



Claude Moraes MEP  
Labour MEP for London

---

New World Newspaper, June 2007

## A Quiet Miracle - Fifty Years of the EU

Last month, with little fanfare or even much reporting the EU created the first international law on racism, racist attacks and combating growing Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The so-called Framework Decision on racism and xenophobia was a transnational response to the fall out from the so-called “war on terror”, but more deeply it requires every EU country to implement such basic requirements as tougher sentencing for hate crimes and much improved police recording and response to race attacks.

It occurred to me that this was the kind of imitative that most readers of this newspaper would applaud, but know very little about. Perhaps more public would be the fanfare over the cut in mobile phone roaming charges voted by the European Parliament, and no doubt welcomed by millions of EU citizens who will see some of their bills cut by as much as a half when they go abroad.

These two pieces of EU news illustrate on the one hand how the EU can use its unique transnational powers for the greater good, but on the other hand still face a great deal of ignorance and cynicism over what it actually does. Even in serious newspapers such as the FT this week the cut in roaming charges was greeted as a breakthrough but with the snide remark suggesting that this was a rare piece of welcome news for an EU which is not usually loved by its citizens. Other parts of the UK media are not so kind, with the daily onslaught on the EU only matched by their onslaught on migrants, asylum seekers.

The gap now between what the EU has really achieved in its fiftieth anniversary this year and its image in the UK is enormous. There are many pro-Europeans in the UK, and there are many who acknowledge the power of EU co-operation, but the atmosphere created tends to be negative.

In March, Time Magazine, an American title, led its front page with the phrase “THE Quiet Miracle – Fifty Years of Peace, Prosperity and Soft Power”. From a non-EU perspective, the article explained that today’s Europe, east and west, is the single largest expanse of peace and widely shared prosperity in the world. It is perfectly true that the EU is not solely responsible for this outcome but even the cynics would understand that the creation of such a large, internal market underpinned by social and human rights, enforced at every turn, has created a unique continent at peace.

In every area of life – business, trade union rights, consumer protection, the environment, research, justice, home affairs, police co-operation, the working of the internal market, free movement rights for EU citizens, the ability to mould development and human rights policy in relation to the rest of the world – the EU has been a quiet but enormous success.



So why is it so un-loved? The answer is that in day-to-day life, EU citizens can benefit from the EU's existence, but rightly their experience of government is local and national. Local and national government does not leap to giving credit to EU institutions when they can take credit for itself. That has always been the story with EU directives – successful or innovative, such as the CO2 emissions trading scheme or new legislation on age discrimination show generally that national politicians will seek credit for EU laws which are appropriately initiated at international level and successful in their implementation, but should there be a problem of implementation or outcome national government will not hesitate with the media to blame the EU.

The EU of course has many problems – reform of the CAP and reforming its unfair image is a continuing story. But the EU is not the massive bureaucracy of myth, the European Commission employs as many people as Leeds City Council. Yet how many times have you heard that Brussels is over-run with bureaucrats That simple example illustrates the growing mythology around the EU.

Time Magazine chose the phrase “Quiet Miracle” to illustrate what has been fifty years of extraordinary success but because of the sovereignty issue a success which is inevitably going to be subdued.

I am particularly proud as one of the first Asian or ethnic minority of the ability of the EU not only to improve the lives of EU citizens, but potentially to create a fair policy towards the developing world.

Claude Moraes, Labour MEP for London