

Stagnation

Italy has a new government, but only after a great deal of wrangling. The principal reason for the impasse is that, like the Brexit vote in 2016, frustration with the European Union was an important motivation for the Italians' decision to vote in large numbers for two eurosceptic parties.

The situations in the two countries at the moment are nonetheless very different. We are on the way out. True, many Brexit supporters are finding themselves increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress in the Brexit negotiations but there are good grounds for believing that we will leave – eventually., somehow.

Italy, by contrast, is still in the EU and there is no immediate likelihood of “Italexit”. Many inhabitants of this founder member of the European Union are distinctly unenthusiastic at the way EU membership has affected their country, but this doesn't mean they want to leave altogether..

What both countries have in common is that they have come up against the dead hand of inertia. Essentially, big, bloated states and bureaucracies do not make decisions quickly. Stagnation is the inevitable result. Those of us who can remember the latter years of the Soviet Union will recall that by the time of Mikhail Gorbachev, it had lapsed into stagnation – unable to respond to events. The EU is in a similar position. No senior figure since Jacques Delors seems to have any vision for the EU's future direction. The enlargement process, after the celebrations of 2004, seems to have ground to a halt.

However, just like the Soviet Union, the EU does not like anyone trying to take it in a direction in which it does not want to go. This piece by Norman Lamont claims that the EU is very uncomfortable with democracy when it produces a result it

doesn't like. Unfortunately for the Italians, the stagnation into which the EU has descended is going to make it difficult to sort out their country's moribund economy. A well-informed website claimed that it was actually Berlin which forced the Italian President to reject the nomination of a Eurosceptic finance minister by the putative new government, forcing a climbdown and nearly precipitating new elections, the result of which would most likely have been a parliament containing even more Euro-critical MPs.

For us in the UK, this tendency towards stagnation has made it very hard for us to achieve a successful Brexit. Last week, Michel Barnier delivered a speech expressing his frustration at the slow progress of Brexit talks. In one sense, he has some justification – our side has been going round in circles ever since Article 50 was invoked. To leave the EU seamlessly requires a lot of research and an appreciation of the nature of the beast. It could be argued that our side has failed almost totally on both counts.

And the struggles the EU is going through, including the Italian crisis, are more than sufficient vindication of our decision. In a fast-moving world, the EU's inbuilt bias to inertia makes it ill-equipped to respond to change. We could do much better as a sovereign state – the big problem is making our escape. A rocket needs a huge amount of power to escape the gravitational pull of the Earth and fly off into space. Our negotiators will need to try a lot harder if we are to escape from the gravitational power of the EU.