

20 years in the EU: Breakthroughs Achieved and Lessons Learned
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Video message by Prof. Marie Briguglio

A little over 20 years ago we were bracing ourselves for joining the EU. At the time I presented a television programme on all the impacts we were expecting (Viva Malta). I also myself managed a unit in the public sector which together with other units across the public sector was responsible for the transition.

What did it mean?

We were actually preparing to share the governance of our country with a supranational body: we would absorb a large body of existing legislation into our own, and that we would need to set up or reform institutions. In turn, these institutions would regulate the way we lived our lives not just as citizens, enterprise, schools, voluntary organisations in the island of Malta but as European ones. In some instances this meant more regulation. In some instances this meant less. All this came at considerable cost but there was also the opportunity to enjoy European funding, expertise and assistance.

So what changed in 20 years?

Laws: Our body of laws was perhaps the first to change. Then our institutions had to report on our progress. Lots of reports. Lots of meetings.

Politically: we gained the opportunity to be represented and to influence Europe – and new laws. Not only do we have people working in the commission, and in all institutions, but we also host institutions in Malta. We elected people to parliament – including the president.

Economically: we had to let go of some protection, adhere to new requirements and swim with the big fish. We pivoted and we survived.

Socially: we have now raised a generation of youth for whom the countries of the EU are as much an option to live and work as is Malta. We are still part of a very very small island but very much part of something bigger.

Environmentally: we have had to invest to reform to upgrade. The areas the EU does not regulate as much – like noise and land use – can be seen as laggard.

In Technology: we are pushed to reach higher standards of research and we are funded.

These considerations - Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal - help us to understand the changes that took place since we joined the European Union.

I hope that was interesting and useful to you. My name is Marie Briguglio and I am a Professor at the Economics Department of the University of Malta.

Professor Marie Briguglio BCom, BA Hons, MSc, PhD

<https://www.um.edu.mt/profile/mariebriguglio>