

Why flee France? *Lionel Shriver* / I command you see *The Favourite* *Deborah Ross*

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# THE SPECTATOR

## Europe's gatecrashers

The populists are one election away from reshaping the EU, says *Fredrik Erixon*



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## Rough crossings

It has been a messy start to the new year for Sajid Javid. For months now, migrants using small boats have been landing in Kent, usually no more than a dozen people at a time. For a country that receives up to 2,500 asylum applications a month, this falls short of a national crisis. It was quite absurd for Tory MPs to talk about deploying the Royal Navy to fend off a few dinghies, and absurd for the Home Secretary to rush back from his holiday to handle the non-crisis and declare it a ‘major incident’. It is a minor incident, but may turn into a major one if the government panics.

Migration patterns change, as do the methods. Over the past few years we have seen the rise of a global people-trafficking industry, a new evil that is responsible for the deaths of thousands of migrants. Most of those arriving by boat are not fleeing war but are seeking a better life and — crucially — have enough money to pay for the journey. As Sohrab Ahmari explains on page 14, some traffickers now offer a full service across Europe. The increase in wealthier Iranian migrants wanting to cross the Channel has led to the start of a new kind of trafficking.

Britain certainly has an obligation to help refugees, but it will not do so by playing the traffickers’ game. For years, police have found migrants stowed away in lorries or shipping containers. Many perish during the journey. The determination is awe-inspiring: these migrants are risking death in order to start at the very bottom in Britain. The human instinct is to help, especially when families with young children are involved.

Angela Merkel’s offer in 2015 to welcome all Syrian refugees to Germany was an understandable human reaction but the results were calamitous. Mrs Merkel unwittingly presented the traffickers with a new

business model: to get people to Germany by hook or by crook, with the promise of citizenship. Some 3,500 died in the Mediterranean that year, with 5,000 perishing the next year and another 1,500 last year.

The Australians found that turning back the boats was the only way to end deaths in their waters. And they accompanied it with a clear message: no matter how strong the claim for asylum, anyone who enters Australia illegally by boat would be turned away. So there was no point in paying traffickers for the journey.

The old rules for refugees, under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, are no longer fit for purpose. They were written to stop a repeat of the pre-war horrors when several

*The people trafficking industry is based on the premise that migrants are willing to risk death*

countries turned away Jewish refugees, but there are now far better ways of helping to save lives. Britain has led the way in this, spending money on refugee camps in Jordan to help refugee families — the vast majority of whom seek temporary shelter rather than permanent resettlement, in the hope of eventually returning home. It comes down to a humanitarian calculation: Britain can help 30 refugees in other parts of the world for the price of accommodating one refugee here. We ought to take our fair share of refugees, but this can only ever be a tiny gesture towards solving a global problem. Using the aid budget to help people overseas, as Norway does, saves far more lives.

We also need to understand what is driving the great migration. War is one element, but a minority of those applying for asylum in Europe are fleeing conflict zones. Most

come from places like Pakistan and Nigeria, seeking a better life. The lengths that they go to ought not to puzzle us. A few generations ago, people from Britain were risking death on crowded boats crossing the Atlantic in search of better circumstances. Between 1847 and 1851, the death rate was 17 Britons for every 100 who attempted the crossing — a risk that was seen to be worth taking. Today, in the Mediterranean, the death rate is closer to five for every 100. Our stories are not so different.

The people trafficking industry is based on the premise that migrants are willing to risk death. And that they will do what they can to find money — as much as \$15,000 — to pay for the crossing. As the poorer world becomes more developed, there will be no shortage of people willing to make the journey and able to pay for it too. Some 17 million emigrated from the UK between 1846 and 1924. It was legal, of course, but the 8,000 Iranians granted asylum in Britain over the past seven years have also used legal routes. We can expect those seeking a life in the UK to choose whichever methods are most likely to lead to success.

This new people trafficking industry must be thwarted. Britain has an obligation to accommodate some of those fleeing persecution, but we ought to take people directly from camps outside conflict zones, rather than accept those who pay traffickers. The surest way of stopping boats from crossing is not to ask the Royal Navy to play cat-and-mouse in the Channel but by making it clear that this method of migration will not work. That requires decisive political leadership, which is a tall order right now. The calamity that has unfolded in the Mediterranean over the past few years should at least provide a clear example of what not to do.



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Most international restaurant critics agree that even high-end French eateries have deteriorated, while the quality of British haute cuisine has soared. Head to head, the crumpet beats the croissant.  
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The 'yellow vest' protesters wear hi-vis vests because they are lo-vis people.  
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'Clean-eaters on coke' are one of our more grotesque modern types. What good is a clean gut when there's blood on your hands?  
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## CONTRIBUTORS

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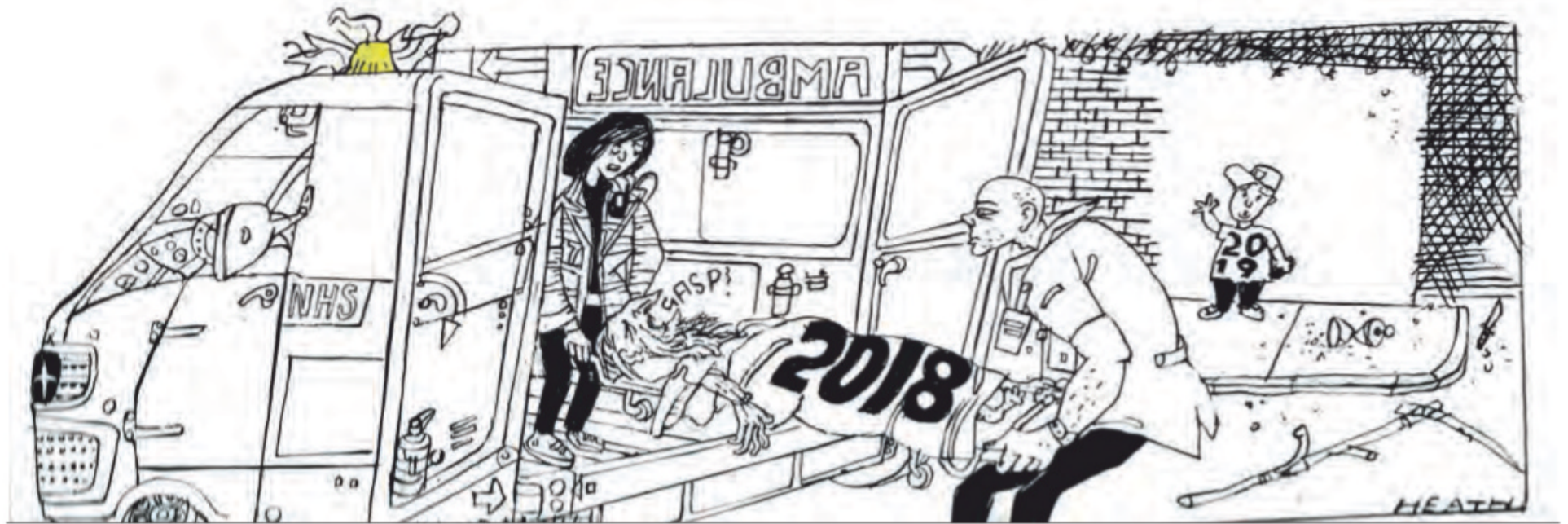
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**Douglas Murray** is Associate Editor of *The Spectator*. His family comes from the Isle of Lewis, which is commemorating 100 years since the *Iolaire* disaster. He writes about the tragedy on p18.

**Julie Burchill** began her writing career, aged 17, at the *NME* in 1976. Her play *People Like Us*, about the Brexit fallout, opened in London last year. On p51 she discusses quitting cocaine.

# PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



## Home

The number of would-be migrants known to have reached England in small boats from France in the last two months of 2018 reached 239, with 40 making the crossing on Christmas Day. Most said they were Iranian. Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary, transferred two Border Force cutters to help the one patrolling the Channel. The government awarded a £13.8 million contract to Seaborne Freight to run goods ferries between Ramsgate and Ostend in the event of Britain leaving the European Union without an agreement; a £46 million contract went to Brittany Ferries and one worth £42 million to the Danish shipping firm DFDS. Without the slightest encouragement, leaders of political parties issued New Year messages. 'If Parliament backs a deal, Britain can turn a corner,' Theresa May, the Prime Minister said. Dame June Whitfield, the comedy actor, died aged 93. Sister Wendy Beckett, the eremitic nun who made television programmes about art, died aged 88.

Gatwick offered a £50,000 reward for a solution to the drones that had closed the airport before Christmas, affecting 140,000 travellers. A local couple arrested and held for 36 hours said they felt 'completely violated'. The FTSE 100 index ended 2018 12 per cent down. HMV went into administration for the second time in six years; its shops remained open while KPMG sought buyers. A cap came into force on the unit price of energy and the supplier's standing charge. New fishing quotas were introduced, with

the unintended consequence of capping expeditions if the wrong sort of fish were caught. Jeremy Corbyn bought a pair of half-rim spectacles.

Twiggy became a Dame in the New Year's honours list, and Michael Palin was knighted, as was Alastair Cook, England cricket captain from 2012 to 2016. John Redwood was among the few politicians to be knighted. A year that had seen 134 murders in London, 70 involving knives, ended with the arrest of 39 people at a party in Fulham Palace Road, Hammersmith, by police investigating an attempted murder. The New Year began with two more people being stabbed to death in London. A man was detained under the Mental Health Act after the stabbing of three people, including a policeman, at Victoria Station, Manchester. Jimmy Osmond, 55, had a stroke while playing Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* at the Birmingham Hippodrome.

## Abroad

The United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in Damascus after a seven-year absence; Bahrain followed suit. Syrian government forces took up position near the city of Manbij in response to Kurdish requests for help in resisting Turkish forces, following the announcement by President Donald Trump of the United States of the withdrawal of American troops from Syria because, he contended, Islamic State had been defeated. Democrat control of the House of Representatives came into effect, leaving unresolved a partial government

shutdown brought about by Mr Trump's insistence on seeking funds for a wall between the US and Mexico. American investment markets saw their worst year since 2008. The UN's World Food Programme told Houthi rebels in Yemen to stop stealing food sent for starving people. Police in Egypt killed about 40 men in Giza and North Sinai after a bomb attack on a tourist bus killed three Vietnamese visitors. Amos Oz, the Israeli novelist, died aged 79.

The internet was shut down in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo a day after delayed presidential elections. Sheikh Hasina won her third term as prime minister of Bangladesh in a landslide that left the opposition with only seven seats but complaining of violence, intimidation and vote rigging. China's former intelligence chief Ma Jian, convicted of taking bribes, was sentenced to life in prison. Russia's FSB state security agency arrested a man in Moscow named as Paul Whelan — he is said to have been charged with espionage. In Magnitogorsk, a block of 48 flats collapsed in an explosion, with at least 40 feared dead. Airlines managed to kill 556 people in accidents in 2018, compared with 44 in 2017.

A Nasa space probe called New Horizons took photographs as it passed a minor planet called Ultima Thule four billion miles from the Sun. At least 426 people were killed and 40,000 made homeless in Sumatra and Java by a tsunami following volcanic activity by Anak Krakatoa. In Sicily, Mount Etna erupted. Venice is to charge a tax of up to ten euros on cruise ship visitors. CSH

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# DIARY

Ben Schott

You'll be relieved to learn my penguin is back. 'How long was it gone?' you ask. About six months. 'And sorry, it's a real penguin?' Actually, no. Here's the story: back in 2005, I was staying at the 60 Thompson Street Hotel in Manhattan. On my first afternoon in town I went for a stroll along Bleeker Street and popped into a shop called Leo Design where I spotted and purchased a charming bronze penguin — three inches high, and ounces heavy. Back in my room I placed Mr Penguin among my coins and keys, and thought little of him. The next afternoon, after housekeeping had visited, I spotted Mr Penguin on top of the television. Odd, I thought, moving him to the window-sill. Over the next week, housekeeping and I engaged in an anonymous battle of whimsy, moving Mr Penguin around the room twice a day. On returning to London I told my cleaner of this game, and we played it on a weekly basis for several years until she hid Mr Penguin under my bed and we both forgot about him for many months. Anyway, I lost him again for a longish spell, and had to lure him back to my mantelpiece with a shoal of miniature bronze fish.

I've recently returned from a week's language school in Italy, and am able to report that the best penne all'Amatriciana is to be found in the staff canteen of the Verona Carabinieri. For obvious reasons this is a tricky reservation to score and my entrée (in both senses) was secured by a Carabiniere called Franco who — as the husband of my wife's cousin — is now my honorary Italian brother. Franco picked me up after school one Wednesday and Vespa'd me at speed to the military barracks just south of the old city. After a brief tour of the facilities, we descended to an austere basement cafeteria. I have to admit my expectations were not great and, out of politeness and caution, I declined various more elaborate dishes (including a delicious-looking pollo arrosto con riso), opting instead for pasta. It was a revelation: perfectly al dente penne with a piquant ragù of fresh tomatoes, succulent guanciale, and sharp pecorino. The second surprise was



to see a number of Carabinieri offspring eating lunch and doing their homework. Many Italian high schools, I learned, finish at lunchtime, obliging parents to feed and occupy their children every afternoon. I'm sure there are wider sociopolitical lessons to be learned about structuring the school day, introducing children to the workplace, and the civilising effect of communal eating, but I'm just plotting how to get another plate of pasta without resorting to crime.



As I may have mentioned (cough), my authorised homage to P. G. Wodehouse — *Jeeves and the King of Clubs* — has just been published. And because 'a boy has to hustle his book', as Truman Capote once said, this means a fresh round of publicity. I should stress that much book promotion is tremendous fun: to meet the fine folk who pay hard-earned oof for your work is a genuine honour — especially when they arrive with a stack of books or a curious story. I remember one fragile young man who asked me to sign an impossibly dog-eared first edition of *Schott's Original Miscellany*. As I took pen to half-title he apologised for the book's parlous state and explained, in halting fragments, that a near-fatal car crash had rendered him amnesiac and he was using my miscellany to rebuild his memory.

Not all moments are so poignant. The oddest encounter took place in a bookshop in the Midlands, where I was signing copies of my *Food & Drink Miscellany* spectated by a lone employee. After 20 minutes this chap finally broke the ominous silence: 'I love your books,' he said in a mirthless voice, 'they're hilarious.' 'Thank you,' I replied, cautiously. He got up, put on his jacket, and made for the door. 'You know what you should write a miscellany about?' I didn't. As he reached for the handle he offered a single word of editorial advice: 'Sodomy.'

Many parents are rightly concerned about their children's activities online — not least the abbreviated slang they use with Snapchat and Instagram. So, in conclusion, and as a public service, I tabulate below some of the telltale signs that your child just might be texting about Jeeves and Wooster:

- BRB — Bertie Regrets Betrothal
- STFU — Spode's The Fascist Upstart
- NSFW — Never Safe From Wedlock
- ASAP — Aunts Seldom Ask Permission
- OMG — Our Man Gussie
- LMAO — Like Mastodons Aunts Orate
- YOLO — You Often Lunch Often
- TL;DR — Top Laughter; Drones Reunion
- JK — Jeeves Knows



# Will 2019 be Corbyn's year?

It's hard to think of a time when an opposition leader has had such a promising start to the new year. Jeremy Corbyn finds himself up against a prime minister who barely survived a confidence motion, with more than a third of the Conservative parliamentary party voting against her. The Tories have no majority of their own and have fallen out with their partner, the DUP. That same government is facing a make-or-break Brexit vote in two weeks' time. It's quite possible — some cabinet members believe probable — that it may soon collapse with a new general election called. All Labour needs is to be ready.

In parliament, Corbyn's closest allies are trying to do just that. A plan for government is being put together, identifying which piece of legislation would be needed to make various manifesto pledges happen quickly should Labour take power. The aim is to move fast, as Tony Blair did in 1997. In such turbulent times, even a Labour government might not last for long — so the Corbynistas intend not to waste any time.

Before they get there, however, there is work to do. The priority is to get through Brexit without fatally wounding the party's electoral chances in the process. Most Labour MPs are die-hard Remainers, and a recent poll showed that seven in ten party members favour a second referendum. Until now, Corbyn has managed to keep a coalition of voters broadly together by being incredibly vague — and, at times, contradictory — on Brexit. His official policy is to get to No. 10, then renegotiate the Brexit deal so that it aligns better with Labour party values on issues like workers' rights. To do this, Labour plans to defeat the government in a confidence motion after the meaningful vote this month.

If Theresa May does lose a confidence motion, the Commons would have 14 days to approve an alternative government. Should it fail, the country goes to the polls. One scenario, being talked up by Corbynistas, is that May wins her Brexit vote, thanks to some Labour abstentions and support from opposition MPs representing Leave seats. But this enrages the DUP, which then votes with Labour to bring May down. Within certain Labour circles this is seen as the tidier option. 'You avoid looking complicit in no deal. You can, in theory, then fight an election on domestic policy,' explains a party insider. Ideally with the same leader: in May

they trust. 'Past performance suggests that if the Tories begin an election with her as their leader they will do worse than expected.'

The second scenario would see the government's Brexit deal defeated (which, as things stand, is more likely). This would put Britain on course for a no-deal Brexit. At this point, the most enthusiastic Tory Remainers may conclude that they cannot vote this down unless they vote their government down. That might have once sounded unthinkable but in the topsy-turvy world of Brexit, there's reason to think some might. Conservative MP Nick Boles has already said he would 'vote in any way necessary to stop it from happening'.

But would there be time to stop it? Unless parliament can agree on a different

*Internal critics point to the fact that the Labour leader is fairly well practised in missing open goals*

course of action, the UK will leave the EU without a deal in 12 weeks' time. This has been the default position since Article 50 was approved by MPs. If it cannot be extended in time, under this scenario a snap poll could occur amid a Brexit on WTO terms — something many Labour supporters would find hard to swallow and might blame the leadership for. It would also leave the matter of Brexit open, which, as a general rule, tends to make life more difficult for Corbyn.

Even without a general election, Corbyn will come under increasing pressure to back a second referendum. Party members tried to make this party policy at Labour conference. John McDonnell and Diane Abbott, both Corbyn allies who help to make the big Brexit decisions, are seen as open to the idea of a People's Vote if an election doesn't happen. But a number of Corbyn's advisers believe this would badly hurt Labour's

electoral chances by alienating towns that voted heavily to leave, such as Mansfield, where the Tories had a surprise victory in the snap election. Winning support in Leave towns is seen as crucial for winning a Labour majority.

Internal Labour polling also suggests that there is no huge appetite for a second referendum among the population at large. Instead, the overall feeling is one of apathy and ennui. Focus groups in the Midlands — an area with numerous swing seats and several Labour marginals with two-figure majorities — found even Remain voters sceptical of the idea of a People's Vote. Were Labour to endorse a second vote, there's concern that Labour Leave voters might accuse the party of Brexit betrayal and defect to Ukip, the Conservatives or not vote at all. This is viewed as a greater risk to Corbyn than annoying Remain voters, who are seen as less likely to vote for anyone else. Just look how the beleaguered Liberal Democrats fared in 2017 running on a pro-EU slate.

Overall, Corbyn's allies are confident that, Brexit aside, things are going their way. And that when the Brexit tide eventually does roll out, the Tories will be found to be swimming naked. 'They're going to have to find out what they're actually for in a way that they haven't since the referendum result,' says one Labour staffer. Theresa May's paralysis on Brexit means that the Conservative party's domestic agenda is threadbare. This is what Corbyn's hope rests on: that record numbers now think that the country is moving in the wrong direction. And that there has been a reversal in public opinion in the past five years in people who thought tackling the deficit was more important than investment in services and communities.

Election or not, this year should present an open goal for Labour. Internal critics, however, point to the fact that Corbyn is fairly well practised in missing open goals. Given all of last year's Conservative problems, they say the Labour leader should be surging ahead in the polls rather than neck-and-neck. The final YouGov poll of last year even gave the Tories a two-point lead. But given that Corbyn went into the last election 20 points behind and came a close second, his allies are still optimistic. So will this be Corbyn's year? Put it this way: if it's not, it might never be.



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# The last heave

This year's European elections could change everything

FREDRIK ERIXON

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There is a strange pre-revolutionary atmosphere in Brussels. At the various receptions and dinners before we broke up for Christmas, it felt a bit like the Last Supper. Elections to the European Parliament are usually predictable affairs, but this time Europhiles (like myself) fear it will be different. We have grown used to populists doing well in national elections over the years, from Sweden to Italy. But the European Parliament elections in May might lead to a landslide victory for Marine Le Pen's National Rally, Italy's League and other nationalist populist parties — and a victory may change the political face of the European Union.

In the past, it never really mattered much if the Euro election was carried by the left or the right: the result was the same anyway. The parliament has always been keeper of the federalist flame — much more so than the European Commission. In practice, elections only served the purpose of confirming the dominion of the overriding ideology in Brussels: that of 'ever-closer union'. Yes, Euro elections would take in a haul of fist-shakers and heretics, and the odd political circus act. But whatever the question, the parliament's answer had always been: 'more Europe'.

Even two years ago, that mindset was still dominant. Emmanuel Macron had just beaten Le Pen in the French presidential election and promised to put new wind in the sails of mainstream politics. The West had reached 'peak populism'. After the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump — two massive defeats for liberal orthodoxy — Macron was credited with breaking the neck of invading populists. It was safe for centrists to come out. Politics would become normal again.

But there wasn't anything normal about Macron's victory. In France, Macron is the insurgent who squashed the centre-left and centre-right. And within a year of his win, the Freedom Party had returned to government in Austria, and Viktor Orbán — the bête noire of Brussels — had been re-elect-



ed in Hungary with an even larger share of the vote. Miloš Zeman, widely suspected to be a Kremlin stooge, had won another term as the President of the Czech Republic — after flirting with the idea of an in-or-out referendum on the country's EU membership. His win came just a few months after the Czechs had elected the billionaire and self-styled populist Andrej Babiš as its new Prime Minister. In Italy, the Five Star Movement and the League had taken charge of Italy's government. And most remarkable of all, the far-right had yet again become an electoral force in German politics.

We can now see a coherence across

*The populists seek to break down the door of the European Union, but not to tear down the house*

Europe's populists. And not because Steve Bannon or anyone else is building a nationalist populist movement across the continent. The populists do not specialise in working together, which in some ways is their whole point. But many of these parties have now been around for a while and matured, and speak for vast swaths of the population: a third of France, half of Hungary and most of Italy. They used shock tactics to get attention, but are changing as they wield power. As they have grown bigger — or been elected to govern — they have learnt the virtue of patience and the art of compromise.

So what began as a bunch of polemicists and rabble-rousers is now sprouting networks of thinkers, journals and institutes. There is growing consistency in their

policies, more discipline in the troops. They are nationalist and (mostly) xenophobic — but not exactly racist and fascist. They are Euro-sceptic but (unlike the Tories) not against EU membership. They seek to break down the door, but not tear down the house. The distinction is crucial in understanding what is now under way.

Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Matteo Salvini in Italy, Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland and Alice Weidel in Germany: all

of them want to reform, rather than leave, the EU. They think the EU has overreached, and they want power to be handed back from Brussels to the nation states. They have no collective agenda for Europe, and this is entirely their point: they dislike the idea of unanimity. Diversity, they say, is the hallmark of Europe and they want an EU which respects that. That message has power partly because the populists' gains have made the centre-left and the centre-right start to question their own approach to Europe.

Take the Christian Democrats and their centre-right group in the European Parliament, the European People's Party (EPP) — which nominated Jean-Claude Juncker as president of the European Commission. For decades, they have been the main driver of European integration, but they now find themselves squeezed by nationalists. Germany's centre-right fear that the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) will become bigger than Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union in the May election. In France, the party of Charles de Gaulle and Nicolas Sarkozy has been cut down to size — almost marginalised — by the combination of a reformist Macron and an extreme right that is rehabilitating itself from its anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi past. In Italy, the centre-right Forza Italia has been obliterated by Salvini and his League, which has — astonishingly — doubled its support in the polls since last year's election. In the three main countries in the EU, support for the centre-right has plummeted.

So this year's Euro elections will leave the centre-right without a confident or