

Europe

Something isn't right.

Eurosceptic and proto-fascist forces are making gains in all the countries of Europe. Sometimes, as in Austria and Italy, they are reaching positions of power. Something is going wrong in Europe.

Beyond Europe, the problem is a global one, with Donald Trump as its incarnation, trailing in his populist wake the largest state in South America, Brazil, 206 million inhabitants, with its new president, Jair Bolsonaro, the "Trump of the tropics". Except that Brazilian society does not have the same capacity for resistance as American society with its solidly-anchored democratic standards. In Brazil the return of a dictatorship is a serious fear.

But Europe has little reason to set itself too far ahead of America; here too things are going quite badly.

For a start we have Brexit which is cutting up Europe and leaving Ireland and Scotland hostage. There is Catalonia where a number of admirable democratic leaders are languishing in Spain's post-Francoist prisons without generating any outraged responses. There is Italy, where elected officials' attempts to outbid each other's demagoguery in the name of "disconnectionism" threaten to destabilise the economic equilibrium of the whole continent. There is Eastern Europe where incomplete democracies are flouting the European model. And there is the general rise in extreme right wing movements, boosted by fears of migratory phenomena. No EU country is escaping it.

Brexit will at least have some merit as a demonstration: undoing the construction of Europe is not as easy as the demagogues claimed during the electoral campaign that led to the Leave victory. But the split is there, weakening Europe, and Ireland is its hostage, endangering the gains of the historic agreements of 1998 which brought peace back to Northern Ireland, while Scotland is subject to the British decision despite some 62% of Scots voting against it.

In Eastern Europe, the European spirit has never really broken through the iron curtain. The obstinate refusal by most of the governments of countries in the former Comintern – the Soviet "common market" – to adopt European standards, in contradiction of the undertakings they made when they signed the accession treaties, can only be worrying for the future. The European space is above all a "shared home": how can we cohabit sustainably without coming together on the very foundations of the European spirit?

Europe's far right is derailing political discourse, whether it be embedded at a high level as in France, less powerful but on the up as in Germany, at the gates of power, or even already victorious as in Italy or in Austria. At each election the alarm signals are getting stronger, and the future of a Europe blighted by increasingly anti-European, proto-fascist political forces is now a real issue. A return of Francoism, the persistence of state structures inherited from the Soviet Union, a repeated refusal by the Member States to evolve in the face of these crises: all this blocks the emergence of real European solutions. And the future is darkening for Europe, in a world itself also the subject of great concerns.

European governance must be criticised; its political performance has been mediocre at best. Certainly the economic situation is somewhat better than it was five years ago, when the subprime crisis was at its peak, and the flows of migrants across the Mediterranean have slowed considerably in the last two years. The European technocrats undoubtedly imagine that this will be enough to calm public opinion. But in truth they underestimate the width of the trenches that have been dug. Much more than well-meaning self-satisfaction is needed to plug them. Now the European Commission is far from taking the right path, while we find ourselves on the cusp of

European elections where everyone is anticipating still greater influence for Eurosceptic and proto-fascist forces.

Frankly, things are going badly and there are real reasons for concern!

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