

That BBC Documentary

As a post script to our piece last week discussing the problems which the EU is currently facing, a number of people have drawn our attention to Katya Adler's documentary "After Brexit: The battle for Europe".

The BBC has been in the firing line of groups like the Campaign for an Independent Britain for a long time because of its pro-EU bias – a bias which dates back to the years when our accession talks were still ongoing, so it was understandably quite a shock to watch the Corporation's own Europe editor travelling round Europe in a documentary which openly acknowledged the challenges which the EU is facing in the wake of the Brexit vote. Miss Adler called our departure just "one crisis among many" as far as the EU is concerned and certainly, if one takes the documentary at face value, she is correct.

The programme features interviews with several euro-critical politicians of varying shades of opinion, including Beppe Grillo in Italy and Marine le Pen in France. Miss Adler also travelled to Hungary to interview László Toroczkai, the controversial mayor of Ásotthalom, a town near the country's border with Serbia, who has posted a controversial video warning migrants not to enter his town – totally in disregard of the EU's fundamental principles, but very much in line with the stance of his Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán.

The prevailing picture painted by the documentary was of an EU caught in the crossfire of several different, albeit interlinked, opposition movements. In Italy, the €uro is the main gripe, whereas in France, an historic bastion of protectionism, globalists are being challenged by what Marine le Pen calls "Patriots". Hungary, along with its Visegrád friends, is proclaiming in no uncertain terms its opposition to immigration and multiculturalism.

Of course, Marine le Pen's Front National is every bit as opposed to immigration – at least Moslem immigration – as Hungary's leaders while Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* – whose Deputy Leader Beatrix von Storch was among those interviewed by Miss Adler – is as unhappy with the €uro as Beppe Grillo's party in Italy. Yet these interwoven strands do seem to have put the EU into something of a stranglehold. Miss Adler finds herself drawing a conclusion which would have been dismissed as poppycock ten years ago:- *"Europe's decision-makers face an unprecedented challenge. Our thorny national debate about Brexit could turn out to be irrelevant. Sooner or later the EU as we know it may no longer be there for us to leave."*

Not everyone agrees, Guy Verhofstadt, the ex-Belgian Prime Minister whom she interviewed in Brussels, sounded very upbeat. He pointed to a rise in support for EU membership in, among other countries, Denmark following the Brexit vote. "A counter-revolution is under way" he said, while reiterating the classic Europhile mantra for solving Europe's problems:- "We need to work for closer union." Federica Mogherini, the EU's "High representative" for foreign affairs, also sounded very positive, calling the EU "a miracle" and claiming that as an institution, it remains "indispensable".

A more sober assessment was provided by Martin Schulz, the former President of the European Parliament. Although every inch as much a Europhile as Verhofstadt or Mogherini, he bluntly stated that *"the risk that we fall apart is very real."* This is a far more realistic assessment of the situation. Gone are the days when the EU project was regarded with admiration by other countries and continents. To quote Miss Adler again, *"Few Europeans are happy with the Union the way it is now. The cry for change is deafening. As is the demand for less bossiness from Brussels. EU power-brokers have a choice: to sink or swim differently, and more in harmony with what the people of Europe want."*

This is the crux of the matter. The EU has been doggedly pursuing its building project of a single European state by means of “ever closer union”. The political problems of its currency union, the blatant violation of the Schengen agreement, a smouldering resentment of the power of the institutions in Brussels and growing hostility to its embrace of big multinationals and political correctness cannot be addressed by just carrying on with the same agenda – Mr Verhofstadt’s solution to the problem. The question is whether it is possible to change direction quickly and radically enough to avoid being swamped by the rising tide of hostility to everything which Brussels represents.

We have reached the point where the EU’s usual “muddle through” approach to crises is no longer adequate. Furthermore, the recent utterances of people like Verhofstadt, Juncker and Mogherini do not suggest that the EU élite has the ability to “think out of the box” which is needed if the EU is to survive in anything like its present form. No doubt critics will read this piece and say that it is nothing more than wishful thinking by a long-standing anti-EU campaigner, but the harsh reality is that it is nothing more than a précis of a documentary fronted by the BBC’s Europe editor which happens to agree with her assessment.