

The EU's agenda for greater union – conclusions of the European Council 20 June

The EU is busy trying to fill its senior positions without success yet. They meet again on June 30th to try to reach agreement over who should be President of the Commission.

The EU Council last week revealed its new ambitions to take more control from member states.

The EU wants member states to press ahead more rapidly with plans to decarbonise. Countries are being pressed to lower their CO2 output, to increase their renewable generation of power and raise their fuel efficiency. 2030 targets are being set, but the EU has still not agreed on a zero carbon target for 2050 which some wish to do.

The EU is keen to weed out fake news from social media. It will be interesting to see what they regard as fake news, and to see if they start to cross the line between unacceptable material and censorship of material that is inconvenient to the EU. It is setting out a new “framework for targeted restraint measures” which will include asking social media platforms to prevent material harmful to the EU.

The Euro area needs to consider how much further it should go with a joint budget and whether it will start to borrow money in the name of the EU to spend around the union. The Euro area meeting talked of intensifying the banking union and capital markets union. There is also a wish to have more common taxation under a policy that it should be “fair and effective”.

The EU wishes to take greater responsibility for its own security and defence, pointing the way to more common defence spending.

The EU wants to become more assertive in international affairs. It wants Russia to release the captured sailors from Ukraine and release the vessels, seeks free maritime passage there and wants Russia to reduce her influence in eastern Ukraine. The EU continued its sanctions against Russia. The EU also condemned Turkey for her alleged illegal drilling in the Eastern Med.

The EU is planning a tougher migration policy “to fight illegal migration and human trafficking and to ensure effective returns”. The detail on who they will make go back will be interesting, and what their enforcement mechanisms will be. They want to renegotiate the Dublin Regulation which requires a member state to offer safe haven to a migrant if that state is their first place of arrival in the EU. The southern coastal states resent this obligation on them.

We await the new Commission and new Parliament. The old one goes out with a

set of conclusions that aspire to much more integration but lack real bite in achieving their full stated aims. Nonetheless the process of integration continues, with the EU using its position in international affairs and negotiator of international treaties and commitments to gain more control over member states policies in everything from defence to energy and from economics to media.

Independence day

Bring it on. There was no need to wait three years. The Withdrawal Agreement was an elaborate snare to try to stop us leaving.

“We don’t believe you” briefing to foreign press in London

“We don’t believe you” thunder the people as the EU tells them that their international rules based system is right for people’s lifestyles and aspirations. Populist movements around the EU are voting into office new parties that challenge the EU orthodoxy on austerity, the Euro, climate change, international relations, migration, control of the media and much else. Today there is a row over who should lead the EU as President of the Commission, given the very fractured party base within the new European Parliament.

There is a feeling amongst many voters that the EU does not advance living standards quickly enough. Its insistence on austerity economics through the Maastricht controls coupled with the statement there is no alternative produces the reply “We don’t believe you”

Its failure to control its external borders is allied to a foreign policy that supported Middle Eastern wars that displaced more people. The Dublin Agreement is breaking down, where the original member state offering asylum or a place for an economic migrant is meant to be responsible for housing and looking after them. The issue of migration reveals a growing gap between what the elite think and what the populists want.

The EU dislikes the social media which carries growing criticism of its policies as well as fake news and cyber attacks. The populists are suspicious of the extent to which the EU wants to regulate and control the media, and are scornful of any traditional media who just accept EU spin.

This gulf is not unique to the EU. Similar feelings in the USA led to the defeat of Mrs Clinton and to victory of Trumpism. The UK avoided the collapse of the major parties experienced on the continent in the 2017 General election, thanks to their joint support for Brexit which saved Conservative and Labour. When these parties delayed or deviated from Brexit they collapsed in the European election. In Brazil there has been a populist tide as well.

In the EU it is remarkable how most of the great centre left and centre right parties of the twentieth century have allowed themselves to be wiped out or blown away by new challengers owing to their rigid adherence to the EU and Euro policy mix. French politics is now a contest between En Marche and National Rally, with the Republicans and Socialists also rans. In Italy Lega and Cinque Stelle dominate. Even in Germany, the one big winner from the Euro and EU policy, the SPD and CDU command less than half the vote between them these days.

What has led to this huge destruction? The collapse of living standards at the end of the last decade and the slow growth since has not helped. The mass migrations were unpopular, brought on by backing Middle Eastern wars which displaced many people from their homes. The insistence on the Maastricht criteria and the austerity policies of tax rises and spending cuts have jarred over such a long time period. Ask Gilet Jaune protesters what they want and they will probably say tax cuts. The concentration on dear energy and restrictions on personal mobility to tackle global warming have also caused issues with the populists, visible in the Gilets Jaunes attack on speed cameras and demand for cheaper vehicle fuel.

Throughout the continent many voters disagree with the priorities of European government as well as with its policies.

John Redwood “ We dont believe you” book available through Amazon

Wokingham Choral Society concert

I attended the Wokingham Choral Society concert on Saturday evening. They sang “Songs of travel” which included the first performance of the revised “Didcot Haiku” by Paul Burke. The composer attended and received a good round of applause for his composition. 9 Vaughan Williams songs concluded the programme, following a spirited duet on the piano of the Ride of the Valkyries. James Morley Pötter, Conductor, joined the accompanist Benedict Lewis-Smith for this item.

The choir sang well, tackling the complex chords and soaring with the bird flights, sunrises and dreams described in the poems. I am grateful to the Society for their invitation top what was a most enjoyable evening.

The EU confirms it is ready for UK exit in October without the Withdrawal treaty

In the run up to our exit planned for 29 March 2019 the EU passed a number of measures to ensure continuity if the UK left without signing the Withdrawal Treaty. Measures included an aviation agreement to ensure the planes fly, a haulage agreement to allow road transport to continue, a rail agreement, "legal certainty for ship operators", compensation for EU fishing businesses if they lose access to UK waters, continuity for students currently in the Erasmus programme, and more time for the Peace and Interreg programmes for Ireland and Northern Ireland.

In the update produced for the recent EU Council they also noted that rights of UK citizens currently legally settled in the rest of the EU will be protected. They are ensuring medicines and Reach approved chemicals can continue to be traded, and have increased customs capacity at UK facing ports and transport centres to handle any need to introduce tariffs.

This of course all goes largely unreported by the Remain facing UK media, who carry on with silly scare stories based on an imaginary exit with none of these agreements in place.