

Var Village Voice

A full-page background image showing an astronaut in a white spacesuit working on the exterior of the International Space Station. The astronaut is floating in space, with the Earth's blue and white clouds visible in the background. The station's complex structure, including solar panels and various modules, is visible in the foreground and background.

THE Var's English Language Newsletter

SILICON VALLEY – UK !

APRIL 2018



FILMS IN VO – LORGUES

Thursday 5 April – 19h00 – Opera – Carmen
 Saturday 7 April – 18h00 – Lady Bird with Saoirse Ronan
 Sunday 9 April 18h00 – Lady Bird
 Monday 9 April – 21h00 – Lady Bird
 Saturday 14 April – 18h00 – Tonya with Margot Robbie & Alison Janney (Oscar winner)
 Sunday 15 April – 18h00 – Tonya
 Monday 16 April – 21h00 – Tonya
 Saturday 21 April 1- 20h00 – the Sense of an Ending, with Jim Broadbent, Charlotte Rampling
 Sunday 22 April – 18h00 – The Sense of an Ending
 Wednesday 25 April – 19h00 – Opera – Centenaire de Leonard Bernstein.

**EASTER WEEKEND BIENNALE PORTE
 OUVERTE COTIGNAC – 30, 31 March 1 April.
 15 artists, sculptors, ceramists show their
 works, pick up map at Cercle des Arts**



**GALERIE AALDERS – LA GARDE FREINET'
 Saturday 7 April Vernissage of Spring
 Exhibition 19h – 21h**

Galerie Aalders, 15 Route Nationale, La Garde Freinet
 Tel : 04 94 55 23 47 michaelaalders@mac.com

TRAVELLING BOOK SWAP

Wednesday 18 APRIL – Saint Antonin at the house of Penny Balaam. 16 Chemin de la Nèze – 04 94 80 35 17 or on her portable 06 12 31 69 10.



OPERA DE TOULON - ROSSINI'S – ITALIENNE A ALGER -13, 15, & 17 APRIL

Friday 13 April – 20h
 Sunday 15 April – 14.30
 Tuesday 17 April – 20h00

**CONCERT – 20 APRIL 20H – Les Mysteres de
 l'Est with Lise de la Salle, Piano. Prog. Dvorak,
 Rachmaninov**



JAZZ CONCERT – LE MOULIN DES ARTS – ENTRECASTEAUX

Saturday 14 April 20h30

Francois Marvy Trio

Res: 04 94 69 58 07 or e: mrkucko@yahoo.fr Ancien
 Moulin à Huile, Entrecasteaux



A VALENCE TOO FAR By TRENCHMAN

We always look forward to our annual trip to Lyon, it is, after all, the gastronomic centre of France. Even Paris with its ever increasing myriad of restaurants, fails to dent Lyon's history and commitment to ordinary eating as well as to gourmet delights.

The genes of great and simple eating in Lyon is founded on the remarkable women known as 'Les Mères de Lyon', and the 'bouchons' named after them, and even more who have been inspired by them.

Eugénie Brazier, perhaps the most lauded, left her village in Ain with her baby son in her arms, she reached Lyon and a few years later in 1921, at the age of 26, she moved into 14 Rue Royale on the corner of what is now Rue Eugénie Brazier. She very quickly established a world-wide reputation and she became the first, and to date the only, person to have been awarded three Michelin stars, twice. This happened at Mère Brazier in Lyon in 1933 and at her restaurant at the Col de la Luère, where both Paul Bocuse and Bernard Pacaud trained.

She is frequently referred to as the 'mother of French cuisine'. The restaurant which bears her name continues today, and whilst it holds only two Michelin stars, it espouses the same virtues she established a long time ago.

Today's Mère Brazier, is under the watchful eye of Mathieu Viannay. We had reserved a table well in advance and when we arrived, we were surprised at the simplicity of the interior, surprised and pleased that this was more about the kitchen than expensive decor.

We set about the quite short menu (Formule at €70), with anticipation.

I chose Artichaut et Fois Gras Poêlé N° 11 (?) and she, who is not ever hungry enough to deal with three courses (unless they are someone else's), decided to await her main course.

Her choice was Bar de Ligne en Nage d'Herbes au Beurre Fumé, Petits Poireaux et Truffé, mine was a more predictable Pomme de Ris de Veau with Truffles.

As you would expect, and as we hoped, it was all delicious. Perhaps a *truffle* riche, but Michelin star cuisine cannot be simple, even if you want it to be.

The following day after a morning spent grazing in Les Halles de Bocuse, perhaps the best food market in France, certainly a perfect larder for the lucky who live near enough to shop here frequently, we set off for Daniel et Denise, a bouchon Lyonnaise which celebrates both traditional cooking and a respect for traditional pricing. The formula here is €21 and you will not go hungry or unhappy. Under the watchful eye of Joseph Viola, this has become emblematic of 'Vieux Lyon' and is another place where reservations are a good idea.

I pass through Lyon quite frequently as I drive to and from London or Paris or Brussels, where I spend a lot of time pursuing my trade, and each time I drive along the banks of the Saône I am tempted to stop. When I do it is almost always at Brasserie Georges, a veritable art deco temple of eating, here since 1836, they brew their own beer and greet travellers almost all day, with affordable and honest Lyonnaise cooking.

This time on the way home I had decided to stop in Valence for lunch; therein lies a great restaurant called Pic, another family establishment now under the guiding hand of Anne-Sophie Pic and with three Michelin stars, it has become a destination. Perhaps happily, we were unable to get a booking that day, another rich lunch was probably not quite what the doctor would have ordered, so instead we settled for a bistro in the old town called Le Bistro des Clercs.

With good planning and an intimate knowledge of Valence, it would be possible to park within a mile of the restaurant, suffice to say I did not have those skills and so upon arrival, was in less than good humour; not through the forced exercise but through the incomprehensible directions I was relying upon.

From the outside it promised all you might want from a buzzy Bistro and even upon entering all the right signs were to be seen.

We were led to our table, the last one available (I had booked) and seated by madame, menus immediately to hand and order taken within minutes. Very efficient. She who likes a nice piece of fish ordered the Cabillaud and I ordered a Cassoulet, her *fois de veau* turned up and was sent back and my Cassoulet arrived and was so hot that I had to leave it for 15 minutes before it was safe to taste.

The Cabillaud arrived eventually and was considered delicious, fresh and flakey and perfectly cooked.

My Cassoulet had at last reached an acceptable temperature and it then became clear that it was an assembly; the rather skinny piece of *confit de canard* had been added to the pre-cooked beans which had been dressed with pre-cooked saucisson and the whole thing then placed in a micro wave and blasted into space. Sadly I had to leave most of it and was still hungry, at this point I clearly stopped using my cognitive skills and ordered a *crêpe suzette*. It lived up to the cassoulet.

One day I might return to Valence, it looks to be a pleasant town, but it won't be soon!

Pip, pip

EBEN PIANO FESTIVAL - JULY 6TH-11TH PLACE DE LA HALLE, LAGRASSE, AUDE.

By ROBERT TURNBULL

Now in its 6th year, En Blanc et Noir is firmly established as one of Europe's most remarkable piano festivals. It showcases the most promising European talents as they embark on international careers. The location is outstanding, the village of Lagrasse voted among the top ten most beautiful in France. Though the pianists are paid a decent fee, the festival is free to the public. For the first time the festival is giving a masterclass focusing on works by Claude Debussy.

Described by a local critic as 'un salon en plein air, en pleine lune', a more perfect location is scarcely imaginable. Concerts take place in a 12th century covered market, a stone's throw from the Lagrasse Abbey, one of France's most romantic monuments. The village was recently voted 9th most beautiful village in

France. Considering the country has over 36,000, that's not bad going.



Robert Turnbull – Musical Director

But that's only part of it. For the directors of the festival the ethos has been to showcase outstanding young pianists at the onset of their careers. Scores of exceptional players spend their formative years in the hard slog of achieving technical mastery but struggle to find stages on which to perform on graduation. EBEN offers those opportunities. Many who pass through this festival go on to be major prizewinners and more: young artists are engaged before they become so successful as to become out of reach. This year, in line with its educational and outreach objectives, En Blanc et Noir will continue its partnership with the regional music conservatoires. Students are invited to perform on the day we call *Piano à Volonté* which takes place on the opening day at 3pm and take part in masterclasses. On this occasion we also invite members of the public to play a piece of their choice provided it comes close to a required standard.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The Budapest based virtuoso PETER KISS will deliver Beethoven's gargantuan E major *Sonata*, opus 109

The outstanding Catalan pianist LUIS GRANE will perform a programme that reflects Debussy's love of Spanish culture and its music. Albeniz, Falla, Debussy

The virtuoso violinist JULIEN DIEUDEGARD will be playing sonatas by Strauss, Janacek and Beethoven, accompanied by EBEN regular GUILLAUME SIGIER.

The festival's first evening concert will be a special film night, with RICHARD UTTLEY AND KATE EPPLEY will accompany two silent films, *Entracte*, the result of a collaboration between Rene Clair and Eric Satie, as well as Milhaud's *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*, originally destined to provide the soundtrack to a film by Charlie Chaplin. For the latter we are choosing a silent film of similar length and character. They begin the concert with *The Rite of Spring*, the four hand version.

At the Marlboro Festival in 2009 the Israeli composer MATAN PORAT improvised to a showing of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Bobby and Ashley have added the score to their Bernstein/Gershwin programme.

Much of the festival's focus has been on 19th and 20th century. A selection of popular Baroque arias and duets will feature for the first time, sung by students at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

There will be three midnight concerts, the programme specially chosen for that special time of the evening:

White Nights : IVAN ILIC performs three 'miniatures' from Northern Europe : Grieg, Part. MICHELLE LEE will play flute solos and duets from French composers, including Debussy's famous solo *Syrinx*. The Janacek specialist THEO FOUCHENERET plays *On the Overgrown Path* and *In the Mists*. Russian pianist SACHA KARPEYEV, will recreate a typical Parisian salon concerts from the 1830s when pianists competed in virtuosity. Liszt and his former pupil Tausig were pitted against each other on one famous occasion. Karpeyev playing works from the same concert.

The Paris-based pianist Pierre-Yves Plat will be delivering his unique jazz interpretations on the works of Frederick Chopin and other Romantic composers.

For piano aficionados a total feast of talent and music. Those hoping to attend should book their accommodation well in advance. And those who would like to support this incredible Festival of Piano, you contribute via the website.

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The Silicon joke?

From roundabout to revolution

By Harry de Quetteville

18 MARCH 2018 • 6:00PM

18-19 March 2018 the TELEGRAPH published an incredibly interesting, fascinating series of articles under the headline of THE SILICON JOKE? But no joke is intended. The series of five articles is wholly centred on computer intelligence, what is happening where in IT and how, and the future it portended for the UK. I cannot underestimate the importance or value of this series of articles, which is totally bursting at the seams with information about the Who, Why, Where, How, on IT (Information Technology) as it is now happening in the UK.

The whole series is a paean of delight for the future of the UK, which really makes a change from all those doom mongers. If I had my way I would send a copy to every UK school leaver, or pre-school leaver, saying this is the future, grab it, with both hands.

Yes it is a paean of delight and praise, but also mixed with heavy criticism of Government failings as well, but on the whole it totally emphasises the great future for the UK, outside the yoke of the ghastly EU, without actually drawing that parallel.

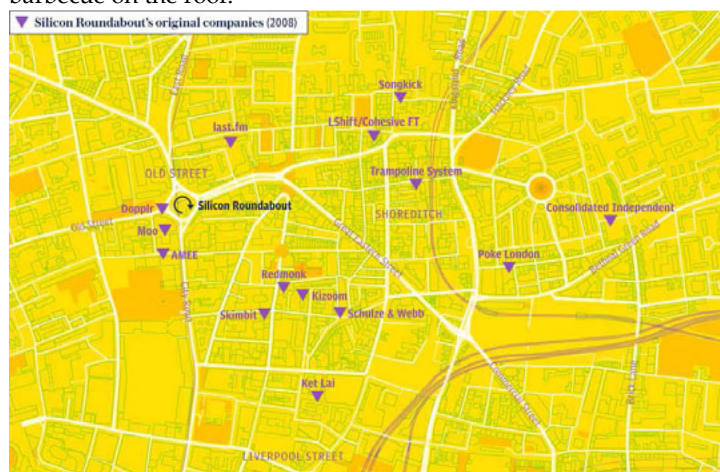
The UK has always been a producer of innovative people, originals, inventors, explorers, and welcomed other like minded people, so that now London and elsewhere hosts thousands of entrepreneurs, all setting

up their own business, creating employment, which is of course the reason why the UK economy is booming, unemployment is low, as compared to every other state in the EU.

As follows, extracts from the five articles to give readers a taste of the excellence of the information.

CHAPTER 1 – SILICON ROUNABOUT

“Exactly 10 years ago, in March 2008, a small technology company called Doppler waved goodbye to its cramped premises above a pub in Hoxton, in London’s East End, and relocated to a bigger office nearby, on 100 City Road. For Doppler’s 32 year-old chief technology officer, Matt Biddulph, the move offered a double advantage. Not only was there more space, but it also opened a door into a young, energetic social world of pub nights and parties, where coders, software engineers, budding entrepreneurs and digital wannabes gathered to gossip and share tales of triumph and disaster in their efforts to build online businesses. At the heart of this world was Moo.com, which was developing both a customised printing business and a reputation for great booze-ups. And it just so happened that Doppler’s new office space was sublet from Moo. “It was very sociable,” Matt Biddulph recalls now. “There were a good number of companies in the area. Friday nights we would always go round to someone’s place go for a few drinks, a barbecue on the roof.”



After a few months, it dawned on Biddulph that this disorganised but congenial congregation of digital companies amounted to London’s very own technology hub. He reckoned that if Britain had an equivalent to California’s all-conquering Silicon Valley - home to Google, Facebook, and Apple - he was at the heart of it. Directly out of his window was Old Street’s grey, dreary, deeply uninspiring, traffic-clogged junction - gleaming City towers and Georgian Bloomsbury facades to the south and west, Hackney Marshes and London Fields to the north and east. California, it wasn’t. So, tongue firmly in his cheek, he took to the then new social media platform, Twitter, and wrote: “‘Silicon Roundabout’: the ever-growing community of fun startups in London’s Old Street area. 15.12- 23 July 2008”

It was meant to be funny, a very British acknowledgement of the gulf that existed between the scale and ambition of America’s technology titans - which promised nothing less than a revolution in human communication and commerce - and our own, rather more humble aspirations, to print nice stationery, perhaps, like moo.com. “It was absolutely a joke,” says Biddulph.

“There was this classically British community of people, creating a bunch of great things, but with a healthy dose of cynicism.”

TEN YEARS ON SILICON ROUNABOUT IS NO LONGER A JOKE!

Ten years on, Silicon Roundabout is no longer a joke. In fact, after the continent-economies of America and China, this country has become - by almost any metric - the most powerful technology hub in the world. Indeed by some measures, like start-ups per capita, Britain now beats the United States. Last year London raised more than twice the amount of money to fund digital companies than any other city in Europe. Between 2012 and 2016, total investment in Britain reached £28bn, as much as our closest three rivals - France, Germany, the Netherlands - combined.

One reason is obvious. Britain is home to eight of Europe’s top 20 universities. The “golden triangle” of Oxbridge and London alone offers six within a 60-mile radius. The results are equally evident: some 40 per cent of Europe’s “unicorns” - new tech companies worth \$1bn or more - are British. If their names - Deliveroo, Rightmove, Transferwise - are not familiar to you yet, they will be soon, changing everything about the way you eat, live, and spend.

Growth is phenomenal. According to the Government’s digital strategy, published last year, fixed internet traffic in Britain is doubling every two years, while mobile data traffic increases by more than 40 per cent annually. Around the world, the volume of global internet traffic in 2020 will be almost 100-fold greater than it was shortly before Matt Biddulph coined the phrase **Silicon Roundabout**, and connected devices will outnumber the global population by nearly seven to one. To fuel that astonishing development, Britain’s so-called digital economy, already home to 1.6million workers, will suck in an estimated half million new recruits in the next four years. It is a high-growth, high-productivity sector in a country where, for the last decade at least, both have been a problem. Average salaries for British tech workers - more than £50,000 - are half as much again as the typical annual wage.

The bashful, forlorn-tugging Silicon Roundabout of a decade ago now attracts global tech titans to its door. The world’s largest technology fund, run by Japan’s Softbank, with \$100bn to invest, set up shop in Mayfair last year. Meanwhile Google is developing a huge campus around King’s Cross, much of it devoted to its British artificial intelligence (AI) offshoot, DeepMind, which it acquired in 2014 for \$500m. And Facebook is finalising plans to open a huge new headquarters in the same area. When Matt Biddulph drew up a map of Old Street startups in 2008, it featured 16 companies. Now London has an estimated 6,000. Far from being a road to nowhere, Silicon Roundabout has taken this country a long way.

Not that the cultural chasm to Silicon Valley has been completely bridged. According to Saul Klein, one of the most influential investors in British technology, “Silicon Valley is a mindset, not a location. It’s about energy, ambition - an almost on the spectrum desire to make something without really thinking about the consequences of what you’re trying to do.” Harry Briggs, a venture capitalist specialising in early stage technology companies, puts it more bluntly: “In Britain if you’re offered \$50m or \$100m to sell your company you think ‘I can be one of the richest people I know, and a big success. In Silicon Valley if you sell for \$100m you’re a nobody, you’re a loser. I heard someone from Silicon Valley say recently they want to be

remembered as long as Julius Caesar. That's just a different scale of self-belief and ambition."

And that's just for starters!



Brent Hoberman and Dame Martha Lane Fox
Founders of lastminute.com

Government, whose services are today undergoing their own digital revolution at the hands of Liam Maxwell, Britain's first National Technology Adviser, can justifiably claim credit for other encouraging gambits too. One is Tech City, founded and funded in 2010 by Cameron, to nurture young companies around Silicon Roundabout. **Another was the tax credit SEIS, introduced in 2012 to tempt investors to back risky new ventures; a third is the British Business Bank, founded in 2014, which allocates enormous sums to venture capital funds to disburse to new tech companies. Brexit means British companies will lose access to £2bn of EU investment, but, as Hancock says, "we've already committed the British Business Bank paying extra funds, to assure that the current European funding is at least matched".**

If Government played its part, though, the two things that most drove the British tech sector into the mainstream occurred well before David Cameron's arrival as Prime Minister, and had little to do with politics. The first was the recycling of talent from those few companies that had surfed (and sometimes been sunk by) the first major wave of the internet boom. Perhaps most famous of these was lastminute.com, the site which made household names of its founders Brent Hoberman and Martha (now Dame Martha) Lane Fox.

From his office just off Kensington High Street, Hoberman now talks about "the mafia" - tight-knit groups of employees who worked in pioneering digital firms in the early-mid 2000s, then emerged to form a host of new companies themselves. "There was the Skype mafia, the Betfair mafia, the Lastminute mafia," he says. "All came out with experience and the confidence to build new things. Just from lastminute we've probably had 10 who started business worth over 100 million, just out of that mafia." Much more important, however, was 2008, and the financial crash. If there was a single event that transformed British technology, it was the crash. Almost overnight large numbers of highly-motivated people with serious financial experience were fired. A huge talent pool was dumped onto the open market. "The crash pushed a whole load more people to want to be entrepreneurs," says Hoberman. **"Entrepreneurship is really risky. Then it turned out that so is working in a bank, so a lot more brilliant people said 'Well, why not be an entrepreneur?'"** The City had been a veritable talent Hoover. "So many founders have come to startups having left a Goldman Sachs," says Sarah

Drinkwater, who runs Google Campus, near Old Street, where refugees from the square mile can pull up a stool at a shared desk, log on to the free wifi, and plug away at their business idea. Every day, dozens of new members post a sticker on the campus notice board to announce who they are and what they're doing. "They've either just been made redundant or are at an inflection point in their lives," says Drinkwater.

The crash didn't just affect the people who had been fired. It changed the mindset of those looking for their first job, too. For generations, the best and brightest had emerged from universities and were tempted to make money in the City that they could not make elsewhere. But after the crash a career in banking was freighted not only with risk, but also with some stigma. Banking was out, tech entrepreneurship was in. "Of my 100-strong graduating class," says Suranga Chandratillake, who left Cambridge with a degree in computer science 20 years ago, "the biggest employer was the City. Almost one third became bankers. Last year the biggest employer was Entrepreneur First" - a prestigious "incubator" for start-ups whose embryonic firms are often then snapped up by investors like Chandratillake himself, now a venture capitalist at Balderton Capital. "Goldman Sachs is having to compete hard to be attractive again for graduates," he says.

"In London you've got everything. You've got consumers at scale, you've got enterprise buyers. It's the largest English speaking city in the world," says Klein. "It's Facebook's number one city English speaking city; it's Twitter's number one English-speaking city. Any consumer service you want to launch you can launch it in London and he will have you will know within 18 to 24 months: do people love this product or service? Are they prepared to pay for this? How much will they use it? Do the economics of this business work? If you tick all of those boxes you can grow very rapidly."

How far can Britain go? Well, of the 53 European billion dollar tech companies, 22 are British. But growing much bigger is hugely difficult: globally only six companies formed since 2000 are now worth more than \$50bn: Facebook, Uber, and Tesla in America, and search engine Baidu, Ant Financial and Didi Chuxing, a ride-sharing Uber-rival in China. Of these, Facebook is far ahead, valued at almost \$500bn - half a trillion dollars. So it is remarkable that some people believe that the world's first trillion dollar company will be British.

Apple is currently worth \$900bn. And Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil company, Aramco, planning to float on the stock market, will probably be valued at considerably more than \$1tn. But Apple, for all its cutting edge tech, is 42 years old. Aramco's roots go back to the early 1920s.

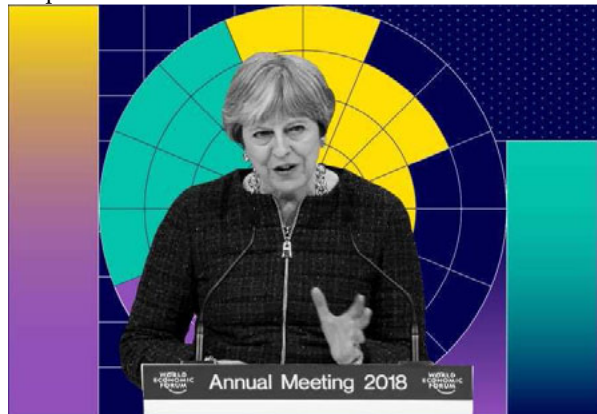
Sherry Coutu
Founder of Interactive Investor International

"The world's first trillion dollar company will be here," says Sherry Coutu, who founded Interactive Investor International and has made her name since as a serial entrepreneur. She is from North America, so her judgement is not down to blind loyalty. Rather, she says that there is a confluence of two emerging technologies that, together, "will fix the whole world and you'll be able to commercialise it on a global basis." She thinks that one nation, a leader in both fields, will best exploit that confluence: Britain.

To get there, however, Britain still has a host of problems to overcome - in education training and lack of diversity with tech;

in transforming academic research into world-changing businesses and fostering a little more of the entrepreneurial ambition that drives Silicon Valley; in scaling-up promising new companies into “unicorns” worth billions; and finally in turning one of those behemoths into a trillion-dollar beast. How we get to do that, and the identity of that trillion dollar company, is the subject of this series.

AND THERE IS HEAPS MORE ON THIS SUBJECT in this chapter.



CHAPTER 2 – TEACHING TECH

How coding moved from the bedroom to the classroom

Talent, talent, talent. Ask anyone in tech what helps or hinders the development of new companies and they will undoubtedly say: access to talent. What they mean is that there is a global shortage of those capable of founding and then developing new technology companies. And almost any company that launches now is a technology company. If you want to sell something, you must sell it online. If you have supply chains, they will be controlled electronically. If you are in creative industries, from art to fashion to architecture, then your designs will be aided by computers and software. Nothing is totally insulated from the digital revolution.

So the list of the staff required is lengthy, and not always obvious. Start-ups grow very fast, hence your most essential recruit might be an HR manager capable of enlarging a team from two to 200 in 18 months. Other crucial senior execs are known by their acronyms: COO, CTO, CMO - Chief Operating Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Chief Marketing Officer. Product managers are also critical - people with a tech background who also live and breathe the commercial sell. But the most obvious demand is for those who stare at the black screens: the coders, the software engineers, the developers who express themselves best in secret languages that meaning nothing to the rest of us: Javascript, C++, Python, among many others.

There are an estimated 100,000 plus jobs waiting to be filled in the tech sector, and almost half a million more to come in the next few years. So you would think that Britain’s computer science graduates, of whom we produce about 27,000 each year, would be the hottest ticket in town, in scorching demand from employers. **But there is something rotten in the state of Britain’s education system. For six months after leaving university, the graduates with the highest rate of unemployment in this country are those who studied computer science, at nearly 14 per cent.**

Pharmacologists, by comparison, have just a 3.5 per cent unemployment rate. Nor does the problem disappear over time. According to a 2016 government review by Sir Nigel Shadbolt, unemployment rates for computer scientists three and a half years after leaving higher education is five per cent, almost twice the average. What on earth is going on?

We need more doing computer science, and we need to make sure that they have the right skills on coming out of university,”

**DR RACHID HOURIZI
DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTE OF CODING**

“We need more doing computer science, and we need to make sure that they have the right skills on coming out of university,” says Dr Rachid Hourizi, an academic at the University of Bath who has just been chosen to be the first director of Britain’s new Institute of Coding. **The institute was announced by the Prime Minister at Davos, but is an idea that has been hanging around for years, waiting for funding. Last year, 12 months after the Shadbolt review, it finally got it.** Hourizi’s mission is clear: “We will produce courses better aligned to industry needs, which will then become the gold standard.”

Opinion varies about just how bad computer science university degrees are in preparing students for the world of work. But the reality is that a host of alternative coding schools have sprung up in an effort to plug the gap. These are often short-term, intensive, usually expensive, immersion courses for those who want to switch careers into tech. One such, Makers’ Academy, whose catchline is “Learn to Code in 12 Weeks”, is run by Evgeny Shadchnev, an engaging young entrepreneur who came from Russia to study for his masters in computer science at Imperial. He then stayed in London and got his first job as a software developer at a marketing agency called Traffic Broker. When he started working, he was shocked. “What I learned on the job is that most of what was expected of me was not covered at university, down to the very basics: how to work as part of a team, how to use version control, and other modern technologies.”

George Davis ought still to be one of those attending lectures. But the 19-year-old left his computer science course at the University of East Anglia to set up his own business, SenLab, offering predictive analytics of budgets for small and medium sized businesses.

“The degree was actually slowing me down because it was out of date,” he says, from his office in Moorgate, in the heart of the City. “They need to modernise. This is very UK specific. American courses are so much further ahead.”

And girls are getting left out!

“Amali de Alwis used to be what they call a “quant” - a quantitative researcher - which is a bit like being a detective, except that your clues and evidence are buried within statistics and data. It was that background that allowed her to pull some numbers from the Office for National Statistics. She already knew that, of 26,845 individuals accepted onto computer science degrees in 2016, just 14 per cent - 3,775 - were women. But she wanted to see how that tiny cohort got on when they graduated. It turned out that in Britain today, in the tech and telecom industry, female programmers and software developers make up only 3.9 per cent of the workforce. Particularly depressing is that this figure has actually been getting worse - down from 10 per cent a decade ago. Similarly, women made up 20 per cent of computer science students in the early years of this century.

““The ramifications are significant. In an industry struggling to recruit suitable staff, half the population - women - are not even candidates. Moreover, overwhelmingly white, male bias poses commercial problems, too.

It is a problem that de Alwis now aims to rectify as head of Code First: Girls, an eight-week coding course for women that aims to get through the basics in 16 hours. It costs £675 for those who can pay; with revenue supporting free courses for the young or just out of education.

On a recent night in an office near Oxford Street, in central London, borrowed from the digital consultancy Transform, 20 or so mostly young women sat around tables in twos and threes. Large screens over their heads displayed the code to allow them to write their names on a webpage. By the end of the course they will have designed an entire website. “The point is to crack their disbelief that they can do it,” says course leader Cedric Kisema, a software developer who volunteers his time.

Code First: Girls has proved increasingly popular. So far, more than 5,000 women have passed through its doors, and it hopes to have trained 20,000 by 2020. In some ways, its success points up the disastrous gender balance of traditional university computer science courses. “By the end of this year, as a small social enterprise, we will be teaching more women to code than go through the entire British higher education system,” says de Alwis. “It’s bonkers.”

Of course, the blame for this malaise cannot be laid exclusively at the door of the higher education system. The problem starts further down the chain, with primary and secondary schools, with parents who do not encourage daughters to consider STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths).

AND MORE

CHAPTER 3 -

The students vying to be millionaires

Professor of Computer Science at Magdalen, Oxford, Daniel Kroening, is the founder of Diffblue, a start-up that wants to develop artificial intelligence that can write its own computer code. In his office, a stone’s throw from Oxford’s station, he asks a simple question: “Do you know the average number of spin-outs each Professor of Computer Science at Stanford has?” Spin-outs are commercial companies founded on the back of academic research. Stanford, based in the heart of Silicon Valley, is recognised as the world leader in the art of the spin-out. “The average number of Stanford spin-outs is 3.8 – per professor.” In Britain the picture is rather different.

In 2015 Oxford, the UK’s number one university for research, produced four spin-outs. Not per professor. That was for the whole university. The situation was not better elsewhere. Data on British university spin-outs is not in any publicly available league table. But it exists, via what’s called the HE-BCI survey (it stands for Higher Education – Business and Community Interaction). For 2015-16, Cambridge University recorded a total of two spinouts in the HE-BCI survey. Imperial College London, another of this country’s most vaunted research universities, listed three. Of 160 institutions, 59 officially produced no spinouts at all.

“““For 900 years Oxford University has been an academic superpower that hasn’t been capitalised upon,” says Riwa Harfoush, Principal at OSI. “Today we will sit down with academics who might not even see the commercial potential of their ideas themselves and build a company around them. We

will have companies that will change the world, and for the better.”

For example one of OSI’s spinouts, Ultromics, uses machine learning to spot flaws in cardiostress echo-tests, which currently have only a 75-80 per cent accuracy rate. “At the moment, says Harfoush, “One in five people are either sent to have open heart surgery they don’t need, or are sent home with a deadly disease.” Ultromics aims to improve that to 95 per cent, potentially saving the NHS £2bn a year. “We’ll give it to them for free,” says Wilkinson. “But sell it to everyone else.”

“If we have a more global immigration policy after Brexit that would be a good thing.”

JAMES DYSON There’s another problem, too. Many embryonic university businesses are founded by foreign students, who flock to Britain for the quality of the teaching. But having taught them all they know, they are allowed four months to leave the country at the end of their course by the Home Office. This is stringently enforced because students currently are counted in the UK net immigration number, which the Government has promised to reduce “to the tens of thousands”. In British technology this cycle – inviting, teaching then expelling – the brightest talent from around the world, attracts near universal eye-rolling. “60 per cent of people reading engineering at British universities are from overseas and 90 per cent of people doing research at universities are from overseas and we should encourage them to stay,” says James Dyson. “We shouldn’t kick them out at the end of it, we desperately need them.” He doesn’t see Brexit as a problem, arguing that EU membership merely skews the balance of those we do let in away from high growth areas like China and India, towards EU nations. “If we have a more global immigration policy after Brexit that would be a good thing.”

And more and more !!

“I think commercialisation is a challenge for Britain on the whole,” says Martina King of Feature Space.. “Nobody here wants to be in sales. In America it’s a noble profession and there are huge amounts of training courses. If you look at the MBA program in most UK universities they don’t have negotiation skills, they don’t teach how to win contracts, they don’t have selling as a module. I think that is something really important for us to change, if in Britain we want to monetise our inventions.” Cambridge, in fact, offers one of history’s best examples of the cost of not doing so. In 1975 César Milstein developed a technique, with Georges Kohler, for producing monoclonal antibodies, in the city’s MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology. Milstein deliberately did not patent his discoveries, nobly believing they should be for the benefit of mankind. But if he did not profit financially (he did win the Nobel), others certainly did. A little more than three decades later, six of the top ten best selling drugs in the world were monoclonal antibody therapies, an annual market worth \$55bn.

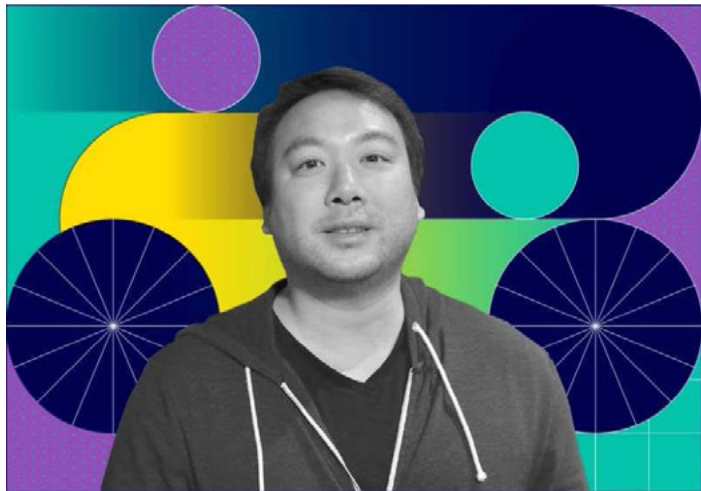
Some 20 years later, in 1997, over drinks at the Panton Arms pub in Cambridge, four chemists developed an idea of how to sequence DNA – effectively a way of transcribing the recipe of all life. Within a decade, they had sold their company, Solexa, to the American rival Illumina for \$650 million. At the time a press release described it as “one of the greatest commercialisation success stories to emerge from the University of Cambridge”. But was it? Illumina is now worth more than \$35bn, all based, as one green-eyed entrepreneur told me, “on British technology”.

“The Brits are the great inventors, and the Yanks are the guys who are great at putting it in a box and selling it,” John Milton, who played a critical role at Solexa, said after the takeover. Learning both to invent and to sell, and then resisting the temptation to take the money and run when commercial suitors come calling, is the key to building billion-dollar businesses. And it is Britain’s billion dollar businesses, known as unicorns, which are the focus of the next chapter in this series.

Chapter 4 – The Unicorns

What’s it like to start a business which, within a handful of years, is valued at more than a billion dollars? Does it catapult you into a world of private jets and superyachts and partying in the Maldives with impossibly beautiful people in skimpy swimming costumes?

Take Shu, the 38-year-old founder of the food delivery company Deliveroo, rumoured to be considering a stock market launch which would value it at around \$2bn (Shu denies that a float is in the immediate offing). He still claims to “ride out once a week”, climbing on his bike to get a saddle-side feel of how his business operates. Customers, ever more used to opening the door to delivery men, barely give him a second glance. Instead, the group who really scrutinise Shu, and entrepreneurs like him, are their investors.



Deliveroo, which was founded in 2013, went through its first funding round in mid-2014. Shu, an American former banker born to Chinese parents, can now barely remember how big it was – three-and-a-half years can feel like an eternity in the start-up business. “I think it was like \$5 million,” he says. “Small compared to the US. But over time, the rounds got bigger and bigger.” Indeed, over the next three years, Deliveroo had five further rounds of funding – B, C, D, E, and F, succeeding each other like Doctor Seuss’s Cats in the Hat, and each delivering their voooom with ever-more-sizeable sums. The last round of funding, in September last year, raised \$375 million, bringing the total today to about \$860m.

In that time Shu, who paid himself £100,000 a year until 2016, when he took an increase to £125,000, himself underwent a remarkable transformation, typical of unicorn bosses struggling to keep up with the rapidly growing monsters they have unleashed. “At the beginning I was riding out on my own – every day for the first year, signing up restaurants,” he says. “It was a big transition then to sign up 20 people to the company; and another then to have offices all over the place. Now I have to work out how to unify the team of 1,200 people, dispersed

around the world. I have an MBA, but they don’t teach that. You have to learn on the job.”

“Clearly, vast growth is harder in a country with 65 million residents than in one, like the US, with 320 million, let alone India with 1.32 billion, or China with 1.4. But Britain’s economic shift from manufacturing to services has prepared it well for selling the often intangible intellectual produce of the digital economy. There is no reason, for example, why the City, and its halo of legal, accounting, consulting and other dependent industries, should not breed a herd of financial technology unicorns, and see them grow from foals to champions.

“If we are not a leader in fintech, then obviously we have blown it,” says Saul Klein, the former Microsoft executive who now runs the venture capital firm LocalGlobe. “Already we’re doing really well, with some of the most innovative businesses.” Like everyone, he cites Transferwise as a star in the making, also mentioning peer-to-peer lender Funding Circle and digital bank Revolut. “But they’re just scratching the surface.” Insurance dominance should follow, he thinks, with Britain also becoming a global leader in cryptocurrencies, brought to popular attention by the recent surge and slump in the value of Bitcoin

“In America you’ve got the technology hub in Silicon Valley and the finance hub in New York, but London has both.”

ANNE BODEN

CEO OF STARLING BANK

The rise of London fintech has been remarkable. More than 60,000 people now work in a sector worth more than £7bn to the British economy, making it bigger than its equivalent in New York, Hong Kong or Singapore. Latest figures show that about \$1.8 billion was invested in 224 deals in Britain in 2017, an increase of more than \$1bn on 2016. “In America you’ve got the technology hub in Silicon Valley and the finance hub in New York, but London has both,” says Anne Boden, CEO of Starling Bank, a much-heralded fintech company which provides an account on an app. “That’s made Britain the global leader.”

Now, on a single floor of an office block near Liverpool Street, her company is at the forefront of an insurgent movement of small but nimble start-ups. They hope to turn the established players’ size against them, in much the same way as low-cost airlines confronted, then overtook, flag carriers hobbled by legacy systems and costs such as clunky websites and expensive staff pensions. “I spent 30 years working in traditional banking, in big operational roles, trying to fix the system,” says Boden. “I realised that what I was spending £30m on at a big bank, could be done with £300,000 at a start-up. So I concluded it was easier to start from scratch. The big banks have the customers but need new systems, and we have the systems and have to win new customers.” It’s clear who she thinks has the better side of that deal.

The Trillion Dollar Company?

By Harry de Quetteville
21 MARCH 2018 • 6:00AM

Chapter 5

“On the 57-acre site in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, where Sir James Dyson has based the headquarters of the company that bears his name, the teams who work on new ideas inhabit a mirrored-cube of a building, officially called D9. To most of the 3,000 staff on site, however, it’s known as The Glass Castle – a hothouse to grow imaginative new products. It’s not the only place that spawns fresh thinking, though, as I discovered when I found myself shut with the billionaire engineer in his private loo. Dyson is now 70, and has been designing vacuum cleaners since 1983, exactly half his life. But the decades have not dimmed his desire to design, his enthusiasm for engineering, or his curiosity about how things work – and how they might be improved.



Sir James Dyson

“For now, the most exciting new device in his pipeline is an electric, semi-autonomous car, due to go on sale in 2021. It is a product that will see this Cotswolds firm go toe-to-toe with the biggest company on the planet – Apple, which itself is running an automotive project deemed so important it is code-named “Titan”. Currently worth more than \$900 billion, Apple is leading the race to become the world’s first trillion dollar company, ahead of Alphabet – Google’s parent company – valued at \$800 billion; Amazon, \$760 billion; and Microsoft, in fourth place at a mere \$750 billion. Technology’s stranglehold on the top of the charts is startling. But these mega-companies offer a simple lesson to any rival who wants to match their extraordinary valuations: make a product or service that is revolutionary, yet ubiquitous, and sell it on a global scale. So where might Britain find its own trillion dollar contender? Will it be with Dyson electric cars? Or through the Internet of Things? Virtual worlds? Artificial intelligence? Might the answer lie in an unprepossessing industrial park in Cambridge, home to what is almost certainly Britain’s most significant technology company that you’ve never heard of? The company doesn’t make sexy products with its name on like the Apple iPhone. It doesn’t even make unsexy products with its name on like the Dyson vacuum. In fact, it doesn’t actually make anything at all: it simply allows other people to make something

that it has designed. That thing just happens to be the silicon chip that has powered the mobile revolution.

“We were the plucky Brits, and so it was OK to do business with us. We really benefited from being in the middle – which was nowhere. Now we’re everywhere.” **MIKE MULLER**

FOUNDER OF ARM Arm never made the most powerful processors, and so never truly thrived in the desktop age, when our computers were tethered to the wall by power cables, and electricity consumption wasn’t a problem. Come the smartphone age, however, companies like Apple were desperate for chips that were powerful enough to drive their software, but efficient enough not to drain tiny batteries too fast. You might not know it, but there’s every chance you have an Arm-designed chip in your pocket right now, hidden behind your mobile phone screen. “There are probably around 120 billion Arm chips out there,” says the company’s co-founder, Mike Muller.”

“.... If Arm chips provide the computing power for the IoT, and Arm software manages them all, could Arm not become a British company to rival Apple?

Yes and no. The business model offers huge opportunities. But Arm is not – technically – a British company any more. It may be born and bred in Cambridge, and still run from there, but it is now owned by Japan. SoftBank – yes, them – acquired Arm two years ago for \$32bn, one of a spate of recent sales of major British technology firms such as Logica, Imagination Technologies, Misys and Autonomy. If Britain wants to develop a trillion-dollar company, resisting the temptation to sell up will be key.

If this all (...) sounds like the escapist fantasy of a brilliant but excitable young mind, it might be worth listening to the words of Mike McGee and Tim Webber, two slightly more grizzled veterans of Britain’s creative industries. They are key figures at Framestore, the special effects company that won an Oscar for Gravity, starring Sandra Bullock and George Clooney. Framestore has charted the rise of technology in visual effects since it was formed in 1986. The point then, as the company’s name implies, was to allow directors to tinker with each frame of celluloid. Now the possibilities are truly mind-bending. “We believe we can do anything,” says McGee, Framestore’s co-founder.



“Actors alive now are already selling their image rights for films which will be made when they’re dead,” **MIKE MCGEE CO-FOUNDER OF FRAMESTORE**

Among their more remarkable tricks is to analyse old movies and use technology to create modern, digitised, representations of long-gone stars which appear real to the human eye. “We can recreate dead actors,” says McGee. So Framestore can convincingly make Audrey Hepburn, or Orson Welles, or

anyone, live again, speak again, act again in an entirely new part. "Actors alive now are already selling their image rights for films which will be made when they're dead," says McGee. With these sci-fi developments happening right now, Improbable's dreams don't seem so unlikely. For in the march towards such virtual worlds, a threshold has been crossed in the past few years – not an imaginative one, but a computational, technological one, significant enough to power such conceptual leaps. "It happened around the time of Gravity," says Tim Webber, who joined Framestore shortly after it was founded, and picked up the Oscar. "The actual world and the imagined world are coming together," he says. "Visual effects have merged with the real."

Similarly, cars are waiting for a great leap forward in not one but two areas: better batteries, to allow electric vehicles to crack the mass market, and automation to make them driverless. At Dyson, Sir James is prioritising the former over the latter. But the Dyson vacuum cleaner range, which includes an automated robotic model, has effectively been a test bed for technologies that might be adapted for his very own Titan project. "Future electric cars will be about interesting battery technology, efficient electric motors and efficiency moving through the air." Putting them together, he says, ought to bring an end to the era of the internal combustion engine, and not just for cars. "There no doubt that aeroplanes will have to become electric," he notes.



Dyson Ltd. campus
Malmesbury, U.K.

The difference between Dyson and so many other British technology companies, however, is that Sir James has refused to sell it, or even float it on the stock market. That allows him to make risky bets on his own judgment without having to convince investors or shareholders. It also means that it is his own profits he is ploughing into research and development on the new car – thought to be about £2.5 billion. "For me, it's all about the technology, I don't care what anyone else says," he insists. "I'm not a good businessman." Not good, perhaps. But surely not bad, either. Sir James is now thought to be the biggest landowner in the country, holding more acres even than the Queen. According to reports, he is worth £7.8 billion.

There's no doubt that, should Dyson crack electric vehicles in the same way he has vacuums, managing to sell a high-priced product to the mass market around the world, his fortune will multiply many, many times. But only taking a sizeable share of the global market – in the way that Apple and Samsung have in smartphones – would propel his company towards truly vast valuations. And the power and scale of competition in the sector makes that seem unlikely. But then, the same might have been

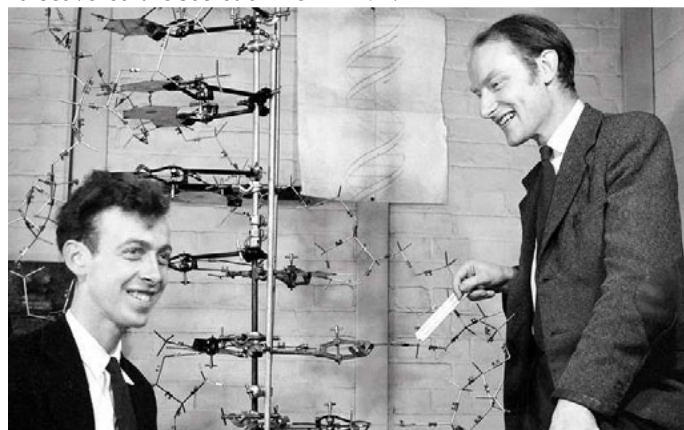
said about vacuums. And today, Dyson is the third-biggest selling vacuum brand in the world. Repeating that feat with cars would see Dyson accelerate hard towards the trillion. Promising as twinning automation and battery technology might be, however, there is another pairing of technologies with even greater potential. One of those technologies will certainly be AI. DeepMind may have been acquired by Google, but it remains what its co-founder Mustafa Suleyman calls "a relatively autonomous subsidiary" of the US giant, and has helped make Britain the AI capital of the world. This is a position challenged by China, which has launched its own state-sanctioned AI master plan. Challenged, but not, as yet, surpassed.

DeepMind ...

DeepMind hopes to build the largest AI research team in the world, working on products that will affect billions of users. "I know that my time on earth is super short and I really want to do some interesting, good, meaningful stuff," says Suleyman. "The way I think about it is that 800 million people today don't have access to clean water; a billion people go hungry every night and yet a third of the food that we produce every year is wasted. AI has the potential to radically transform the quality and cost of healthcare at scale; the efficiency and cleanliness of our energy systems; our transport systems; our education. These technologies have that potential."

Is this one half of the answer to Britain's trillion dollar question? If so, what might the other be?

"The fifth industrial revolution will be the result of the meeting of gene sequencing and artificial intelligence," says Dave Norwood, the CEO of Oxford University's start-up fund, OSI. "When we look back, we will see that 1953 is the year that everything started." What he means is that 1953 was the year that Alan Turing, the computer scientist who played such a significant role during the war at Bletchley Park, asked: "Could one make a machine which would answer questions put to it, in such a way that it could not be possible to distinguish its answers from those of a man? Could one make a machine which would have feelings like you and I do?" But it was also in February of the same year that James Watson and Francis Crick staggered into the Eagle pub in Cambridge and announced that they had "discovered the secret of life" - DNA.



The discoverers of the structure of DNA
James Watson, left and Francis Crick, 1953

Which brings us back to Sherry Coutu. It was Coutu, a seasoned business builder, who predicted in the first part of this series that Britain would produce the world's first trillion-dollar company. Her revelation even contributed to the fact that our meeting, at a co-working space in Islington, dragged on well beyond its allotted time. Outside, those who booked the room for the next

hour frantically rapped at the door. In frustration, a shaven-head man clutching a MacBook stuck his head around the door and pointed to his watch.

"So what will it do?" I asked hurriedly, determined to get the answer. "What is Britain's trillion-dollar company?"



"We have the data sets here. Much of the research is very granular, in databases. If you look at the US and any other country their databases are not like that."

Sherry Coutu
Canadian entrepreneur

It will be in precision medicine," said Coutu. "We have the data sets here. Much of the research is very granular, in databases. If you look at the US and any other country, their databases are not like that. We have beautiful treasure troves that are just starting to be harvested. Spotting the patterns in genomes on our data set, you'll be able to find solutions not limited to just our population, you'll have something that fixes the whole world and you'll be able to commercialise that on a global basis. That's why I absolutely think the trillion-dollar company will be here."

AND BELIEVE ME THESE FEW PAGES HAVE JUST SKIMMED THE SURFACE OF THESE WONDERFULLY INFORMATIVE ARTICLES, everyone, interested in the future of the UK should read them.

Now this is not some jingoistic rant -all the foregoing is based on hard, well researched facts, and illuminate a great future. As it points out the London, Cambridge, Oxford nexus looks to become the next great Silicon Valley, with benefits, close to finance – the amount of money already swilling around these start ups, and spin offs, is quite mind boggling, millions, ready to be invested or already invested by hard headed businesses - and most importantly with access to huge, huge talent pool. As the writers of the above articles make clear, it is all about Talent, Talent, Talent.

If you do not subscribe to the TELEGRAPH, I have laboriously copied all five articles and could mail them to you in PDF format. They are worth reading. If I had my way, I would thrust a copy at every MP, Minister, civil servant, etc. and insist they absorb its content.

THE UK & THE EU - DESPITE BREXIT !

LONDON is still the top choice for business start-ups ahead of EU rivals despite the uncertainty caused by Brexit, according to new study by a German business consultancy. **The report from consulting firm EY found that investors were happy to plough £4.27bn into young growth companies in the British capital in 2017.**

This figure puts the UK capital streets ahead of its main German rival Berlin which attracted £2.61bn worth of investment for start-ups and Paris with £1.74bn.

Last year, investors pumped a record amount of £16.73bn into European growth companies - 84 percent more than 2016 - in a clear sign that business was not put off by Brexit.

EY analyst Peter Lennartz said: "The willingness to invest very high sums in start-ups, has increased significantly.

"This is also due to the strong stock markets, which offer investors lucrative exit opportunities when companies prevail." In 2017, the UK was also at the top in a country comparison. Investments in British growth companies increased to £5.58bn, more than twice as much as in the previous year's figure of £2.35bn. Mr Lennartz said even more money is now being invested in the broad start-up scene than there was before the Brexit referendum. German founders raised around £3.75bn, significantly more than the previous year with £2bn and ahead of the competition from France with £2.27bn.

Mr Lennartz said German corporations were increasingly investing money in start-ups to gain new ideas and technologies. The impressive UK investment figures emerged as Theresa May told MPs Britain will be able to step out into the world "signing trade deals with old friends and new allies alike" now the UK and the European Commission reached agreement on a transition deal.



London was streets ahead of Berlin and Paris, according to a business report



During the recent UK Fintech (Financial Technology) Week, Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond told the audience Britain is the global capital of Fintech and he will do everything he can to maintain this title.

Hammond outlined how London is the home to 17 of the top 50 international Fintech firms and Fintech investments doubled during 2017, attracting more four times more funding than France, Ireland and Sweden combined. *Fintech is vitally important to the UK economy driving \$7 billion in revenue during the year.* Fostering an environment of innovation is even more pressing as Brexit questions linger and competition is fierce.

As Guido Fawkes just pointed out:

Remainers who predicted doom and gloom have been so comprehensively proved wrong it is astounding that people think they have any credibility left. Foreign direct investment is strong, the stock market is strong, manufacturing is stronger, exports are booming, employment is booming, wages are rising and we're importing Europe's unemployed youth to fill vacancies. More people in work than ever before with the lowest youth unemployment since 1971. This is exactly the opposite of what the Treasury forecast. *Astounding.*

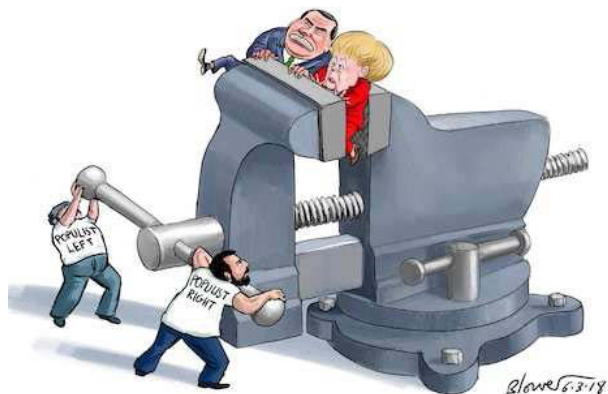
London remains the top city in the world for financial services despite a widespread scaremongering from remainers who claimed its prowess would be diminished post-Brexit. London leads this year's Z/Yen global financial centres index and is the only European city in the top 15 of 110 listed. Frankfurt, widely tipped as a beneficiary of a 'Brexodus', fell nine places. The index draws on 103 data points provided by global organisations and a survey of 2300 financial professionals. ***They rated London as having the most competitive business environment, a better reputation than any of its rivals, and the best financial infrastructure.***

A central argument made by remainers during the campaign and after was that Brexit would have a negative impact on the City. The Bank of England said 75,000 jobs in financial services would be lost. LSE Chief Xavier Rolet said 200,000 would go. Goldman CEO Lloyd Blankfein famously tweeted he would be "spending a lot more time" in Frankfurt (despite his firm expanding its London office). None of these predictions have come off - in fact, London has remained the world's leading city for finance, streets ahead of any European rival. *Experts, eh...*

Fraser Nelson in the WSJ.

""London's resilience is easy to explain. It is perhaps the greatest financial center in the world. No other European city comes close, not just for finance but (let's face it) for vibrancy, atmosphere, people and opportunity. **What's the point of earning more money in Frankfurt if you have to spend it in Frankfurt?** London's advantages—the time zone, the language, its fintech pre-eminence, the financial ecosystem—are still very much in place. Its biggest rivals are Hong Kong, New York and Singapore, all of which manage just fine outside the EU.

""For financial chiefs, Brexit might mean doing more business out of a bureau in Dublin or Paris, but its impact probably won't go much further. TheCityUK, a trade body, had been talking about as many as 100,000 financial jobs moving from London after a Brexit vote; **it has since estimated that the toll will be more like 3,000.!**~!



Whence Italy?



SELMAYRGATE - EU CORRUPTION NEPOTISM EXPOSED !!

Yet another EU Stitch up & Coup d'Etat !!

The 21 February J. C Juncker, and his Chief of Staff brought about a total Coup d'Etat, appointing Martin Selmayr to the all powerful post of Head of the EU Civil Service, all without any consultation, advertising of post, other candidates, without any of the usual required appointment legalities!

The move totally astounded and took by surprise all the EU Commissioners, who knew nothing about the moves, until they were told that morning, in the process of about one quarter of an hour. If you think this sounds exaggerated, or unbelievable, believe me it happened.

The commissioners were summoned ostensibly for a Press Briefing at which they were informed that Martin Selmayr, J. C. Juncker's Chief of Staff for several years – known as being totally Machiavellian in his way of working, nicknamed variously 'Rasputin' or the Beast of Berlayemont, he is not the most popular of officials, and has crossed many in the EU – had been named as Deputy Secretary-General, giving him the required Civil Service Grade needed for advancement, and barely had this been announced to the assembled Commissions, than at the same time it was announced that Alexander Italianer, then occupying the post of head of the Civil Service, whose retirement had been expected in two years time, was retiring immediately, and that given that Selmayr now had the required grade, he was being appointed Head of the Civil Service.

Consternation all round! But apparently the assembled Commissioners were so staggered, that they rubber stamped the

appointment, without a word of dissent, all in just about 20 minutes.

When asked if there had been any other candidates, the Commission said there had been one, who withdrew before the process was complete, but refused to name the candidate. Margaritis Schinas, chief spokesman of the EU Commission insisted that the appointments had been ""done by the book"", which J> C. Juncker and others reiterated, as complaints started to flood in.

Apparently the other candidate was alleged to have been Clara Martinez Alberola, Selmayr's former deputy, who now slotted in to succeed him ad head of Juncker's private office! How cozy! From the time of this announcement 21 February, until now opposition, complaints, formal objections have been made. At later press conferences, press representatives demanded more information, as the huge backlash against this appointment continued to roil round the EU/

Later the decision was made to debate the appointment by the EU Parliament in plenary session at the Conference of Presidents, the assembly's political body, following a request from several groups including the Greens and the far-left GUE/NGL group.

The official letter also asked Juncker to explain the case to MEPs as "the European Commission is accountable to the European Parliament." Other political groups, including the European Conservative and Reformists, tabled oral questions to the Commission concerning the legality of Selmayr's appointment. **Dutch liberal MEP Sophie In't Veld also filed a legal complaint to the EU Ombudsman against the appointment.**

The backlash against Martin Selmayr's appointment to the European Commission's top civil service post turned into open warfare that Monday, with journalists accusing senior officials of a cover up.

7 – 8 March 2018 - The Commission's normally sedate midday press briefing turned into a verbal brawl between reporters and chief spokesman Margaritis Schinas. It came on the 13th day of questions about the lightning-quick elevation of Selmayr. **It followed allegations of Machiavellian machinations, from the buying of commissioners' support for the promotion to a plan to increase the severance packages they receive at the end of their term, and a rumored takeover by Selmayr of the Commission's legal service — all of which the Commission vehemently denied.**

Selmayr's appointment also drew complaints because it puts another German in a senior EU leadership post — the secretaries-general of the European Parliament and the European External Action Service are also German — and because it elevates another man in an institution where women are under-represented in upper management.

Schinas, was unflappable. "All the procedures, and I repeat all the legal procedures, under the staff regulations have been respected religiously," he declared at the midday news conference. **"I repeat — respected religiously. It was all done by the book, by the rules."**

In the press room, no one quite believed him.

Jean Quatremer, longtime EU correspondent of the French newspaper Libération, reported that it was Clara Martinez Alberola, Selmayr's former deputy and who has now succeeded him as the head of Juncker's private office. Quatremer led the charge on Monday as the midday briefing turned into a veritable uprising, with reporters demanding that Selmayr himself come

to the podium to answer questions about how he got his new job, whether the vacant positions were properly advertised and if other procedures were followed according to EU regulations.

"These institutions don't belong to you," Quatremer snapped at Schinas in response to his assertion that all questions on the matter had already been asked and answered. "They belong to the European citizens, and it is our perfect right to ask you questions, to repeat the questions as often as we want, without you giving us lessons in morality," Quatremer said before asking yet more questions.

"You say it was legal; the rules were respected," he told Schinas. "It doesn't look legal to me, and as a representative of French public opinion, I tell you there's a problem here."

That a French journalist would gripe about a German official's promotion didn't seem to particularly move the Greek spokesman.

On several points, the press corps was unrelenting, with some reporters noting that the Commission's responses indicated that Selmayr was well aware he would get the job before the application process started.

"Perhaps the way of lancing this boil would be to get Martin Selmayr down into the press room," James Crisp of the U.K.'s Daily Telegraph said.

Schinas, trying to make light of the situation, replied: "Are you implying now that he is after my job as well?"

Crisp fired back, "If he wanted it, I am sure he'd take it."

While Selmayr may be German, the move that landed him the top job is known in the world of civil servants by a French term: **parachutage.**

The uproar seems to be less about whether following the rules more closely would have yielded a different result, and more about Selmayr himself — a man who is as feared and hated as much as he is admired and respected. It is a concept as old as civil service itself — a well-connected appointee effectively dropping out of the sky into a plum post — and veteran officials say it has happened many times in the Commission, though not previously for the post of secretary-general.



A very EU coup: Martin Selmayr's astonishing power grab
How a bureaucrat seized power in nine minutes

Jean Quatremer - 10 March 2018 9:00 AM

Martin Selmayr has always dreamed of being known beyond the Brussels bubble. His wish has now been granted, albeit in not quite the way he might have hoped. It has arrived in the form of a brilliantly executed coup that has handed this 47-year-old German bureaucrat near-total control of the EU machine. The coup began at 9.39 a.m. on 21 February, when 1,000 journalists were sent an email summoning them to a 10.30 a.m. audience with Jean-Claude Juncker. The short notice suggested urgency — and for such a meeting to be happening at all was unusual in itself. Since becoming President of the European Commission, Juncker has held hardly any press conferences. His news was the surprise promotion of Selmayr, his Chief of Staff, to the position of Secretary-General, in charge of the Commission's 33,000 staff. The reaction from the journalists present was astonishment. No one had been aware of a vacancy. There was no sign that the 61-year-old Alexander Italianer had been thinking of retiring. But as Juncker announced other appointments, it quickly became clear what had happened. Selmayr had taken control, and anyone who resisted him had been unceremoniously fired. Juncker had handed the keys of the European house to his favourite Eurocrat.

Selmayr had served Juncker well — or was it the other way around? Rather than being a regular chief of staff, Selmayr acted like a de facto deputy president. Juncker, who looks increasingly tired and worn out, had been the perfect glove puppet for Selmayr. Juncker was happy to let his Chief of Staff do the work, and happy to thank him by giving him a job of even greater power.

In the first few days of his new job, Selmayr has left no doubt about how he intends to rule. Last week, all Commission staffers were sent a letter from their new Secretary-General — something that is, again, highly unusual, as such letters are sent only by the President. In his *Urbi et Orbi*, Selmayr proclaimed that the EU civil service 'must not be satisfied with being the machine to run our institution', which is odd, given this is exactly what the Commission is supposed to be for.

But Selmayr declared that the civil service (or, rather, he himself) would act as 'the heart and soul of the Commission'.

With that sentence, Selmayr reduced the role of the 28 European Commissioners to mere extras.

One commissioner who was present at the meeting where Selmayr was promoted later explained to me what happened (he spoke on condition of anonymity, which is in itself telling as he is supposed to be a heavyweight). They were called to a 9.30 a.m. meeting where Juncker presented them with nominations. Selmayr was named not as the Secretary-General, but as the deputy — a post that was known to be vacant. Selmayr's promotion was unexpected, but Juncker assured them that all was above board.

Then came the coup de grâce. Having appointed Selmayr as deputy, Juncker announced that the Secretary-General — Italianer — had resigned. So Selmayr, having been deputy for just a few minutes, would take his place from 1 March. 'It was totally stunning,' the commissioner told me. 'We had witnessed an impeccably prepared and audacious power-grab.' Before anyone else could find out about this unprecedented double-promotion, an email was sent out summoning journalists to the press conference — where Selmayr was confirmed. A fait accompli.

Why are the European Commissioners not making more of a fuss? Perhaps because Selmayr is preparing to give them a

special present. Retiring commissioners are entitled to a generous 'transition allowance' of up to two-thirds of their basic salary for roughly two years, up to about €13,500 a month. Selmayr now plans to extend this to three, or perhaps even five, years. On top of the extra cash, they'd enjoy a series of benefits in kind: an office in the Commission headquarters (previously a perk to which only former presidents were entitled), a company car with a driver and two assistants. So thanks to Selmayr, a departing European Commissioner might receive double, if not triple, what he or she currently receives. All tax free, let's not forget.

Selmayr's manoeuvre would not have been possible without the complicity of Irene Souka, the European Commission's Director-General of Human Resources. She has been amply rewarded for her efforts: last month, her job was extended beyond compulsory retirement age (as was that of her husband, Dominique Ristori, who is Director-General for Energy).

Only one mystery remains: why did Selmayr move when he did? Why not wait? Juncker will be President until October 2019: why would Selmayr not stay as chief of staff (or de facto president) until then? Or why not at least spend six months in the Deputy Secretary-General job? One answer is that Selmayr had to move before anyone could work out what he was up to. France, in particular, had its eye on the Secretary-General job, as two of the four great European institutions (the Parliament and the Diplomatic Service) are managed by Germans. Now, thanks to the Selmayr ascendancy, it's three out of four. Rather a lot. But there's an even bigger reason for him to have moved.

Precisely because Juncker will be gone next year, Selmayr needs to act now to line up a replacement — someone just as docile. And he believes he has found just the man in Michel Barnier. It's thanks to Selmayr's patronage that Barnier ended up as the Brexit negotiator in the first place. Selmayr's next mission is to put Barnier top of the list of the European People's Party (a grouping of centre-right MEPs), which means he'll be in pole position for the job under the *Spitzenkandidat* system that Selmayr did so much to set up. **Barnier is the ideal candidate because he is (in Selmayr's eyes), weak, malleable and Macron-compatible.**

Selmayr is now accountable to no one. Indeed, he has lost no time further consolidating his power. He has moved his office close to the President's.

I understand he will continue to chair meetings in the President's office and even plans to put the hitherto independent European legal service under his command. So all he needs now is a new president as docile as Juncker has been and he'll have achieved his aim: before his 50th birthday, and without ever having stood for elected office Selmayr will become the alpha and omega of the European Commission."

Monday 12 March – Plenary Session in the EU Parliament to debate Martin Selmayr's new appointment

March 12 -Martin Selmayr, dubbed "the Monster of Brussels" by his critics, faced demands for an official investigation into his appointment as top Eurocrat at a parliamentary session March 12, as the political firestorm over his promotion spreads.

Critics say Selmayr, 47, a German who amassed formidable power as chief of staff to the European Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, exploited gaps in the rules to fast-track his surprise appointment as the commission's secretary-general — and brought the organisation into disrepute.

Sophie in 't Veld, a firebrand Dutch MEP, said she would call on the commission to reverse its decision at the European

parliament in Strasbourg. She has also asked the EU ombudsman to investigate. The MEP said the approval of the promotion by the EU's 28 commissioners, without discussion and without inviting other applications, was "stupid and immoral". "Nobody objected, nobody even asked a question," she said. "These people are supposed to be the very best. They run [the] most powerful institution on this continent and yet they behave like sheep when something like this is put before them. The debacle has revealed the backbiting inside the EU's 32,000-strong bureaucracy. One senior EU official put the outrage over Selmayr's new job down to resentment among internal opponents he mercilessly sidelined while he was Juncker's chief of staff.

"He inflicted a lot of battle scars on people in this town and now they're trying to kick him in the face," the official said.

Emily O'Reilly, the EU ombudsman, has just over three weeks to decide on the complaint against Selmayr's promotion. She has criticised EU institutions for avoiding scrutiny but lacks strong powers to punish maladministration.

And yet, under Juncker and Selmayr, the Commission's reputation as honest broker has taken a hammering. In the eurozone crisis, it was seen as too ready to do the bidding of France and Germany. In the migration crisis, again it sided with Germany.

Juncker's Commission has failed to close the rifts that opened up between western and eastern Europe, between the Eurozone members and the rest. If it were not for the Brexit negotiations, those tensions would arguably be more obvious.

This is where Selmayr's promotion is truly corrosive. It's not about the ambition of a particular individual. It's about what the member states will make of the president of the Commission — a Luxembourgish Christian Democrat — conniving in the appointment of a German Christian Democrat to the most senior post in the Commission civil service, bending the Commission's procedures to achieve that end, and discrediting the rest of the commissioners.

The natural response, when the game looks rigged, is to lose faith in the referee. So what loyalty do the member states now owe to the European Commission?

STRASBOURG — For a hugely divisive figure, Martin Selmayr has done an impressive job of uniting MEPs of all stripes in condemnation of his promotion to the most powerful civil service job in the European Commission.

Juncker sent Budget and Human Resources Commissioner Günther Oettinger to face the music at the Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg on Monday (12 March). With few voices of dissent, the EU assembly agreed to have the affair looked into by the budgetary control committee.

Oettinger insisted the Commission had "done everything by the book" and acted in accordance with the rules" but it soon became evident that MEPs would not be appeased by platitudes.

During a plenary debate in Strasbourg on his rapid route to the powerful position of secretary-general, representatives from every political corner — left and right, federalist and Euroskeptic — lined up to admonish the Commission for a maneuver that to many looked like a bare-faced stitch-up.

Selmayr's flash promotion "destroys all the credibility of the European Union," Dutch liberal MEP Sophie in 't Veld told her colleagues.

"The Commission will have to choose what is more important," In 't Veld said in her speech, "the career of Mr. Selmayr or the credibility of the EU."

"What better to give grist to the mill of the Euroskeptics," said Françoise Grossetête of the European People's Party, Selmayr's own political group. "This discredits an institution that we know is made up mainly of very talented professional people."

The Parliament can't remove Selmayr from his office but it can add fuel to a controversy that started three weeks ago when his surprise promotion was presented to the commissioners — who promptly waved it through with apparently little scrutiny.

For Selmayr and his patron Jean-Claude Juncker, the action in Strasbourg adds an unwelcome extra dimension to criticism that has been building in Brussels and beyond. Euroskeptics in the U.K. have pointed out the affair confirms their perception of the EU institutions as an old boys' club while the Hungarian government has blasted the Commission over its double standards and "preaching" about the rule of law.

At the plenary debate — entitled "Integrity policy of the Commission, in particular the appointment of the Secretary-General of the European Commission" — the role of fending off attacks on the Commission fell to Günther Oettinger, the budget commissioner.

"All decisions including the decision on the new secretary-general were unanimously agreed by the College of Commissioners. If you look at the minutes, you can see that we acted in accordance with rules," he said. "As far as I'm concerned there is no doubt and indeed this has not been called into question: Martin Selmayr has all the necessary qualifications to take on the task of secretary-general of the Commission." But several MEPs disagreed.

Werner Langen, a German member of the EPP, said Selmayr lacked experience. "What Selmayr doesn't have is the experience in various departments, he was never head of department ... the whole procedure was anything but transparent, it reminds us of the 19th century secret bureaucracy."

In 't Veld said the debate was "not about staff policy ... It is about the total lack of political judgement of this Commission."

She said she had been left "speechless" at the idea of 28 commissioners, who voted unanimously in favor of Selmayr's appointment, though none of them knew about it beforehand, being "led by the nose by a civil servant." **Mrs in 't Veldt has made a complaint to the European Ombudsman.**

"If the commissioners are so easily intimidated by civil servants ... if they act like helpless children ... how can we expect them to stand up for the EU interest against [Donald] Trump for example in a trade war?" she added.

Visibly shaking with emotion, Pervenche Berès, a senior Socialist MEP, said Selmayr did not have the "legal qualities" required for the position. She asked why the position of Commission secretary-general had not been advertised beforehand, and why Clara Martinez, Juncker's current chief of Cabinet, had withdrawn from the race.

Bart Staes, a Belgian Green MEP, said the speed of the appointment was "a world record."

"Don't treat us like children," Staes said. "We don't expect high officials to act in this rushed fashion and in such a dishonest way."

Green German MEP Sven Giegold added: "I'm not going to question the candidate's competence ... You have to draw consequences from this scandal."

György Schöpflin, a Hungarian conservative, said: "It demonstrates that checks and balances are missing from the work of the Commission."

"If the European Commission is ready to ignore its own rules, why should anyone pay a blind bit of attention to what the EC says about flaws in the rule of law in member states and anywhere else for that matter?"

French Green MEP Pascal Durand told Oettinger that with Selmayr's appointment, he was "undermining" the whole European project.

The vast majority of MEPs who spoke were critical of the Commission, but some came to Selmayr's defense.

"Selmayr's nomination falls within the political competence of the European Commission president," said Esteban González Pons, a Spanish member of the EPP, adding that it would be unthinkable to see the Commission controlling appointments in the Parliament's administration.

Prior to the debate, MEPs voted unanimously to give the Budgetary Control Committee the task of investigating the procedure of Selmayr's appointment and on the basis of the committee's work, they agreed to vote on a resolution at a plenary later this year.

Members of the European Parliament threatened to topple the European Commission unless its infamous new secretary-general Martin Selmayr, promoted twice in a matter of minutes in controversial circumstances, steps down.

Leading MEPs, including Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt, evoked the spectre of the Santer Commission, which resigned en masse amidst corruption allegations in 1999 before it was forced out of office by the European Parliament.

"The Commission will have to choose what is more important, the career of Mr Selmayr or the credibility of the EU because the appointment of Mr Selmayr was a grave error and it must be corrected and that is a precondition for our continued support for this Commission," Sophie in 't Veld, a senior Dutch liberal MEP in Mr Verhofstadt's ALDE group said. "If the Juncker Commission is not careful, it will have the same fate as the Santer Commission," Mr Verhofstadt tweeted during the debate.

That appears unlikely at this stage but sacking Mr Juncker's commission would plunge the Brexit negotiations into chaos. Nigel Farage, the Ukip MEP and leader of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group, said: "Selmayr appointment is like a palace coup under cover of bureaucratic darkness." "The lack of transparency and chicanery in his elevation brings shame on the EU," he told The Telegraph. **"This is the first time Guy Verhofstadt and Nigel Farage have agreed on anything," a source from the pro-EU ALDE group said.**

Günther Oettinger, the European Commissioner for human resources begged for mercy for the man known as "the Berlaymonster", the Commission's headquarters is the Berlaymont building.

"We shouldn't turn Mr Selmayr into some kind of monster. Give him a chance, please give him a chance," he pleaded after a sustained grilling from furious MEPs, who accused him of treating them like children.

Others accused the commission of giving grist to the mill of Brexiteers and eurosceptics. **Jean-Claude Juncker was roundly criticised in the parliament for rejecting demands from MEPs to attend the debate personally.**

"You are taking us for idiots, you are lying to us!," Pascal Durand, a French Green MEP told the German commissioner. Mr Selmayr is widely suspected of being the source of damaging anti-British leaks about a private dinner between Theresa May and Mr Juncker to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, a charge he denies.

His chances of retaining a hugely influential role in the commission after Mr Juncker's term ends next year have been increased if he can survive the burgeoning scandal.

At this stage, it appears unlikely that the Juncker Commission will be forced out before 2019.

The governments of Hungary and the Netherlands have expressed concern over the promotion. Despite the best efforts of commission spinners, who insist EU rules were followed "religiously", the scandal has made headlines across Europe. "We are after Selmayr and we are gaining momentum," one parliament source told The Telegraph.

ALDE, The Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, led by Nigel Farage, the Tory-led European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group, the European Greens, the hard left GUE-NGL and the far-right Europe of Nations and Freedom group criticised the appointment.

Syed Kamall, Britain's most senior Conservative MEP and co-chairman of the ECR group, said: "The Commission should be looking at ways to make Brussels more transparent and democratic, yet this appointment resembles nothing more than jobs for the boys."

"Perhaps the most worrying thing about this appointment is that the Commission doesn't seem to even realise why this is a problem," he added.

But a number of deputies felt that the damage had already been done. "What you are doing for Europe is worse than all nationalists, Eurosceptics and extremists," said Pascal Durand (Greens). Others still – arguing the cause of Poland and Hungary, two eastern 'rogue' member states that have been on collision course with Brussels over law and judiciary – said the Commission no longer had the moral high ground to call anyone to account.

"If the Commission is ready to ignore its own rules, why should anyone care about what the Commission says about flaws to the rule of law anywhere?" asked György Schöpflin (EPP), while another MEP added the Commission should stop Article 7 procedures (against Poland) and "start it against yourself".

Article 7 was launched against Poland, because of concerns about the rule of law in the country and may ultimately result in sanctions, with a 20 March deadline for Warsaw to justify its actions.

SELMAYR UPDATE

Juncker: If Martin Selmayr goes, I go !!

'Furious' European Commission president tells party colleagues he would quit if Selmayr is ousted from secretary-general post. 3/22/18, 11:31 PM CET

Jean-Claude Juncker told senior colleagues in his party he would quit if his former chief of Cabinet Martin Selmayr is

forced out of his new job as the European Commission's most senior civil servant.

According to three EU officials who were briefed on the meeting, Juncker told European Parliament President Antonio Tajani and Joseph Daul, the president of the European People's Party (EPP), that he was disappointed with the lack of support Selmayr had received from the EPP group over his controversial promotion. The meeting happened on Thursday, on the fringes of the EPP's gathering ahead of the European Council summit in Brussels. Juncker, Selmayr and Tajani are all members of the EPP, the largest group in the European Parliament.

One senior EU official said that during the Thursday meeting Juncker told his colleagues that "if [Selmayr] goes, I go." A second EU official briefed on the meeting confirmed Juncker had threatened to quit if Selmayr is forced out.

"There wasn't a good atmosphere around Juncker on this," the official said, adding that the Commission president was "furious."

Another official said Daul complained during the meeting to Juncker that the Commission president had not informed his group in advance that Selmayr would be promoted.

A Commission spokesperson said the Commission "never comments on the content of internal meetings."

"The Commission will have to choose what is more important," said Dutch Liberal MEP Sophie In 't Veld in her speech, "the career of Mr. Selmayr or the credibility of the EU."



Dutch correspondent Marc Peeperkorn

At a later press conference Mr Juncker was answering questions from reporters when Marc Peeperkorn from Dutch paper **De Volkskrant** provoked roars of laughter from the assembled journalists.

He said: "I would just like to know is it correct that you consider to step down as Commission President if your secretary general is forced to leave?"

"And if so, don't you think this will increase in fact the appetite from the European Parliament to do it, as they get two for the price of one."

The European Union chief Mr Juncker delivered a brutally chilly response to the journalist. He said: **"Mr Selmayr will not step down because I'm the only one capable of asking him to step down. "The other question is irrelevant."**

The Commission was supposed to reply to questions put to them by the European Parliament by 24 March, principally to some 130 questions about the appointment tabled by Green MEP Sven Giegold, who earlier this week claimed the issue was

putting Europe's credibility at stake, said: "Juncker's threat to resign is a disrespect for the democratic investigation of the Parliament.

"Instead of adding more fuel to the flames with his threats, Juncker should contribute to the inquiry. "It is grotesque that the EU Commission President makes his fate conditional on the career of an EU official. "Juncker is at the service of European citizens, not of Martin Selmayr."

Finally at 3 am Sunday 25 March the Commission replied – a full month after the appointment - with an 80 page document justifying in detail the appointment of Martin Selmayr. Let's reiterate – a document of 80 pages of justification!

"The decision was taken by the college of Commissioners unanimously, in full compliance with the staff regulations and the rules of procedure of the commission," the EU executive said in a written response to a list of 134 questions posed by MEPs. MEP Ingeborg Gräßle (EPP, Germany), the chair of the European Parliament's Budget Control Committee, the body which will debate on Selmayr's appointment on Tuesday (27 March), reacted against what she called "paternalistic interference".

"We already knew your opinion. Our duty is to come to an own assessment", she twee

It said that technically Selmayr had not been promoted, as he remains on the same civil service grade as before, and that he had taken a pay cut in switching jobs.

On 19 April in Strasbourg, MEPs will vote on a resolution on the Selmayr case that has the potential to put down the entire Commission. Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) tweeted that it would be better if Selmayr resigns.

"In a pre-election year like the current one, neglecting to clear up such a massive scandal may prove fatal not only for the sitting Commission but also for electoral turnout and choices in 2019," the research and campaign group wrote.

Spiegel Online quoted budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger having said that "without Selmayr, Juncker is helpless".

The issue continues to roil around the European Parliament, it will be fascinating to see how it all turns out. Somehow one suspects Juncker and Selmayr will both hang onto power.

Both **Politico** and particularly **Euractiv** have been scorching in their criticisms of Oettinger's stonewalling of the principal question – that Juncker (and naturally Selmayr!) knew in 2015 that Alexander Italianer, would be retiring early, but told no one, thus preventing anyone else from presenting themselves as candidates, and allowing them to organise the ""stitch up"".

Despite all the EU Parliament's objections, it looks like Business as usual – Nothing to see here! Just the stink of rancid meat curdling ever ever more round the machinations of the EU Commission.

GERMANS HOLD EU KEY POSTS

After 21 Feb. (Selmayr's appointment!), Germany's conquest of EU's key posts significantly continued. German nationals not only pull the strings in the Commission and the Parliament, but they also chair key financial institutions: the European Stability Mechanism, the Single Resolution Board and the European Investment Bank.

The move means Germans will hold the secretary-general position in three EU institutions. Klaus Welle holds the st at the European Parliament while veteran diplomat Helga Schmid has the equivalent position at the European External Action Service.

Other German nationals who hold key positions in the EU include Werner Hoyer, the president of the European Investment Bank.

And the top prize is also within reach. Bundesbank chief Jens Weidmann is clearly leading the race to take over from current ECB boss Mario Draghi in November next year, as EPC's Robin Huguenot-Noël notes.

Juncker said that he is "a bit fed up" of discussing national flags inside the institution he leads. Selmayr is not a German "undercover agent", according to Günther (German Budget Commissioner!) Oettinger, but quite the opposite.

But Selmayr was instrumental in securing a few key points for his motherland. Despite the two energy Commissioners' concerns about Nord Stream 2, the executive did not block the Russian pipeline and passed the 'hot potato' to the member states.

Juncker criticised the "simplistic" manner of reducing EU posts to nationalities. But it is obvious that the power quota at the EU's helm is a top priority in member states. Especially now, as capitals are starting to jockey and exchange favours behind the scenes ahead of the big reshuffle.

Chancellor Merkel remarking on the number of posts occupied by Germans said "it is all just relative!" Yes indeed, coming from her, no surprise.



IRISH GRAND SLAM, ENGLISH FATIGUE & FRENCH NEAR MISSES

By SIMON EVELEIGH

The 6 Nations reached its conclusion with Ireland beating England at Twickenham to claim only the third Grand Slam in their history. There is no question that this accolade was well-deserved and Ireland are currently the best team in the northern hemisphere. They are on a 12 match winning run and in the last 18 months they have beaten every one of the teams ranked in the top 11, including that famous victory over The All Blacks in Chicago, the first ever for an Irish team.

Irish fans will be hoping that this team, a mix of seasoned internationals and young talented players, will go from strength to strength in the next year and a half and will be able to launch a serious bid for the world title in Japan in 2019. Ireland have had very good teams in the past but have failed at every single World Cup and it is about time that they stepped up to the mark at the highest level, being the only one of the major nations to have never reached a World Cup semi-final.

That final showdown at Twickenham was meant to be a straight shoot-out between Ireland and England to decide who is the best team in Europe. However, England had a hugely disappointing tournament and ended up in fifth place after losing their last three games. The inquest into their lacklustre performances has thrown up post-Lions tour fatigue and the workload imposed by the Premiership clubs as the main reasons (excuses,), but there

has also been some questioning of Eddie Jones' tactics. Having hardly put a foot wrong for his first two years in office, Jones has quite a lot of credit in the bank, but some of his selections in the second half of the tournament caused a bit of head scratching. It is true that England were hampered by injuries to important members of the team and the lack of central contracts means that the players do play far more rugby than their Irish counterparts, for example. English fans will be pleased that this blip has happened now, far enough out from the World Cup for things to be put right, provided that they are corrected. The three match series in South Africa in June will tell us whether Jones and his team have recovered their mojo or if there is a more deep-rooted problem.

Wales and Scotland both won three matches and will take positives from their campaign, although the Scots will be very disappointed with the way they were outclassed in both Cardiff and Dublin and they also very nearly lost in Rome on the final weekend. The Welsh were involved in probably the best match of the lot, when they ran Ireland very close in Dublin and will rue missed opportunities at Twickenham, but they too were a little fortunate to win their last match at home to France.

So what of the French?

They lost to Ireland with the last kick of the game, missed a simple penalty which would have seen them come out on top against Wales and beat England. However, they did their level best to hand an undeserved victory to Eddie Jones' team at the death and were the only team not to take a bonus point against the Italians.



We can certainly say that France are now harder to beat than they have been in the recent past and their defence was excellent, conceding only 6 tries, but their attack was pretty blunt, scoring fewer tries than anyone else (only 8 in 5 matches). New coach Jacques Brunel will point to the limited time he had to prepare for the 6 Nations and will also argue, with a certain amount of legitimacy, that stopping the opposition scoring is a step in the right direction and that with more time he will be able to tack a cutting attacking edge to the strong defence. The only problem for him is that his team's next three matches are in New Zealand! The two stand out performers for France both wear Toulon colours. Guilhem Guirado has led from the front for the last couple of seasons and even in the mediocrity that has so often been on show from France, he has never been anything less than excellent, so it is no real surprise that he is one of the two players I mention. The fact that the other is Mathieu Bastareaud is a little more surprising. He was outstanding defensively and has also added more subtlety to his attacking game in the last year or two.

One Toulon player who will not remember this year's 6 Nations quite so fondly is François Trinh Duc. In Cardiff he made more mistakes in one game than most players would in a whole tournament; flapping at a bouncing ball to allow Wales to score a soft try, kicking an attacking penalty dead rather than into touch, giving one of the more ridiculous forward passes you will see at international level and missing a fairly simple penalty to give France the lead with only minutes remaining. These three have now returned to their club where they hope to help Toulon in their bid for both domestic and European honours in the last two months of the season and things got off to a perfect start in their first weekend back when Toulon thrashed Clermont 49-0.

That match saw Chris Ashton score his 21st try of the season, equalling the league record, and with at least four matches to play, it is highly likely that Ashton will beat that record. Ashton is not to everyone's taste but there can be no denying that he has a nose for the try line and he has been successful wherever he has played.

The Clermont win was much needed, following a disappointing defeat at Oyonnax. After that game, president Mourad Boudjellal told team manager Tom Whitford to cancel the return flight and arrange for a train or bus to get them home. The players refused and Boudjellal vented his anger on Whitford.

Once things had calmed down, Boudjellal explained that he wanted to make a point about how modern players are spoiled and that he just wanted them to be aware of the privileged position they hold. Whatever, the truth behind this bizarre episode, Boudjellal will feel vindicated after the one sided match against Clermont.

Over the Easter weekend the quarter-finals of the European Cup take place and few will give Toulon much hope, as they face the daunting prospect of a trip to Ireland to play Munster. With their away form being so poor this season, it would come as a huge surprise should Toulon win in Limerick. By the time you read this, you will know if that surprise has come to pass or if the form book has been respected.

Should Toulon have pulled off a shock, the semi-final on the weekend of 21st/22nd April will probably be played at Marseille, against the winner of the all French tie between Clermont and Racing.

As far as the Top 14 is concerned, Toulon have their destiny in their own hands. With four games to go and a six point lead over seventh-placed Lyon, they are likely to finish in the top six, which means qualification for the end of season play offs, but they still have their work cut out if they want to finish in the top two, who go straight to the semi-finals.

Currently they are fourth, three points behind Racing, who are second, who they play away from home on 8th April.

The following weekend, Saturday 14th April, Toulon play host to league leaders Montpellier. That match will be at Marseille's Stade Velodrome, kick off 2.45pm and tickets are still available.

Win those two matches and Toulon will be in a very strong position, but lose them both and they could be sweating on other results when they come to play their last two fix

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