

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GLOBAL EMERGENCIES

PREFACE

The first decade of the twenty-first century has been marked by a series of emergencies – terrorism, wars and rebellions; natural and man-made disasters; and the destabilisation of the world’s financial and economic foundations. The climate, the safety of maritime areas and even whole countries, and energy and food supplies are under threat. Europe is affected by them all in human, political and economic terms.

At the time of writing this Preface, the damage to the nuclear power plant at Fukushima has put in issue once again the wisdom of relying on nuclear power as an answer to Europe’s over-reliance on fossil fuels. Almost contemporaneously the fire of dissent lit in Tunisia threatens to destabilise regimes throughout the Maghreb (a term that used at one time to embrace Andalusia, Sicily and Malta) emphasising that, for Europe, the Mediterranean is truly the ‘middle sea’. Quite apart from the toll of human suffering that Europe must play its part in alleviating, the effect of these new developments on the world’s financial and economic stability is wholly unpredictable.

In the media coverage of these global crises, and the many others with which we have been confronted since the heady days of 1989, the European Union figures hardly at all. The larger Member States play a part but they parade their disagreements in public while claiming the credit for any success. They hardly even try to present a united front to the rest of the world. Some observers are pleased that this is so, since it supports their belief that a political union was never more than a pipe dream and a rather dangerous one at that. Others lament the fact that it should be so, but accept that the workings of the EU and the scale of its successes do not lend themselves to simple explanations.

The reality is that the workings of the EU are necessarily complex because it is a novel experiment in continental governance developed against a background of ever more complex and dangerous global events. So we need to know whether the EU's constitutional machinery is fitted to meet these challenges. Do we indeed know what the challenges are and what has already been done to face them? These are the fundamental questions to which this book seeks to provide some at least of the answers.

The book is the product of a very lively conference at Durham University organised by the Durham European Law Institute of which I have been privileged to serve as a member of its Board. The resulting papers have now been brought together within an overall structure that is clearly explained in the Editors' Introduction. They deserve very close study, not least by those who believe that the EU is toothless and impotent. I hope and believe that the book will contribute to a better public understanding of the challenges and the ways in which the EU seeks to meet them.