

Lord Plumb

Memorial Service
Former Members Association
26 May 2014

"As we meet in memory of past Members and to honour our former colleagues and friends, it is a comfort to know that we will be remembered as former Members of the European Parliament.

We are fortunate to be called together to recognise those who made their contribution to the cause of European unity giving service before self.

To bring former members together from 28 countries from different faiths, languages, roots and visions, is a great achievement and a unique experience for all of us, creating a fine example to the rest of the world. I congratulate the President and his colleagues for maintaining such important initiatives.

Recent celebrations of the ending of the European War – 70 years ago – bring back many tragic memories of the loss of life of friends and family, demonstrating the importance of peace and reconciliation.

The vision and hope of our founding fathers in creating a community of nations and Treaty of Rome is far from complete. It is a great challenge with many calls for reform and change. Winston Churchill said “this is not the end, not even the beginning of the end, but perhaps the end of the beginning”.

Those who we remember tonight and all past members have had the good fortune to help to shape the European Union. We were often frustrated with the lack of progress in the market place, on budgetary issues, on the ever increasing red tape and regulations, often exaggerated in the press. But there is a learning curve living with a difference between nations and celebrating diversity.

The fundamental threat to the future of us all is the collective failure of moral imagination to find ways to resolve our differences and disputes without recourse to anger and violence.

Our world lives in, and perversely thrives on a constant state of war. Worldwide, governments need to commit the same energy and resources as those who wage war into making and building peace.

Our present requires new patterns of community where we learn how to live together with deep differences. Equity, diversity and inter-dependence are critical themes for discussion and more imaginative acts of hope.

Nor should we stand aloof from on-going political questions on what it means to share public and civic space with those of different faiths and cultures.

The present problems of immigration probably raise the biggest issue ever facing the European Union. It raises the major question of – why so many people, both from within Europe and outside are prepared to risk their lives, leaving their country of birth.

Much of it is obviously fear, but it is unfair to blame Europe when we have created a more united and prosperous land for people to settle and where we have free movement of goods, services and people.

So the question for the European Parliament used to be “what if”? is “now, what now?”

I believe my country when facing a Referendum will ultimately vote ‘Yes’ to stay in.

So in my 90th year, I am still an optimist, and as an old farmer once said to me when I asked him about the future he said “last year we lived in faith, this year we are living in hope” but next year we will have to rely on charity”.

God Bless our dear departed friends, and long live the Former Members Association. "