

Crises without Progress

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By January 2019 the future of the European Union, which calls itself “Europe”, has become more uncertain than ever. Its four biggest countries are in political chaos. In France, the man from Rothschild, Emmanuel Macron, is struggling with the semi-proletarian movement of the Yellow Vests, which he had hoped would fizzle out over Christmas. Now they are back. Macron, personal ruler with a synthetic political party, committed one blunder after another, completely failing to understand why he and his policies are so despised by what he thought were his voters. Having in vain made fiscal concessions (which will cost him dear, making him dependent on his German allies looking the other way as France again exceeds the Maastricht debt limits), he now tries to organize a national dialogue with “the people”. Neither the “Yellow Vests” nor the left and right “populists”, *France insoumise* and the *Front national*, will attend. Who will he talk to – himself? And how are the “results” of the exercise, if there are any, to filter into policy, if at all? The suspicion is that the maneuver is simply to buy time until the European election in May, which Macron originally thought would be the occasion for his charisma to enchant not just France but all of Europe. Now he must save his skin, even earlier than expected, and his chances of survival seem minimal. Europe will have to do without his “visions”, very likely forever.

Next is Italy. The unlikely coalition between Lega and Cinque stelle has survived first attempts from Brussels to unseat it. Now there is a ceasefire, after easily reversible Italian concessions on the 2019 budget. Meanwhile the two governing parties are digging in; no return of Renzi or his party to be seen. Italy’s weak point is the refugees for which its government needs, or claims to need, the help of other European countries. This is not likely to be forthcoming, however. Nor is the promised “European” effort to close the external border in

the Mediterranean. It is winter, after all, and everybody is more than busy with their domestic politics. In fact, Macron has publicly singled out Italy as a target of his ire, for whatever reason, very likely to divert attention from his domestic misery.

Enter the UK. Here, in the face of Brussels intransigence, the political system is about finally to fall into pieces. In both parties there are remainers and leavers, with different ideas of what remain and leave means and should lead to, and with divergent strategic interests that even insiders cannot disentangle. That battle will go on for some time; May's defeat in the British parliament over the separation treaty was only one more step into chaos, certain to be followed by others. Looming in the background is Scottish separatism, followed perhaps by Welsh and Northern Irish separatism. It is not just "Europe" that is at stake here but also the United Kingdom as a national political entity – not much different, though, if you think of it, from France and Italy.

Remains Germany. Here the CDU/CSU is orchestrating the retreat from, or of, Merkel. It is wide open who will succeed her and in what political configuration. Almost certainly, the next Chancellor will come from her party, either its new chairwoman, aka AKK, or her neoliberal opponent, the German representative of Blackrock, one the world's biggest financial firms. The SPD, now smaller than both the Greens and the AfD, will run a Chancellor Candidate only at the price of appearing ridiculous. Right now CDU/CSU are reviewing the policies inherited from Merkel and her various Grand Coalitions. An obvious item is how to distance themselves from the decision in 2015 to throw open the German borders for the unconditional entry of a million people, after the emergency at Budapest Central Station had been resolved during one weekend. Only when this will be done will it be possible to know how Germany will contribute, if at all, to securing the EU's external border and designing a quota system by which to distribute refugees among European Union member states.

Reforming the European Union to keep it together? Revise the treaties? Forget it. Everybody is far too busy with themselves.