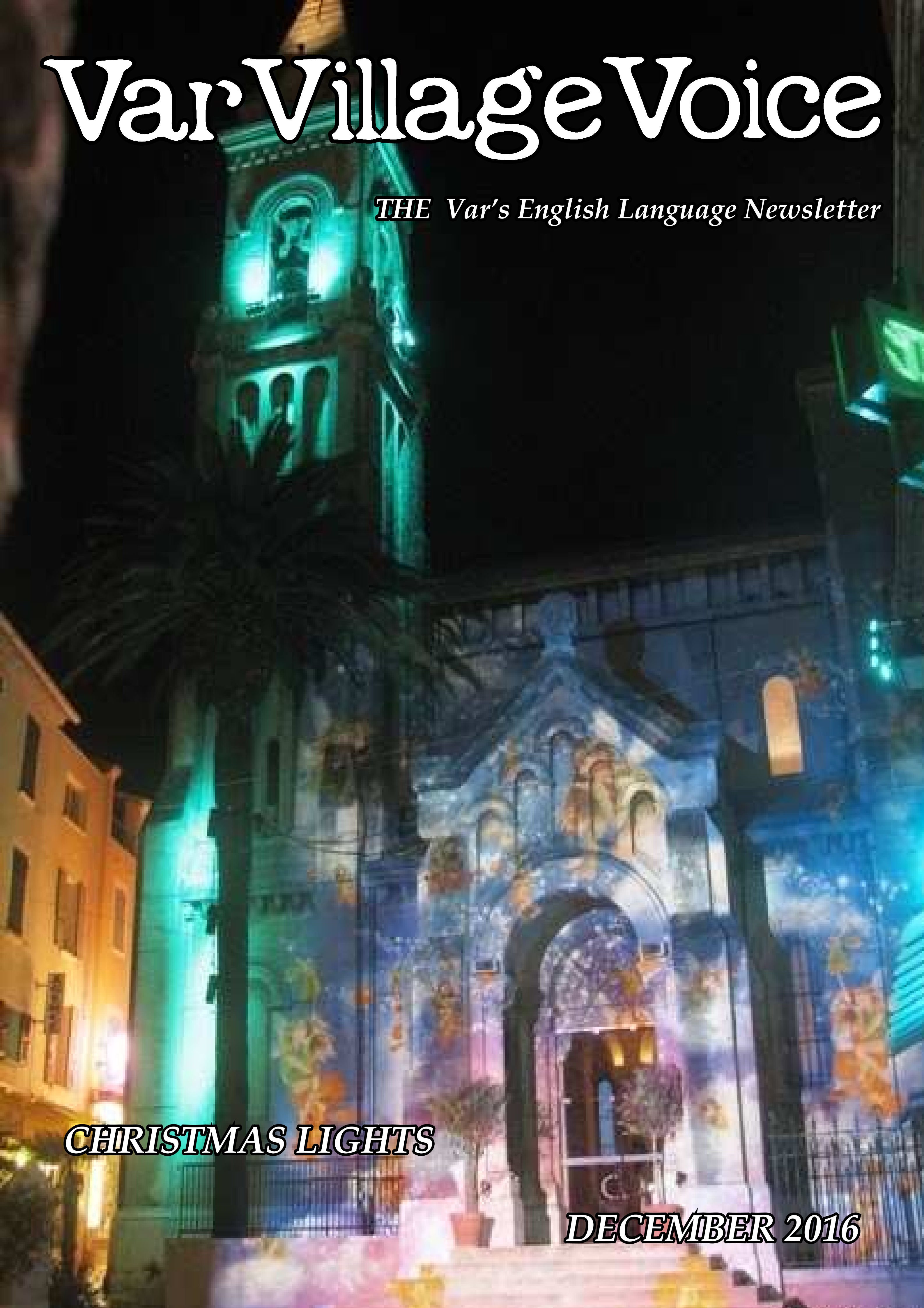
# Var Village Voice

*THE Var's English Language Newsletter*

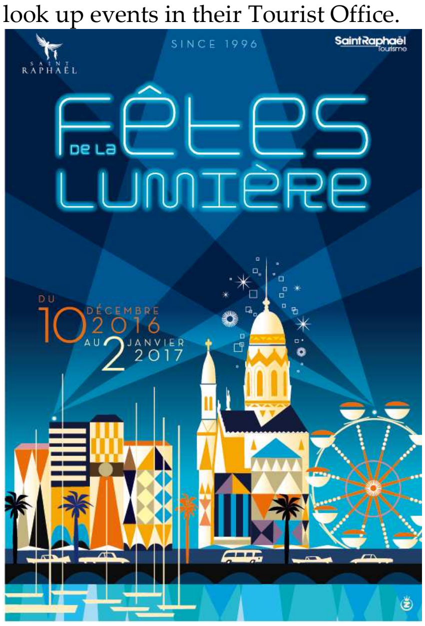


***CHRISTMAS LIGHTS***

***DECEMBER 2016***

## CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

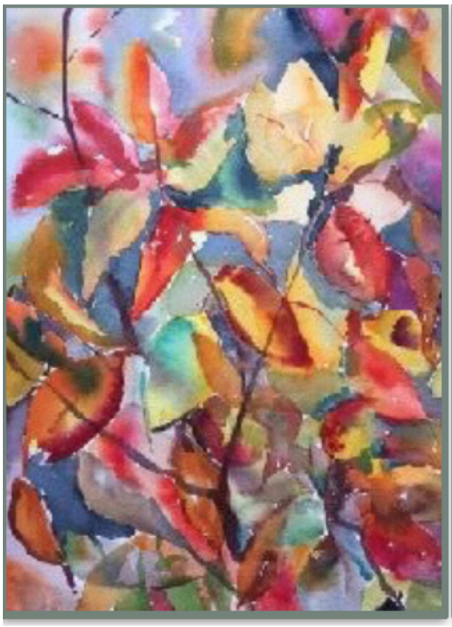
Loads of magical Christmas Lights, Illuminations, skating rinks, and Father Christmas, all over the Var.
The illuminations start 2 December in St. Tropez, with the lovely skating rink in Place des Lices, lots of entertainment down there, and Father Christmas arrives by boat on the 24 December, I mean, how else.   Toulon also will be celebrating, just look up events in their Tourist Office.




## ST. RAPHAEL – FETES DE LA LUMIERE 10 DECEMBER - 2 JANUARY

All sorts of wonderful entertainments, including some very good free concerts, all around the St. Raphael area, lights, entertainments for children, a train ride, you name it.
There are Christmas Fairs all over, Santons, all the works of the traditional Provencal Christmas, just enjoy, and look around.

**http://www.visitvar.fr/noel-en-provence**



## ART SALE & EXHIBITION
### STARTING FRIDAY 2 DECEMBER
### ATELIER D'ART
### 1142 Route des Miquelets 83510 Lorgues

- Just below St. Antonin Village

After a very jolly and successful sale of recent art works, the weekend of 26 November, Artist Tessa Baker is extending the show and sale into the weekend of December 2nd and onwards. The Sale show will be enlivened by Wine and Canapes, and hours are as follows: **Opening Friday December 10h00 to 17h00  Sunday: all afternoon, 14h00 to 17h00  All week from Monday 5 to Friday 9 10h00 to 17h00, except Thursday 14h00 to 17h00 only.   Monday 12 – Wednesday 14 10h00 to 17h00.**
So do come along see the latest, meet up with your friends, take the chance to buy some nice Christmas presents, chat and enjoy a Pre Christmas get together.
You can get in touch with Tessa at 06 11 25 29 72  and on: website: **tessabakerart.com**
Next year she will be starting off her teaching  painting classes season with a month in Antigua, running from February to March 2017, coming home to teach classes, painting in Provence April to May, and then later on Cookery combined with Painting classes May to June.
So lucky people who can get away to the Caribbean to escape winter here,  or who would like to spend time with Tessa here in Provence, do get in touch and book your places


## FILMS IN VO – LORGUES

***Sunday 04 December : 18h 00 Snowden***
**SNOWDEN**
The NSA's illegal surveillance techniques are leaked to the public by one of the agency's employees, Edward Snowden, in the form of thousands of classified documents distributed to the press.
**Director:** Oliver Stone
**Writers:**Kieran Fitzge-rald (screenplay), Oliver Stone (screenplay)
**Stars:**Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Shailene Woo-dley, Melissa Leo
***Sunday 11 December: 18h 00 The Girl one The Train***
**The Girl one The Train**
A divorcee becomes entangled in a missing per-sons investigation that promises to send shockwa-ves throughout her life.
**Director:** Tate Taylor
**Writers:**Erin Cressida Wilson (screenplay), Paula Hawkins (based on the novel by)
**Stars:**Emily Blunt, Haley Bennett, Rebecca Ferguson
***Wednesday 14 December: 19h 00 Royal Opéra  BALLET - Anastasia***
**ANASTASIA**
Choreography: Kenneth McMillian.
Events overtake the young Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov and her family: World War I is declared, and then the Russian Revolution brings their privileged lives to an end.

A woman who believes herself to be Anastasia, sole survivor from the massacre of the Romanovs, is incarcerated in an asylum. Memory and fantasy intermingle; she recalls her rescue, the death of her husband, the disappea-rance of her child and her attempted suicide. But, despite her nightmares, her faith in her own identity cannot be shaken.
The performance lasts about 3 hours 30 minutes, including one interval.
For the first screening of Royal Opera playing in Lorgues, note that you are more than welcome to bring some food/snack to share with everyone. Cinébleu will offer a glass of wine at the inter-mission. Please come and tell everyone who wants to share this moment of Art. Entry fee : 9 Euros per person

***Sunday 18 December: 18 h 00 Allied***

**ALLIED**

In 1942, an intelligence officer in North Africa encounters a female French Resis-tance fighter on a deadly mission behind enemy lines. When they reunite in Lon-don, their relationship is tested by the pressures of war.

**Director:**Robert Zemeckis
**Writer:**Steven Knight
**Stars:** Brad Pitt, Vincent Ebrahim, Xavier De Guillebon

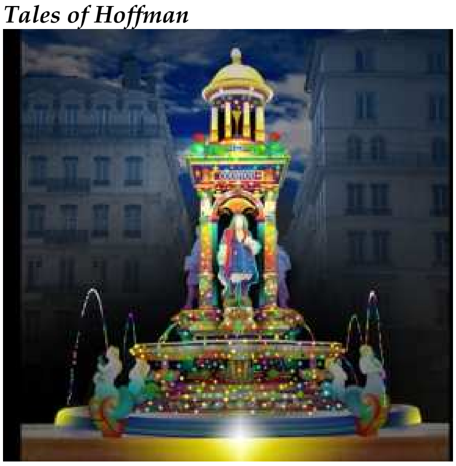
***Wednesday 21 December: 18 h 00***
***Fantastic Beast And Where to Find Them***

**FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM**

The adventures of writer Newt Scamander in New York's secret community of witches and wizards seventy years before Harry Potter reads his book in school.

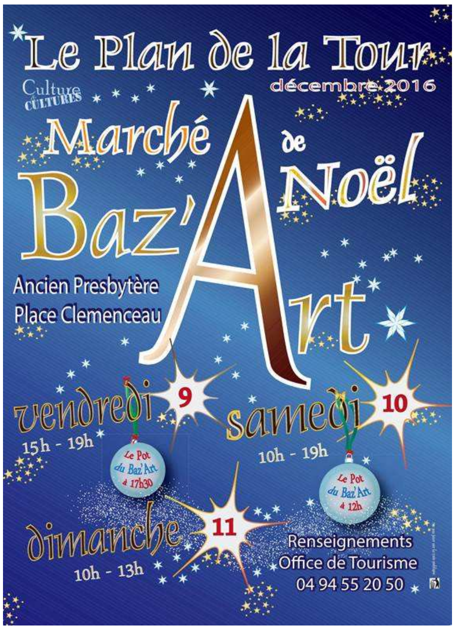
**Director:** David Yates
**Writer:** J.K. Rowling
**Stars:** Eddie Redmayne, Katherine Waters-ton, Alison Sudol

***Wednesday 28 December 19h00***
***Opera from Covent Garden Offenbach's Tales of Hoffman***



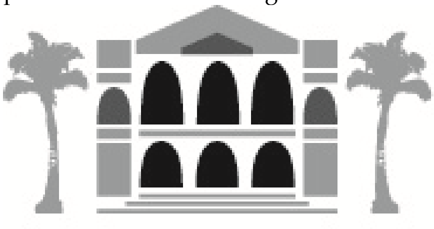
## FETES DES LUMIERES – LYON - 8 – 10 December

For those who want a rather special event, why not take a trip to Lyon for their spectacular Fetes des Lumieres, where whole areas of Lyon are illuminated in spectacular fashion. Below, a light exhibition featuring coi carp.
This year the show will not be as extensive as before, last year it was cancelled due to security reasons, and this year is limited for the same reason, but still quite magical.
**http://www.fetedeslumieres.lyon.fr/**




## PLAN DE LA TOUR – MARCHE BAZÁRT 9 -11 December

The Christmas Baz'Art starts on the afternoon of Friday 9th December, is open all day on Saturday 10th, and closes at lunchtime on Sunday 11th. Once again it will be held at the Ancien Presbytère, close to the village church. There will be charity cards, Christmas crackers, shortbread and other English goodies for sale. Exhibitors are selling Christmas gifts, decorations, and the like, the emphasis being on handmade and artisanal items. There is a lovely Christmassy atmosphere in this venue, and drinks will be offered on Friday evening at 17h30 and on Saturday at 12 noon. On the evening of Saturday 10th there's a concert in the Foyer des Campagnes, Seats cost 10€ and may be purchased on the evening.



## OPERA DE TOULON

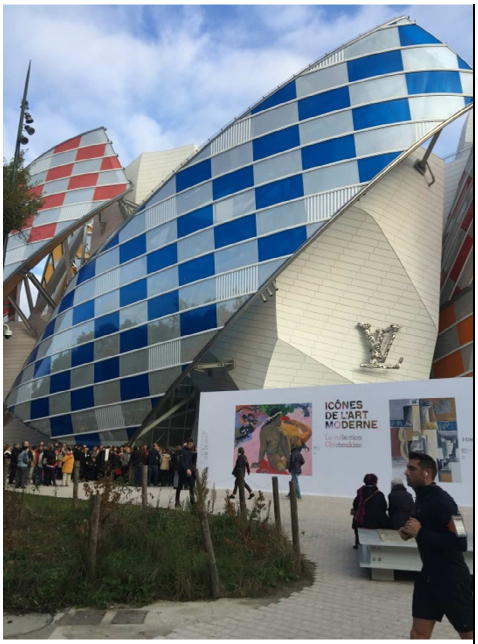
## MOZART'S - LES NOCES DE FIGARO -

### Tuesday 27 December, Thursday 29 December & Saturday 31 December 20h.

What better to cheer up New Year, than a superb Mozartian romp, intrigue with the Count Almaviva, his Countess, his rogue Valet Figaro and fiancee Susanna.
Tickets: 04 94 92 70 78 &
www.operadetoulon.fr

## PRIME MINISTER MAY!

May Picks up award as the Spectator Parliamentarian of the Year. She very craftily donned a High Viz jacket and Hard hat to collect the award which was being handed over by George Osborne, saying we're all Builders Now!
Indeed, she has been labelled Killer Queen, and hopefully will be just that in negotiating an exit from the ever more troubled EU




## CHANGING TIMES
## By TRENCHERMAN

However often I do it, the excitement of going to Paris never recedes. I cannot count the number of times, but for a number of years it was weekly, and yet the sense of anticipation has never diminished.

And so it was last month as I pointed my car north and cruised up the auto route, direction Paris.

It is mildly annoying that when I lived in London I could, and did, drive to Paris in half of the time it takes me now, but such is the price one pays for living down here.

I always have some business to attend to in Paris and often arrive, do what I need to do and then drive on to London or perhaps Brussels. By necessity I have turned into a van driver and keen to slip out of this role I had decided that on this trip I would indulge in some tourism and relax a little.

Happily there was an exhibition just opening at the amazing Fondation Louis Vuitton in the Bois de Boulogne. This Frank Gehry designed building is worth a view in itself, but this exhibition was of art on loan from the great Russian galleries; art that had been produced in Paris and shipped to Moscow by a rich merchant called Schuhkin, who in the early 1900's befriended Matisse and Picasso and all their contemporaries and shrewdly bought their art before it was appreciated in Paris.

He hung it all in his huge Moscow mansion and held soirées to show it off to a sceptical audience of other collectors and artists; just as they were all getting excited about it there was some altercation and the incoming government persuaded Schuhkin to donate his collection to the state, and on his doctors orders, he did.

So now spread amongst the great galleries of Russia is a collection of work rarely seen in the West, and here it was (and still is) hanging in the newest and most spectacular gallery in Paris.

I had booked in advance, a good idea if you don't want to queue for ages, and on a sunny day we were ushered in and roamed, open mouthed at not just the quality of paintings, some of which I knew, but also at the sheer quantity.
We were smothered in amazement and overwhelmed by the experience.
Sometimes it feels good to leave a gallery shedding the weight of culture and this was one such occasion.

As this was a treat weekend I had tried to book a table at a restaurant called Le Pré Catalan, a legendary three star establishment, but unaccountably they were closed that week!

So I searched for another in the Bois.

La Grande Cascade is a magnificent pavilion within a few metres of the actual waterfall it is named after, and following a stroll to get there from the museum, Google maps told me it was just around the corner, which it was, 3 kilometres around the corner and on a warm day it was a long day's march into what I hoped was the promised land.

The setting is wonderful, the greeting is all style, our table for two gave out through the huge bay windows onto a verdant landscape of the wonderful arboretum that is the Bois.

The glass of champagne met a thirst, which was rising like the sun from deep within my person, even she who does not perspire was grateful for the relief.

The menu promised much and even the wine list was enticing, if a little expensive.

I chose a 'tart of cèpes' as an entrée and lamb as my main course, she who is never hungry chose a ''loup de mer' as her main course and we chose a Croize Hermitage to wash it down.

Details attended to we glanced around at our fellow diners and all had one thing in common, age, great age. Mainly they were grandes dames attended by younger persons, who were certainly not paying the bill.

I had the feeling that these ladies of a certain age were first brought here by their grand parents a very long time ago, then they would have arrived in a caleche and swept up the crescent drive to be fussed over by waiting staff, Gigi would have felt at home.

A series of delicious amuses bouches arrived, fresh and delicate and promising a wonderful experience.

The food, which arrived, after an elegant pause, demonstrated all the skill of the Chef.

The cèpes were overcooked and had been precooked and warmed up to be layered onto a short biscuit with little taste, just as well for if it had any it would have overwhelmed the mushrooms which had none.

The lamb arrived perfectly pink but limp and almost certainly cooked in a water bath, it too was thin on flavour. The wine, whilst expensive was a true disappointment. She who had really enjoyed the walk, approved of her fish but only just.

What was on display was the chef's skill at producing a significant kitchen margin.

Perhaps I was not in the right mood; or the chef had argued with his wife or the planets were not lined up, but I was deeply disappointed that the old style of this old style petit palais no longer worked.

The following day after a morning of collecting paintings from various auction houses, we went to Chez Georges for lunch, a real old style bistro, which was truly delicious, as always, and well within the budget. 1 Rue du Mail in the 2nd.

Now I am about to drive off to Venice for a long weekend; fresh fish from the lagoon and the wines of the Veneto.
Pip.. Pip

## OPERA NEWS
## By ROBERT TURNBULL

Though Alban Berg's Lulu is cited as one of the greatest opera is the 20th century, it was actually unfinished at the composer's untimely death in 1935. Berg managed to complete the 'short score', but left chunks of the third act including the lengthy Paris scene without orchestration, so a two-act version of the opera was the only one around for many years. After Berg's widow's death in 1976, the Austrian composer Friedrich Cehra was commissioned to complete the final act, and the world premiere of this revision was given at the Palais Garnier in Paris in 1979 with the late Patrice Chereau directing and Pierre Boulez in the pit. It was a total triumph, especially as the Paris Opera had managed to secure the vividly dramatic Greek-American soprano Teresa Stratas in the title role. Virtually every opera house now performs this three-act version. But for all its glory, Lulu is a difficult opera to bring off partly as so much of its power depends on the performance of the protagonist. The casting presents huge problems for an opera house as the opera requires the kind of acting skills that many singers don't really possess or find hard to manage as they negotiate the notes of this very demanding score.

At best, the opera mixes a Wagnerian sense of drama and musical organization with elements of Viennese social satire, or what the Germans called neue sachligkeit. This referred to the 'new objectivity' that looked squarely at society's problems and refused to idealize or glamorize the world. As the basis of the opera Berg fuses two neue sachligkeit plays by the German dramatist Frank Wedekind. Earth Spirit and Pandora's Box both depicted a society driven by lust and greed and were both considered depraved and shocking. The latter was later filmed by the German director GW Pabst with the American silent film star Louise Brooks as Lulu. The plays depict the characters rather starkly, whereas Berg's opera is generally more forgiving, as well as sensual and sentimental in tone.

Lulu is a gambler, prostitute, murderer, thief and general exploiter, not someone you would introduce to your grandmother; but such is her allure and beauty that she draws everyone into her web and collects an entourage of 'victims' that includes a neurotic painter, a rich businessman, a pubescent boy, an acrobat, an old lecherous man and a lesbian countess. They follow her from place to place, making personal sacrifices to win her attentions until each comes to a sticky demise. The final scene takes place in Victorian London where both the heroine and the lesbian countess Geschwitz are murdered by Jack the Ripper.

Berg deliberately infuses the personality of Lulu with ambiguity while the music makes it clear he views her with compassion. However, what is she? A femme fatale and cynical manipulator of men, or, as a number of modern interpretations would have it, a victim of men's desire to control and appropriate women for their selfish and perverted ends? Some singers are directed to try to embody both, or at least make her tantalizingly inscrutability, but that's not easy to convey.

English National Opera's new production of the three act version was designed by the famous South African visual artist William Kentridge and conducted by one of Britain's top maestros, Mark Wigglesworth. Sabine Theunissen's set consists of constantly changing video projections of black ink drawings which illustrate the action as the opera proceeds. However, the imagery is certainly Kentridge's.

Musically the orchestra plays with great sensuality, but the overall effect is underwhelming and lacks emotional punch. By the time we have Lulu's final death scream on the rain-drenched streets of Whitechapel and the lesbian Countess Geschwitz's final eulogy to her dead lover we should be shattered, not just intrigued.

But for this to happen the protagonist needs to be convincing and this is where this production falls down. Brenda Rae in the central role has a light coloratura voice of considerable charm. She is coquettish, relentlessly busy and in general rather superficial, making it hard for us to understand quite why her entourage of demi-monde archetypes should be so hopelessly besotted by her. Nonetheless there was enough to enjoy in this production, with a cast that included the excellent James Morris as Dr Schon, Lulu's rich businessman lover who returns as Jack the Ripper and Nicky Spence who has the perfect ringing tenor voice to sing Dr Schon's son Alwa. Last but not least is the great British mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly who depicts Geschwitz as the perfect jazz age 1920s lesbian.

## ARE WE WATCHING THE GRADUAL DISINTEGRATION OF THE EU?

An exaggeration, perhaps, but as events roll on, as per this past week, perhaps now not an exaggeration at all.

I have been reading, researching articles from all over the spectrum, most of them pretty gloomy, and just nobody wants to predict what will happen vis a vis the Italian Referendum happening this Sunday 4 December. To say that all the commentators are jittery, whether political, financial, you name it, is to put it mildly. Believe me, they are all holding their breath, if Italy votes NO, which is what all polls are predicting, apart from the possibility of total political instability, will it provide the tip over point for the Italian banking system, which is on the fringe of bankruptcy

To add to all the many, many comments now coming out of the EU is yet another very critical one from an ex President, Romano Prodi, who led the Commission between 1999 and 2004 and oversaw the EU nearly double in size.He claims Brussels' glory days are over as Germany and France and other member states snatch power from the European Commission.

The 77-year-old told Politico the organisation has morphed from a "union of minorities" to a "coalition of states" which has changed how the EU works and plans for its future.

As he put it ""**THE European Commission is over as Germany dominates Brussels!"**

Actually we had rather noticed this, on the whole when Chancellor Merkel says "Jump'', J. C. Juncker, says "How High"! A previous EU Euro founder, expert, Dr. Ottmar Issing, declared last month, the euro would collapse, echoing the statements of numerous financial experts who for some time have been saying relative to the Euro, one size does not fit all.   Which is totally born out by the level of unemployment, and the stagnating economies of the southern member nations, for example have a look at the item concerning the French car industry. And what has brought this all into high relief is not so much the Brexit vote, but which has exposed lots of the cracks and fissures that now riddle the EU, the Commission and its member countries, but the Migrant Mess, now affecting all EU countries one way or the other, andw crippling the continent.   But also the impending Italian Referendum this week, which may, now very likely,  in all possbilities, totally upset the EU apple cart.   Read on.

## BREAKING NEWS!
## IS JUNCKER ON THE WAY OUT?

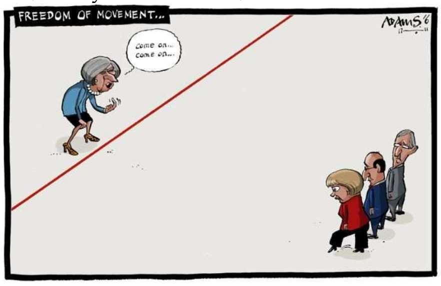
**Nov 24 -Martin Schultz  (EU Parliament President and close ally of J. C. Juncker!) resigns to resume political career in Germany – possibly to challenge Chancellor Merkel who has just announced decision to run for 4th term!. And EU might be set for a re-set – angry mood indicates less and less confidence in J. C Juncker – will he get kicked out?**

“Kicking out Juncker would be the first thing to do if someone wanted to make the EU a better place,” a well-informed institutional source told EurActiv, asking not to be named. According to the source, Merkel, whose opinion of Juncker’s performance has significantly deteriorated, would like to see him replaced, giving the chance for a ‘reset’ of the EU.

“The EU needs a new start and Schulz’s departure is very good news,” the source said. Juncker was already under pressure to resign over the Brexit vote, and has been criticised by the Visegrád countries for his handling of the refugee crisis.


*“Two Englishmen in Whitehall. One says ‘Which way to Brexit?’ The other one replies ‘I wouldn’t start from here’”*

Meantime Prime Minister May continues her progress round the Continent, pursuing her own agenda, and good on her, if anyone can do it, she can.




J. C. Juncker, and other EU Commission members, all rush around with fingers in their ears, trying to block out the increasing clamour of dissent rising from EU members, as they try to cope with this crisis.  If only J. C. Juncker had to cope with it on his own real doorstep in Brussels, he would perhaps not be so utterly intransigent and complacent.

> “”If you want to fight extremism, solve the problem.  **But it is not happening for the same reason it did not happen in revolutionary France.** The gatekeepers of western capitalism, like the Bourbons before them, have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing!””

And it is the utter intransigence, arrogance and blockheadedness of the likes of Juncker, which is driving EU voters, particularly those in Italyand Holland, into the arms of far right movements.

And now the chickens are coming home to roost and how. Chancellor Merkel, a good Chancellor, but she it was who opened the floodgates to the EU, saying ”We can do it!”  Oh yes!   And a couple of million migrants, not just refugees fleeing war torn zones, but in the main economic migrants, from Africa, Somali, Sudan, Eritrea, etc, flooded into the EU by any means possible.


Now, over a year later, Chancellor Merkel, having announced that she will stand for a fourth term, realises she is facing political annilhilation, and what do you know, she does a total about face, first of all touring African countries, like Burandi, Nigeria, etc, promising all sorts of goodies, if they will keep their nationals from crossing to Europe, then announces that she/they/who? -will turn back the boats from leaving North Africa for Italy, but without any precision as to how this will be accomplished, stating vaguely that would-be migrants would be taken back to (refugee) centres in North Africa

Now, blow me down, she has just announced that Germany will deport over 100,000 migrants over the next year.

> **”It is often assumed, wrongly, that in uncertain times, voters will cling to familiar leaders - and Mrs Merkel evidently believes that will be their reaction next autumn when she hopes to lead her CDU to the most seats in the Bundestag. But as the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit vote have shown, nothing is guaranteed. Like Mrs Thatcher, she may yet find she is not invulnerable.”**

Her extraordinary change of heart has been prompted largely by a series of catastrophic local election results for her ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, which was trounced by the populist Alternative fur Deutschland in both her home state and the capital Berlin.

The party’s slumping poll ratings have sparked alarm amongst her allies in both the CDU and its coalition partner, the Christian Social Union (CSU), with talk that senior officials would try to oust her. But instead Mrs Merkel last week announced her intention to stand for a fourth term as leader of Germany, and now she is striking an increasingly anti-immigrant tone as she attempts to restore her battered reputation ahead of next autumn’s election.

For me what added insult to injury was to see Chancellor Merkel, yet again posing for yet another incredibly hubristic Photo Ops with retiring president O’Bama, as in this photo.

What is it about politicians that they seem to possess no sense of the ridiculous.

Here she is, posing with O'Bama, apparently as "Beacons of the Free World"! for a tete a tete dinner at the lush, famed luxury Adlon Hotel in Berlin

Can you imagine the conversation:

OB: By the way Angela, it would be a really good idea if Germany was to shell out what it owed NATO, and also prompt other EU countries to pay up what they owe. After all defence does not come free, and the Donald! will be breathing down your neck tomorrow, not me .

AM: Well, I will look into it, humph.

OB: And what about those migrants, all those drownings, it's not really nice, is it?

AM: Well, we are looking at it.

OR – maybe the conversation went more like, "Pass the butter, please!"!

## THE MIGRANT DISASTER

And one can only describe what has been going on as a total disaster. How many have drowned in the Mediterranean.

Poland, a country of 39mn people, has not found room for one refugee

While the relocation requirement is legally binding on EU member states, some countries are flouting EU decision-making rules and shirking their responsibilities.

Some have contributed fairly but others, it would seem, are either actively bucking the programme or passively offering little or nothing in the hope the issue will to go away or that the asylum seekers will end up elsewhere.

Despite an European Commission press statement touting "significant progress" in relocating asylum seekers from Italy and Greece, prime minister Robert Fico of Slovakia said just a few days ago that the idea of migration quotas was "politically finished". Indeed, a handful of EU states have aggressively attacked the relocation scheme and the very concept of sharing responsibility. Last December, Slovakia, which currently holds the EU presidency, and Hungary filed a legal action against the relocation scheme with the EU Court of Justice.

In Hungary, the referendum against the quota has opened the way for a state-sponsored xenophobic anti-migrant campaign. Denmark and the UK took the damaging decision on day one to opt out, while Sweden has successfully sought a one-year delay. Austria, Hungary and Poland have flatly refused to take anyone. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have hardly done better, each taking a dozen or fewer people.

The Visegrad group - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia - joined by Austria, has proposed no humane alternative and their attacks on the relocation scheme send the grim message to stranded people that their suffering is not a matter of concern. As for relocating asylum seekers, a disappointingly small group of countries has led by example.

**French example**

France has relocated the largest number - 1,987 - over a third of the total. Finland, Portugal, the Netherlands and even Malta, Cyprus, and Luxembourg, the EU's smallest countries, have made progress toward fulfilling their commitments.

Germany, on the other hand, hailed a year ago for welcoming refugees, has been stalling for months. There have been recent positive signs, with over 150 people relocated in just a few weeks. Belgium and Spain, also at the back of the pack, should follow suit.

Given the human-made tragedy for the over 60,000 asylum seekers stranded in Greece, by that measure too the plan has failed.

Many have been stuck for months in filthy, unsafe camps and with few basic services except for those provided by volunteers. Overcrowding, unacceptable living conditions, lack of protection for women and children, and lack of space in shelters for unaccompanied children are common in Greece and in Italy.

Authorities in both countries are struggling to cope with an increasing number of asylum applications.

As if things weren't bad enough, many asylum seekers are not even eligible for relocation. Relocation under the plan is open only to nationals of countries whose EU-wide protection rate exceeds 75 percent, based on data updated quarterly.

At the start, Eritrean, Iraqi and Syrian nationals could apply, along with people from a few surprising places like Costa Rica and St Vincent and the Grenadines. But Afghans - one-fourth of those stranded in Greece - were never included. Since June, Iraqis have been ineligible.

In a resolution adopted by a large margin on 15 September, European lawmakers rightly called on the European Council to bring Afghans and Iraqis into the relocation scheme, and urged countries to make at least one-third of their relocation places available by the end of the year.

**Lone children**

Human Rights Watch believes the EU should consider making unaccompanied children eligible regardless of nationality. This is an opportunity for the commission to do the right thing: extend the scope of vulnerable asylum seekers eligible for relocation and trigger infringement procedures to hold accountable countries that ignore their obligations.

Member states whose leaders believe in a common European response to the refugee crisis should step up their contribution and oppose the Visegrad group's obstructionism.

This would bring back some meaningful hope for the tens of thousands of asylum seekers stuck in Greece and Italy.

*Philippe Dam is advocacy director for Europe and Central Asia at Human Rights Watch*

## LATEST FIGURES

*As of November 28, 171,299 boat migrants had reached Italy's shores, the Interior Ministry said, compared to the previous record of 170,100 for all of 2014.*

*There is no sign of a let-up in people crossing. Some 1,400 more migrants were rescued from rubber and wooden boats attempting to cross the central Mediterranean during Monday (28 November), Italy's coast guard said.*

*In the past three years, Italy has recorded nearly half a million migrant arrivals. Many have fled war, poverty or political oppression.*

*Most of the migrants who have come to Italy this year are Africans of various nationalities. Some 36,000 Nigerians have made the trip, about 21% of the total, along with 20,000 Eritreans and more than 12,000 from Guinea.*

*An estimated 4,663 migrants have died in the Mediterranean this year as a record number of unaccompanied minors have come to Italy. As of the end of October, almost 23,000 unaccompanied minors – mostly teenage boys – had arrived, compared with 13,000 during the whole of 2014.*

*EU states cannot agree how to handle them. Despite agreeing last year to relocate 160,000 people from Italy and Greece, eastern European countries, including Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, have refused to take any in. Germany, which received most of those*

*who made it to Europe last year, is backed by Sweden, Italy and Malta – which takes over the bloc's presidency in January for six months – in pushing for obligatory relocation in the asylum reform.*
""Since August 2015, more than one million migrants and refugees have entered the EU, many fleeing conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.
Thousands entered Italy or Greece hoping to carry on to wealthy western Europe where most want to settle and build a new life. But instead of making their way to Britain, Germany or Scandinavia, hundreds of refugees from the Middle East were sent to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, among the EU's poorest countries, under bloc rules.
"The failure of the EU relocation programme has been laid bare as it emerges 72 out of 90 Iraqis and Syrians sent to Lithuania and granted refugee status have left.  More than half of the 63 refugees given asylum in Latvia under its EU quota have also fled, according to an estimate by the Latvian Red Cross.
""Refugees have left Lithuania by bus for Germany and claim living in a refugee centre is better than leaving in the Baltic state. "They are satisfied living in a German refugee centre, **and are receiving everything they are entitled to."**
In the Baltic states, benefits are limited. Lithuania pays a refugee family of two parents and two children 450 euros a month for the first six months. After that payments are halved.
The European Union is struggling to implement its 2015 agreement to share 160,000 refugees across 28 member states. Only about 7,500 have been resettled so far. Poland has refused to accept its quota of 7,000 and Slovakia has called for the scheme to be scrapped. Hungary has also rejected the EU plans.
Ilmars Latkovskis, head of the Latvian parliament's Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion Committee, said that to make it attractive to stay, benefits would have to be boosted "to a level which would be very unpleasant for our own population, which is not that well-off".
Qassem, 37, a Syrian working as a translator at Latvia's Mucenieki refugee reception centre, questioned why the EU scheme sent refugees to eastern Europe. The translator, who did not want to give a surname, said he knew only one other refugee with job.  He said: "Why do you take us for relocation if you don't have a place for us?"


! In the past week or so Belgium authorities have withdrawn officials who were processing migrants in the Greek Islands, due to fears for their safety, migrants were increasingly rioting, assaulting officials, starting fires.
*""the European Commission was aware of the concerns about the security of staff working for the EU asylum office (EASO) in the Greek hotspots. She said that Migration and Home Affairs Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos had addressed a letter to the Greek migration minister Yannis Mouzalas on 4 November, saying member states needed reassurances that everything is being done to guarantee the security of their experts. He also reportedly asked Greece "to urgently improve the situation".*
*EASO itself has taken measures to improve the security by hiring additional guards in all the hotspots and improving the security infrastructure and equipment, Bertaud said.*
**Asked if other countries were contemplating withdrawing their personnel, the Commission spokesperson said she didn't have such information. There is a shortage of 44 experts on the Greek islands, she added.**
! The Higher Administrative Court in Schleswig, northern Germany, has agreed with the Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees that only minor protections will be granted to people who have fled the Syrian conflict - which has now raged for more than five years.  Uta Strzyz, who was involved in ruling said: "There is no reason to believe that in the Syrian state everyone is under general suspicion of being a member of the opposition."  The court ruled that not all Syrians could expect to be persecuted for their political beliefs and risked being arrested or tortured.
! **around 1,500 migrants rioted in Bulgaria's largest refugee camp yesterday (24 November), triggering clashes that left two dozen police injured and prompted the arrest of hundreds of protesters, officials said.**
"Around 300 migrants, six of them considered a threat to national security, have been arrested," Prime Minister Boyko Borissov told BNR public radio after visiting the camp in early hours of Friday.
**Until recently, most refugees entering Bulgaria from Turkey wouldn't hang around, seeking to continue their journeys towards western Europe. But now they are finding themselves stranded in the EU's poorest country.**
Tensions have been rising particularly in Greece where tens of thousands of people remain stranded.
Migrants set fire to a camp on the Greek island of Lesbos Thursday after a woman and a six-year-old child died following a gas cylinder explosion, local police said.
! The Italian Government drafted in some sectors of the Italian army to support Milan Police authorities in dealing with migrants now camping out throughout Milan.
! Migrants located to an old Olympic facility in Tourin, set it on fire. More and more reports are coming in of No-Go areas, dominated by migrants, where police dare not patrol, without considerable riot police back up  - in Sweden and Germany.  The situation escalates beyond control.


## GUESS WHAT – FOLLOW THE MONEY!

The UK's Daily Express recently published an analysis of what the EU is facing right now –
**""Where WILL EU find the cash? Tax rises or budget cuts needed to plug Brexit black hole**
**THE CRISIS-HIT European Union is facing a serious funding nightmare when the UK leaves the bloc and pulls its mammoth budget contributions from the bloc.""**
"Britain currently ploughs £13 billion every year into Brussels' coffers after the rebate is applied, meaning it accounts for 15 per cent of all EU cash.
Even after the UK recoups some of that massive outlay in the form of euro grants - over which we have no control - our net contribution stands at a massive £8.5bn a year.  In context, that is more than eight times what the EU spends on defending its borders despite increasing funding due to the migrant crisis.

**AND Britain's net payout is equivalent to the entire budget contributions of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia combined.**
And all of those countries are net beneficiaries of the EU budget, meaning that they take far more out in Brussels subsidies than they contribute in membership fees.
With economic stagnation spreading across the eurozone and huge joblessness in most Mediterranean countries, it is inevitable euro leaders will have little choice but to significantly slash their budget or impose ever higher contribution demands on the few wealthy countries able to afford them, and in particular Germany.
Brussels' only other option will be to negotiate a Brexit deal with the UK which involves Britain continuing to pay its exorbitant membership fee.
However, it is unlikely EU leaders will be able to achieve this without compromising on free movement.
Here ***express.co.uk*** looks at the pain EU citizens will face as their leaders scramble to replace the **British cash cow.**"

They could perhaps - **RAISE TAXES**
One option is for Brussels to keep its high spending levels - set at £113bn for 2017 - and instead ask member states to make up the shortfall for Britain. However, this would be a politically risky and enormously unpopular move.
Or: **BORROW THE MONEY**
A second option would be for the EU to attempt to borrow the money to cover the cost of Brexit. This would be tricky as, under current Brussels rules, the European Central Bank (ECB) can only go to lenders to raise cash for loans to member states, such as the Greek bailout deal.
OR: **CUT THE CAP**
The controversial Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is by far the EU's biggest expenditure accounting for around 40 per cent of its entire budget. France is famously by far the biggest beneficiary of the bloated scheme, and has fought ferociously to prevent any attempts to slim it down. France rakes in £7.6bn in agricultural subsidies from Brussels ever year to keep its outdated industry going, meaning it could give up all subsidies and still not even recoup Britain's net budget contribution.

To cover our entire costs the French would have to convince either Spain of Germany to also forfeit all of their cash payouts under the scheme, causing a massive economic shock to rural communities.
**SLASH SCIENCE SPENDING**
The EU's flagship science programme, Horizon 2020, has a budget of £10.1bn a year which is doled out to labs across the bloc to carry out vital research. The project was handed a massive payout of £71bn to cover its costs from 2014-2020, meaning it is due to expire just after Britain officially leaves the EU, which is expected to be in 2019.
UK institutions have benefitted heavily from the fund due to Britain's reputation as a world-class centre for science.
So far 30 per cent of the available funding has been dispersed, of which Britain has been the number one recipient among the 28 member states of the EU.
OR: **REDUCE RED TAPE**
A final option facing bureaucrats would effectively be to sack themselves. Given that this would be like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas, it is extremely likely that moves to slash red tape would be fiercely resisted by eurocrat bodies like the EU commission.""

**The latest budget figures from the EU shows that it spends around £6.7bn a year on administration, most of which is made up of staffing costs. <u>The biggest institution is the EU commission which alone has an army of 25,000 bureaucrats - around half the total number of EU employees.</u>**
**On top of that are other stunning examples of largesse which may need to be cut. *<u>Without Britain's cash, for example, even stubborn French officials may no longer feel they can insist on the exorbitant vanity show of moving the entire EU parliament to Strasbourg every month, at a cost of £130 million a year.""</u>***

## 'Italy must obey' Juncker threatens Italian PM as he scrambles to hold failing EU together

**BRUSSELS bigwigs have warned Italy to respect pacts with the eurozone after the nation's Prime Minister chose to support earthquake sufferers instead of balancing its books under EU regulations.**

With his back against the wall with an upcoming referendum on constitutional reform, the Italian Prime Minister decided to remove the EU flag from a Q and A event on Facebook.
While taking part in an online call to League and Five Stars nationalist voters at his official office in Palazzo Chigi, Rome, Matteo Renzi, in a very public display of lack of confidence in the EU, he pointedly removed the EU flag.
He spoke in front of six Italian tricolours instead of the usual combination of a European Union flag, an Italian one and the Italian Council of Ministers' flag.
The 41-year-old faces the biggest test yet of his political career on December 4, when Italy votes on changing the constitution, a ballot seen in the eyes of some as a vote on the country's membership of the 28 nation bloc.
Renzi has reiterated that he will quit if he loses the vote. In several recent speeches he has reiterated that he no long will accept the dictats from Brussels. Matteo Renzi locked horns with chief Eurocrat Jean Claude Juncker after saying he will balance his budget in favour of earthquake hit regions and to support regions coping with an influx of new migrants "whether Brussels officials like it or not".
Under the EU Stability and Growth pact nations must keep their budget deficits below three per cent, and support a national debt of less than 60 per cent of GDP.
But Italy is being kept under a tight leash after its debt soared to 142.31 per cent of GDP.
**Mr Renzi said: "Juncker says I'm being quarrelsome.**
"Respecting the rules is one thing, the possibility of those rules obstructing the

stability of our children's schools is quite another.
“We will allocate that money outside the EU Stability and Growth Pact, whether Brussels officials like it or not.”
The normally Europhile Mr Renzi has been forced to clash with the EU after anger from Italians over the EU’s refusal to help with their end of the migrant crisis and the economic struggles of the eurozone.
Both Spain and Portugal are protesting the very same Stability pact rules for their 2017 budgets.
**Meantime the EU tells Spain, lower your debt, or face the consequences!**


## Why we all should worry about Italy's stricken banking system: Savers who saw their euros go up in smoke and why the nation fears bank bail-ins

- **Bank bail-in rules would force losses onto Italian savers and investors**
- **Italian bank savers who bought bonds already hit by bank rescue**
- **In Italy many ordinary savers hold bank bonds - with an estimated €180bn invested and suggestions of mis-selling**
- **Some 130,000 small savers were hit by bank rescue a year ago**
- **Italy wanted to bail-out banks but ECB said it was against the rules!**

“The small Italian town of Pontassieve is only a few kilometres from Florence, but on a crisp autumn day when scores of victims of Italy's banking crisis have gathered for a demonstration, it feels a thousand miles from the Renaissance glories so many British visitors adore.
The protesters are here because it is the home town of Italian premier Matteo Renzi. Their slogan is, 'Renzi a casa. O noi a casa di Renzi', which means 'Renzi go home, or we will go to your home.'
Maybe it loses something in the translation, but the sentiment is clear. The middle-class, middle-aged and elderly demonstrators clashing with baton-wielding carabinieri hold the prime minister responsible for their losses – in some cases their entire life savings.
Many of the protesters have seen tens of thousands of euros they invested in bank bonds or shares go up in smoke.
A demo in a little Tuscan town may seem peripheral, but in fact the troubles of the Italian banking system have opened up fault-lines at the very heart of Europe.
The state of the banks is a gigantic headache for the Italian leader, who, like David Cameron, has offered the people a referendum he may live to regret.
Ostensibly the poll is about constitutional reform, but in the eyes of many Italians it is tantamount to a vote of confidence in Renzi.
If the referendum on December 4 goes against him, the youthful premier, aged just 41, has said he will stay on, though that may well prove untenable.
It would certainly unleash huge political turmoil – the Italian banking system is a serious threat to financial stability in the European Union and beyond.
Justin Urquhart Stewart of Seven Investment Management said: 'If banks in the eurozone falter it will jolt their economy and that will affect the 40 per cent of UK exports that go there.'

**The trouble with Italian banks and the bail-in rules!**

Shares in the Italian lenders have plunged. The banks collectively are burdened with £320bn of bad and doubtful debt, equivalent to a staggering 20 per cent of the entire Italian economy.
The task of cleaning up the banks has been made harder by European Union rules that came in at the start of this year.
Now, instead of a state bail-out, as happened with Royal Bank of Scotland, there is a so-called 'bail-in' of shareholders and creditors who are forced to take some of the losses.

**How ordinary savers could get hit by the bail-in**

The idea behind this – that taxpayers should not be compelled to pick up the tab for bust banks – is perfectly reasonable. But in Italy there is a big problem, namely that the banks' creditors include millions of ordinary people, many of them pensioners. Grandma and grandpa hold around £180bn of bank bonds that could be 'bailed in' – meaning those savings could be lost. **To make matters worse, many of those who bought bank bonds and shares believe they are victims of mis-selling.**
The decline of so-called 'relationship banking' is much lamented in the UK but was until recently alive and well in Italy, where customers often knew and trusted staff in their local branch, and were prepared to invest on their say-so.
The rescue of four banks in November last year has already given Italy a taste of the distress that will ensue if more lenders need to be saved. Around 130,000 small savers lost heavily.
Communities were ripped apart. In Arezzo, staff who had been working in the local branches of Banca Etruria had to be transferred to other areas to avoid confrontations with locals who had lost their nest-eggs.
One woman, Patrizia, a shop worker in her early 50s who I saw on the march in Pontassieve, tells me she has had 'to sleep with one eye open' - since she lost almost all her life savings - in case her husband tried to kill himself.

**The 83-year-old widower who lost his £30,000 savings**

Another of the banks that hit the rocks last November was the Cassa Di Risparmio di Ferrara, known locally as Carife. The impact on individuals in Ferrara in Emilia Romagna and on the local economy, has been brutal. Jusue Arnone, an 83-year-old retired pharmaceutical salesman and widower of eight years, lost his £30,000 savings and had to take out a loan to pay his utility bills.
Milena Zaggia, a businesswoman in her early 50s, lost her truck repair business and saw her investment in bank shares wiped out. The shock the bank rescues have dealt to the Italian psyche – and therefore to confidence in the economy – is profound. Italy has historically been a nation obsessed with thrift, where banks relied on prudent individual savers as a source of capital.
The banking crisis is affecting all sections of Italian society, not just those who have directly lost money. Younger people watching what has happened to their parents' and grandparents' hard-earned nest eggs see no point in saving money themselves – even if, with youth unemployment at more than 30 per cent, they are lucky enough to have a job and surplus cash to set aside. All the bank

victims I spoke to said they are going to vote against Renzi in the referendum.
***Any collapse in the Italian bank sector would send shock waves across the world, including the UK***
The loss of faith in Italy's banks, politicians and its economy bodes ill for the country's future: businesses cannot gain access to the funding they need to grow, jobs are not being created in sufficient numbers and talented Italians are leaving in a brain-drain.
Here in Britain, we would not be immune from the fall-out from Italy if their banking and political crisis worsens, even after Brexit.
**'Any collapse in the Italian bank sector would send shock waves across the world, including the UK,' says Laith Khalaf of financial advice firm Hargreaves Lansdown.**

## Could Italy be the big risk to the EU - and should the UK be worried?

Indeed, there has been increased speculation that Italy may be the next country to follow Britain's example and break with the EU. A vote against Renzi this weekend would certainly be a boost for the eurosceptic Five Star movement.
Could anything like the Italian banking meltdown affect British bank savers? On the face of it, no. Our banks are in a much better state, ordinary Britons do not invest in bank bonds on an Italian scale and conventional deposits are covered by a protection scheme if a bank does go under.
There have, however, been high profile clashes between small bond investors and banks in the UK, including a high court fight where Lloyds this summer won the right to buy back bonds that had been paying a high rate of interest.
There were also battles between the Co-op Bank and its small bond holders when the mutual lender imploded.
British bank customers are no strangers to the mis-selling alleged to have happened in Italy, just with different products. And investors in RBS, Lloyds and other banks are all too familiar with falling share prices. It is chilling to see middle class bank customers in Italy being so brutally stripped of their savings – behaviour we associate with far flung dictatorships, not our neighbours on the continent.
**When this kind of thing happens in Italy, it feels uncomfortably close to home."**

**"This is the showdown, the big political battle. And then, as they say in Florence, ''they will count the dead'."**
And as Prime Minister Renzi continues to point out to J.C. Juncker, "Why should Italy pay out vast sums to the EU, and all the Eastern European states, huge beneficiaries of EU largesse, (see EU White Elephants!) when they refuse to take any immigrants, and Italy is bearing the brunt of the immigrant crisis. Poland for example has not taken, ONE!

## THE SHARKS ARE CIRCLING

In the Oscar-winning film ***The Big Short***, Steve Carell played the angry Wall Street outsider who predicted (and hugely profited from) the great financial crash of 2007-08 – to the tune of over a $billion..
He saw sub-prime mortgages rated triple-A but which, in reality, were junk – and bet billions against the banks holding them. In real life he is Steve Eisman, he is still on Wall Street, and he is still shorting stocks he thinks are going to plummet.

**Steve Eisman: 'I'm not really worried about England's banks. They are in better shape than most in Europe.'**

And while he's tight-lipped about which ones (unless you have $1m to spare for him to manage) it is evident he has one major target in mind: continental Europe's banks – and Italy's are probably the worst.

Why Italy? Because, he says, the banks there are stuffed with "non-performing loans" (NPLs).
But the Italian banks have not written off these loans as duds, he says. Instead, billions upon billions are still on the books, written down as worth about 45% to 50% of their original value.
The big problem, says Eisman, is that they are not worth anywhere near that much.
**Personally I can't see how he can make money betting against the banks, who would take the bets, but what do I know? But obviously he scents blood in the water.**

## Ireland should LEAVE EU before it's TOO LATE' Anger as Dublin faces HUGE membership bill

### IRELAND must leave the European Union before it is too late, a politician has claimed, after it was revealed the country's EU budget contribution is to balloon over the next few years.

Ireland has only just become a net contributor to the EU, previously being in reciept of EU largesse. However a recent Freedom of Information request by an Irish councillor revealed the nation's contribution will rise by almost 25 per cent by 2021.
Councillor James Charity of Galway County Council believes the shocking figures, provided by the Department of Finance (DoF) and exclusively seen by ***Express.co.uk***, show the country must urgently assess whether it would be better off following the UK's lead and quitting the bloc. The figures show Ireland's EU budget contribution has grown rapidly from €1.529bn in 2006 to €1.952bn last year, and is set to further grow. Estimates put forward by Irish ministers show the contribution will continue to expand, from €2.075bn this year to an eye-watering €2.425bn in 2021. These figures may actually increase further, as they were put forward before the UK voted Leave this summer.
Cllr Charity, who is an independent councillor as well as a practicing barrister, said the figures were deeply worrying said: "The perception out there is that Ireland is receiving significant funding from the EU in terms of capital investments and grant funding but the reality is quite the opposite. "Vast sums of money are being paid to the EU while problems with health, homelessness and public services persist and get worse by

the year." He said Britain's departure will significantly damage Ireland's role in Europe, as they will lose an "ally" at the negotiating table - especially when it comes to the battle to oppose tax unification across the bloc."

Ireland has just been hit with a huge €15 billion tax bill for its tax concessions to Apple.

**Cllr James Charity described the EU as a "ponzi scheme"**

He continued: "With its disdain for the democratic process, over-bureaucratic, and indeed increasingly autocratic, approach, together with the reality that Ireland does not in fact receive any direct funds from the EU Budget, but rather is funding its expansionist movement towards an enlarged Federal Europe and a system of tax harmonisation designed to promote the interests of mainland European States, we should be prepared to discuss the pros and cons of our own continued membership of the EU in Ireland."

***Ed: I asked the EU Press Office the following question:***

"What is the status of the EU Tax Transparency legislation, for fair tax payment, Corporation tax, throughout the EU. Has this applied yet to Multinationals registered in Luxembourg, paying little if any corporation tax (these include Amazon, Costa Coffee, Ikea, etc.)? The reply was

**"The Directive has not been accepted yet…. Unfortunately there is no available timeline when the Directive is going to be adopted."**

**So it seems that the EU can attempt to punitively extort €15 billion or so from Ireland, but has not got anywhere near fining hundreds or so of multinationals all sheltering under cosy Luxembourg tax regimes, avoiding all possible Corporation tax. One rule for some, but not for All!**

## LUXEMBOURG TAX HAVEN

*** ""*A court in Luxembourg on Wednesday (29 June) gave a 12-month suspended sentence and a €1,500 fine to Antoine Deltour for leaking thousands of documents that exposed the huge tax breaks obtained by major international companies,* ***including Apple, IKEA and Pepsi, at a time when Jean-Claude Juncker, now head of the European Commission, was prime minister.***

*Raphael Halet, who also blew the whistle, was given a nine-month suspended sentence and fined €1,000. Edouard Perrin, a French journalist who first exposed the deals, was acquitted.*

***More than 300 companies, including PepsiCo Inc, AIG Inc and Deutsche Bank AG, secured secret deals from Luxembourg to slash their tax bills, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) reported on 5 November 2014, quoting leaked documents.***

***The companies appear to have channelled hundreds of billions of dollars through Luxembourg and saved billions of dollars in taxes, the group of investigative journalists said, based on a review of nearly 28,000 pages of confidential documents.***

***Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who took the office in January 2015, was accused of being the cause or at least the protector of the scheme, in his former capacity of Prime Minister of Luxembourg.***

***He however survived a motion of censure in Parliament thanks to his comfortable majority and made a priority for his presidency to fight tax avoidance which depletes the EU countries of €70 billion annually.***

*The Commission wants to close loopholes and make sure multinationals should pay their taxes in the country in which they operate. The so-called Tax Transparency Package will force the EU's 28 member states to share details of any tax deals agreed to with some of the world's biggest multinationals, in information sent automatically every three months. The plan aims to end the secrecy that allowed member states to often compete against each other to attract business and investment.""*

## Could Ireland follow Britain out of the EU?

In a year of confounded expectations, another allegedly unthinkable idea, Eirexit, is gaining traction according to the Irish Times. Until very recently, the very notion of Ireland leaving the EU was so outlandish and marginal that it did not feature in any public discourse in a meaningful way.

But it has now been thrust more into the limelight by a combination of Brexit, the Apple case, fears of an EU stealth attack on Ireland's most sacred cow, corporation tax; and now, the election of Trump. Certainly, Eirexit has gained some momentum of late. There is a small but growing band of public figures questioning the basis of Irish EU membership. Some are opposed to any notion of a federal Europe or EU superstate. The Irish Times noted the rising support for Eirexit from various fringe groups and asked "Are these a collection of disparate and peripheral voices, or do they reflect a population far less enamoured of Brussels than its political leaders?" It's safe to say we have an answer already. Look at Brexit. The left was supposed to vote overwhelmingly "Remain", instead, only the big liberal cities did. Look at the US. Working class people, men and women voted hugely for Trump. One politician recalled Charles de Gaulle's famous remark: "Europe is France and Germany; the rest is just the trimmings." The EU's Brexit reaction was punishment, threats, and a call for even "more Europe".

The nannycrats were furious when the UK responded by cutting corporate income taxes. It wants and will seek to force Ireland to comply.

## CORPORATION TAX II

**The warehouse of a Greek logistic company is seen in the Bulgarian town of Petritsi, 5 km away from Bulgarian-Greek Borders, November**

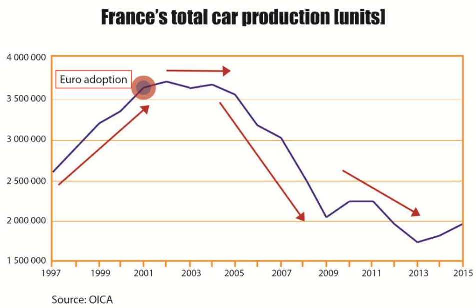
Greek businessman Prokopis Makris believes moving to Bulgaria three years ago was the best decision he ever made. The accountant shut his failing furniture company in Greece and opened a business helping other entrepreneurs move to Bulgaria to escape a 29 percent

tax rate, which has jumped since Athens adopted austerity as part of an international bailout.
"We are bombarded with taxes in Greece, businesses are being annihilated," he says in his plush office overlooking the town square of Petritsi, a Bulgarian town about 12 km (seven miles) north of the border with Greece.
The debt crises faced by Greece and several other European countries led to drastic spending cuts and tax increases to improve government finances. But the higher taxes punished businesses forcing many to shut or move to lower tax jurisdictions such as Bulgaria or Cyprus, helping those economies but undermining the recovery needed to balance the books at home.
**The number of Greek owned businesses based in Bulgaria, where the corporate tax rate is only 10 percent, has risen to 17,000 from 2,000 in 2010, when Greece had its first bailout, according to Bulgarian authorities.**
The Greek government is concerned. It plans a series of tax audits in cooperation with Bulgaria to determine if these business defections are merely changes of address designed to avoid tax rather than a physical relocation of operations.
Businesses relocated from Greece generate about 5 billion euros ($5.3 billion) annually and employ an estimated 53,000 people, according to 2014 data from Greece's embassy in Sofia. Numbers are rising fast: 3,642 Greek businesses have been registered in Bulgaria so far this year, up from 3,262 for all of 2015, according to the Bulgarian Registry Agency.
**Now what is the point of those businesses, which could be helping the Greek economy to recover, relocating to Bulgaria, for a lower corporation tax regime. One rule for some but not for others.**

## FRANCE - The End Of A Great Industrial Power: French Car Production Has Collapsed Since Joining The Euro

***For many people, the automotive sector is a determinant of a country's economic power. If you do not produce car brands that are known worldwide, then you mean nothing. France, once a global leader in car manufacturing, may soon fall out from the elite, as its contribution to the world's automotive market is dramatically decreasing. It is one of the many signs how weak French economy has become with the euro adoption. A dying industry can be a spark that will set on fire the whole country; or the European Union.***

**French industry has been contracting since the adoption of the euro.** It was not able to recover after either of the 2001 or 2008 crises because the euro, a currency stronger than the French franc would be, has become a burden to France's economy. The floating exchange rate works like an indicator of the strength of the economy and like an automatic stabilizer. A weaker currency helps to regain competitiveness during a crisis, while a stronger currency supports consumption of foreign goods.
China has been accused of artificial devaluation of its currency to prop up exports, while the ECB's policy has had an opposite effect for the economy of France and some South European countries: the euro has become too strong; whereas for Germany's it has become too weak. That is why the common currency has increased consumption and imports in less productive countries and strengthened German competitiveness and exports. **Because of the euro France could not regain international competitiveness in the world's market after the 2001 crisis, so its industry has been slowly dying ever since.**
The floating exchange rate is a great tool for bad times, which is excellently known in Poland, where there was no recession because of, among others, a temporarily weaker national currency. France and South European countries have just given this tool over to the ECB and they were not able to have a quick recovery. Just like Germany has had with an undervalued euro in their case.
Today, according to the Eurostat, industry (except construction) makes up 14.1% of the French total gross value added, while in 1995 it was 19.2%. The EU's average is still 19.3%, but in Germany 25.9%. Moreover, the share of industry in total employment in France is only 11.9%, also under the EU's average (15.4%) and the German level (18.8%).
**One of the imprints of the dying French manufacturing under the ECB rules is automotive sector collapse.** According to OICA data, the world's car production almost doubled in the years 1997-2015 from 53 million vehicles produced yearly to 90 million. At the same time, Germany increased its car production by 20% from 5 to 6 million. What happened in France, once the proud producer of beautiful and modern vehicles?




**Not surprisingly, car production in France almost halved from nearly 4 million to less than 2 million.** And again, stagnation and collapse occurred just after euro adoption. Obviously, France has been pursuing a very social policy and its market is highly constrained by the excessive legal regulations. However, trade unions in Germany are also very strong and yet the manufacturing sector has not collapsed.
**A dying industry is a huge problem not only for French economy but also for society.** The strong revolutionary sentiment may spark off extreme riots, also with a racial background. France has one of Europe's largest Muslim immigrant populations from Africa that is still growing. **Without jobs in the industry France will not be able to offer these people any perspective.** The longer the industrial stagnation lasts, the bigger the chances are that France will one of these days destroy the common currency union.
And you can say much the same relative to the Italian car industry since Italy joined the EU –halved production, unemployment, etc.

## Hungary suffering worst labour shortage on record - Survey

More than half of companies in Hungary are unable to fill vacancies due to a shortage of workers, a survey by staffing company ManpowerGroup showed on Tuesday, the highest level on record.
**Years of emigration to Western Europe have created labour shortages in countries on the European Union's eastern flank like Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, which make it tough for businesses of all kinds to recruit.**
The annual survey by ManpowerGroup showed 57 percent of Hungarian companies polled had difficulties finding workers, a 10 percentage point leap from last year. That compares to a global average of 40 percent in a survey including 42 countries. Hungarian

companies "compete for workers not just with local rivals but with employers in western European and neighbouring countries as well," ManpowerGroup's local Managing Director Laszlo Dalanyi was quoted as saying.
He said Hungary's biggest disadvantage was the lower level of wages offered to workers, which made it hard to retain or attract talented employees.
"Hungarian companies feel that lifting wages would threaten their competitiveness," Dalanyi was quoted as saying. "However, the labour shortage has reached such an extent that it also damages competitiveness."
The survey said a third of Hungarian companies were unable to fill vacancies because there were no applicants at all for a given positions. Another third of employers were having problems as applicants were not sufficiently qualified, it said.
The top 10 list of problematic hiring areas ranges from blue-collar jobs such as carpenters, electricians and plumbers to drivers, engineers, doctors, information technology experts and accountants.
ManpowerGroup said a third of local companies try to tackle the shortage by giving their workers additional training while 16 percent offered more favourable benefits.
The survey said Japan was the worst hit, with 86 percent of companies facing a shortage of workers, while Romania and Bulgaria, among the poorest members of the European Union, scored 72 and 62 percent, respectively. Samsung Electronics has recruited Ukrainian workers to keep its Hungarian factory running. German carmakers Audi and Daimler have also said they are feeling the impact of the crunch. Hungary's unemployment rate fell to 4.9 percent in the June-August period. Gross wages were up by an annual 6.9 percent in August at a time of no inflation.
Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government is planning to cut payroll taxes in a two- to three-year programme that will also include incentives for employers to raise wages.""
One Hungarian company making sun roofs for cars, were forced to bring in labour from their Mexican subsidiary to keep production going. The Hungarian Government is also proposing a measure whereby university graduates have to sign up to stay and work in the country for at least ten years after graduating!

**So much for the sacrosant FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT.**

**Viktor Orbán's Hungary will receive €25 billion between 2014 and 2020; more per capita than any other country, except Lithuania.**

## HUNGARY

### This past month, the European Court of Auditors reported on how the EU spends taxpayer money. For once, the worst offending member states being named and shamed, with Hungary set to topping the list.

The ECA's report will be presented during the plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. This year, as with the previous 21, the report states that the ECA could not declare that EU spending of almost €150 billion in 2015 was entirely free from mismanagement, negligence or fraud by member states. What is different this year, however, is the decision by the ECA to name those countries that are the worst at ensuring EU funds are properly spent – **and Hungary, under the rule of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, comes out on 'top'.**
The figures are staggering: the same Viktor Orbán who runs roughshod over basic European democratic values, the rule of law and protection of minorities, will be the proud recipient of €25 billion between 2014 and 2020 – more than any other EU country on a per capita basis apart from Lithuania – and yet a large percentage of the Hungarian projects funded by the European Union are by research of Transparency International Hungary described as 'corrupt'.
EU funding for the regions of Europe (so-called cohesion funding) accounts for around one-third of the EU budget and is meant to help create a level social and economic playing field across the EU, reducing disparities between and within member states.
Yet despite being one of the major beneficiaries of EU funding, Hungary shows little sign of improvement – indeed regional and social inequalities in Hungary have grown significantly over the last few years. To mention just one example: Hungary's spending on education is the lowest in the whole of the OECD, both as a percentage of total public spending and of GDP.
So where does the money go then? While some of it is undoubtedly spent on positive and useful projects for which is was intended, much of it is not. There are many cases of EU money being used to finance projects that ostensibly follow fair and transparent public procurement procedures but which in fact are often a cover for Orbán to give money to his oligarch cronies.
They include Lőrinc Mészáros, Orbán's childhood school friends and mayor of the his home village; István Tiborcz, Orbán's son-in-law; István Garancsi, a friend of Orbán's and president of the football club of the town where Orbán was born; and Lajos Simicska, Orbán's former college roommate, and former treasurer of the ruling party, who was the regime's top oligarch until he fell out with the prime minister early last year.
In 2013 alone, the share of the combined value of tenders won by the many companies owned by these four people accounted for 11% of all public procurement contracts agreed that year. Between 2011 and 2014 the share of EU financing in the contracts won by these four men never fell below 80%; the average share of EU funds in Hungarian procurements is usually between 50 and 60%.
Simicska's case is particularly interesting in shedding light on how this public procurement process really works. His companies won contracts worth hundreds of billions of forints before his friendship with Orbán came to a sorry end; since the rift with Orbán, his companies have won virtually nothing. In other words, if you're close to Orbán, you have a much greater chance of winning the contract. Ironically, it is this falling out with Orbán that means that there are still some critical voices in Hungary. Simicska rebelled against Orbán's plans to introduce a special media tax (because it would have hurt his media interests) and now uses his once-loyal media empire to criticise the government.
Other critical voices are more easily stifled: the recent closure of leading opposition daily newspaper Népszabadság by new owners sympathetic to Orbán is just the latest example in an increasingly long list of independent voices summarily silenced.

Most Hungarians now get their news spoon-fed to them by the regime's propaganda industry – all financed to a large extent by European taxpayers' money meant to be used to help remove inequalities between EU member states. **Yet despite this being widely documented, the EU institutions continue to turn a blind eye.** While Orbán's crony capitalism is perhaps the most extreme example, the abuse of EU funding goes well beyond Hungary's borders and risks irredeemably tainting the entire EU project if it is not tackled. The naming and shaming by the ECA is just a start – real action is now needed to put an end to these abuses. Let's hope other EU leaders and political leaders have the political courage to do just that. It's time all relevant EU institutions start biting back at Orbán, on behalf of good governance for Hungarian citizens.

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## NORTH SOUTH DIVIDE NARROWS (OR DOES IT?)

## By SIMON EVELEIGH

November is a month when domestic competition continues, but somewhat in the shadow of international matters.
The might of the southern hemisphere descends upon Europe for a series of matches which, generally, gives those of us from the north reason to feel vastly inferior. However, this year that has not quite been the case.
Before the autumn internationals close at Twickenham with the England/Australia encounter, there have been 14 matches between Rugby Championship teams (New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and Argentina) and 6 Nations sides. Of those, 8 have been won by the European sides, including Ireland's historic victory over New Zealand in Chicago on the opening weekend.
The fact that the current South African side has been described by some as their worst ever has certainly helped swing the statistics in favour of the northern hemisphere. If you dig a little, you will find that Argentina and South Africa lost three out of three, but that Australia and New Zealand each won three out of four, both losing to a resurgent Ireland.
Whilst Australia have the ability to upset the form book and bring Eddie Jones' undefeated run as England coach to an end, the results of the matches over the last month have confirmed several things that we suspected beforehand; New Zealand are still the best but it is possible to get under their skin and upset their game plan, England continue to develop into a very credible challenger to the All Blacks' number one ranking, Australia have regrouped well after a less than impressive summer, Ireland are a force to reckon with, Wales are finding it difficult to adapt to life without Warren Gatland, South Africa are poor and Scotland are taking steps in the right direction.
What then of France?
Guy Novès' first year in charge of *Les Bleus* has resulted in 4 wins from 10 games, but only one from five against teams currently ranked in the top 5.
They finished 5th in the 6 Nations and lost their opening test match in Argentina in June. However, after a very impressive win in the second test, supporters were keen to see if the French team could build upon that when they took on Australia and New Zealand.


A routine victory over Samoa enabled the players to get ready for the stiffer challenges ahead and, on the face of it, a two point defeat by Australia and a five point loss to New Zealand give reasons for encouragement, BUT……………
Australia rested several front line players against France, preferring to keep them for the stiffer tests they believed they would face against Ireland and England.
New Zealand seemed a little disinterested and have been accused of treating the French with disrespect, particularly when they chose to turn down the chance to kick at goal when they were only 5 points ahead.
In both matches France had opportunities, but failed to convert them and ultimately paid the penalty.
The national team has been poor for quite some time, so narrow defeats against the world's best, irrespective of who is playing for the opposition and whether they are "up for it" or not, are taken as positives and it is true that there were indications that, under Novès, France are developing a style of play which could bear fruit in the future.
France travel to Twickenham for the opening round of the 6 Nations at the beginning of February and that will be a true test of whether they are heading in the right direction or not. French supporters must hope that they are, because the 2019 World Cup draw will be made after the 6 Nations and world rankings at that time will determine who your likely opponents are.
France are currently ranked 8th, but are only just ahead of Argentina. The Pumas do not play again before the draw, so their points tally will not move. However, the 6 Nations gives France the chance to gain or lose points.
It is unlikely that France will break into the top 4, but they will be determined to cement their place in the 5th to 8th block. This is important as teams are drawn randomly, with one from each block of four in each of the four groups. Based upon the current rankings, that means that France would end up with either New Zealand, England, Australia or Ireland, but would avoid Wales, South Africa and Scotland.
A nightmare scenario for France could look something like this; they drop out of the top 8 and then draw New Zealand and South Africa, who between now and 2019 rediscover their mojo. Of course, France could do the same and nobody would welcome having them in their group. As we saw last year, England paid the price for ending up in a group with Australia and Wales, because Wales were ranked 9th when the draw was made.
In domestic action, November was a bad month for Toulon, losing quite heavily at both Lyon and Castres, but winning comfortably at home to Stade Français.
With one game to go before we reach the halfway stage of the season, Toulon are in fifth place. Considering that they have only won 6 of their 12 games so far, this is probably not too bad. They are already 9 points behind leaders Clermont, but only 3 behind second-placed Bordeaux-Bègles, who travel to Mayol on 4th December to complete the first phase of the season.
The revolution that it was hoped would follow Mike Ford's appointment as head coach has not yet happened and it may be too much to expect any significant

changes between now and the end of the season.
December and January will determine what Toulon have to play for in the latter part of the season, as they play five times in the Top 14 and also complete their European pool games, with their final match being away to last year's champions, Saracens.
If you are looking for something to do after all the excesses of the festive season, you could do worse than go to Stade Mayol on New Year's Day, when Toulon play host to reigning French champions Racing 92. The match kicks off at 8.45pm.
I would like to take this opportunity to wish all readers a very Merry Christmas and we can only hope that by the time we return in February, Toulon's season is not already all but over.

The cash came from the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund.
€255 million euros was spent on infrastructure which was "unnecessarily large". Only half of the airports needed EU funding, and much of the infrastructure, once built and paid for, was underused. This was even the case at peak times in some cases, the report said. €38 million worth of infrastructure was not being used at all, according to the damning report, called EU funded airport infrastructures: poor value for money.

**Delays**

Most of the audited airports had construction delays of two years on average. Almost half went over budget, causing member states to spend €100 million more from their national budgets than they planned to.

# EU WHITE ELEPHANTS! GHOST AIRPORTS COSTING SQUILLIONS & SQUILLIONS

## FIELD OF DREAMS – BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME?

**In 2014 the EU's Court of Auditors released a damning report into the use of €460 million taxpayer's money to fund airport expansions.**

**Millions of euros of EU money was wasted on too many airports, on airports that are too close together and do not attract enough passengers, the European Court of Auditors has found.**

Auditors scrutinised investment from 2000 to 2013, worth more than €666 million of EU money at 20 airports in Estonia, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain.

The European Commission generally did not know which airports got funding or how much, the auditors said. The funding was allocated at national level, and the decision on where to spend it was made by member states.
When national bodies such as aviation authorities were allocated the money, they were often reluctant to reallocate it away from their sector, which led to unsuitable projects being funded.
There was a lack of planning at national and EU level that made the situation worse, auditors said.
Only half of the audited airports increased passenger numbers after receiving EU funds. More than half of them had significantly over-estimated increases. In Cordoba last year, fewer than 7,000 passengers travelled. 179,000 were predicted to.

**COMMENT**

I find all of the information in this article in the main totally incredible – mind boggling - particularly relating to Airports.
Airports are hugely expensive projects to undertake, as you can imagine, yet these projects all went ahead seemingly without any sort of informed, professional input and overview.
You might well say with reason, what the hell do I know. And I will point you at Toulon Airport, which has had to fight incredibly hard to keep going. Originally owned by the Var Chamber of Commerce, it is now owned by Da Vinci Airports. And Toulon Airport is in the middle of one of the most attractive tourist areas of this region.! In the past few years several budget airlines have tried to use Toulon, including up until recently Ryanair, who tried it for a couple of years, but then obviously found they were not getting enough passenger throughput to make the route viable.
City Air only use Toulon for a short summer season.
Did any of the following Airport projects call in the commercial airlines to do expert number crunching, the bean crunchers, to assess the potential of passengar throughput. I hardly think so. Commercial airlines know what they are talking about, and these airports in the main are huge EU loss making vanity projects!

**Here's the EU scorecard:**
**Poland-**

**$125 million (€100 million) to help build and upgrade 12 airports,**
**€615.7 million to support these financial black holes between 2007 and 2013,**
**Lublin (3 flights a day in and out )and Rzeszow Airports (four flights a day in and out), 2 new facilities in the east part of the country/**
**Lodz Airport was redeveloped, but passengers, who live just 50 minutes from Warsaw, are not responding well.**
The problem is most striking at the recently rebuilt Lodz passenger terminal, where passenger numbers in 2013 fell almost one million short of forecasts, according to European Commission documents examined by Reuters.
On a relatively busy day this summer, just four flights arrived and four departed. In between, the place was almost deserted. In the early afternoon a single passenger, a woman in a blue-and-white striped T-shirt, sat in a 72-seat waiting area. Outside on the tarmac, five

sets of movable steps stood waiting for a jet to land.

**The European Union has given Poland more than 100 million euros to build at least three "ghost" airports in places where there are not enough passengers to keep them in business**.

Polish authorities projected combined passenger numbers for the airports to be more than 3 million passengers a year. In 2013, the actual number was just over 1.1 million.

Together, the investments in the three airports totalled about 245 million euros. Around 105 million of that came from the European Union. The rest came from central government in Warsaw, local governments and the airports themselves.

**"There was also little evidence of new jobs being created, or other regional socio-economic benefits, or even improved customer service, as a result of the investments."**

**Spain-**

**Ciudad Real Airport in central Spain cost, €1.1 billion to construct. It was opened in 2008 and closed four years later bankrupt. Later, it was bought at auction April 2016 for it is said €10,000, and it has yet to open to flights. This central Spanish airport has a capacity for 2.5 million passengers per year.**

**€150 million was spent on Castellon-Costa Airport in Valencia. Since completion in 2011 it had problems in meeting criteria for commercial flights. Now it boasts ! 9 flights a week, in and out.**

"I always thought it was a stupid idea to build one here when we are less than one hour from Valencia airport and I was right," confessed Vicento Bore, a 78-year old pensioner playing cards with friends in the tranquil square of Vilanova d'Alcorea, a village with 700 inhabitants less than two miles from Castellon airport.

"To think that we were worried about all the noise of suddenly being in a flight path," he laughed. "What a joke!

Another example is Huesca airport, opened in 2007 in the shadow of the Pyrenees in northeastern Spain, regional authorities hoped to attract skiers to its slopes, even subsiding the now defunct Pyrenair. Seeing only 6,228 passengers in the whole of 2009, one report stated that each passenger cost the public coffers some 700 euros (£600) and last year its losses amounted to 6m euros (£5.2m).

**242 passengers were handled by Huesca airport in 2015!**

**GERMANY**

**A total of €8.6m will have to be spent to make Berlin's Brandenburg Airport operational. The Brandenburg facility is near the Schonefeld Airport, already operating. Brandenburg Berlin Airport IS to open… one day!**

Germany is known for its efficiency. The world beats a path to its doorstep to buy cars and hi-tech appliances. However, their renowned productivity doesn't seem to have spread to the building of Berlin's long awaited Brandenburg Airport.

It was supposed to open in 2011, and even now its runways still remain empty and not one passenger has passed through its terminals.

The project has been short of funds and this problem was further confounded after Hartmut Mehdorn, the CEO of the new airport, said a further €1.1 billion ($1.25 billion) would be needed to complete the facility, which would bring the total cost to €5.5 billion ($6.26 billion), almost double its initial budget, according to Der Spiegel.

The vice president of the operation, Rainer Bretschneider, said the German capital's new airport would be opened *"in the second half of 2017,"* Deutsche Welle reports. However, given the amount of problems the transportation hub has suffered, perhaps this date is looking slightly optimistic.

A faulty fire safety system added to the delays. To compound matters, the man hired to oversee the system's implementation didn't have the correct engineering qualifications! It took eight years for someone to notice and fire him.

The EU pledged €30 million ($34.1 million) in 2009 to help with the completion of the project, with the last tranche being paid in 2013, Der Spiegel reports. However, Brussels now wants to know why money was spent on extras such as elevated parking spaces to give VIP's better access to the airport gates.

The numerous setbacks cost Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit his job as he stepped down in December, two years before his term was due to end. He was also the head of the airport supervisory council, and was in charge of supervising the construction and opening of the facility.

Berlin questions whether there is actually any need for the airport; the city already has two airports - Tegel and Schonefeld.

### Latest news Berlin Brandenburg Airport – November 16 :

**The bosses of Berlin's new international airport have been criticized for offering bonuses to the companies building the long-delayed and over-budget project.**

Karsten Mühlenfeld, the head of the state-owned company responsible for Berlin Brandenburg Airport (BER), told Bild am Sonntag that construction companies were being offered financial incentives to speed up their work on the building so that it can be opened by the end of 2017.

According to Tagesspiegel, the potential bonuses add up to around €10 million. Each construction company could receive around €1 million. Costs for BER, which was supposed to open in 2011, have skyrocketed from an original projection of €2.5 billion to €6.4 billion. The bonuses will only be paid if the passenger terminal is ready by July 2017.

News that companies which have participated in a project dogged by scandal, corruption and delays could receive such bonuses met with immediate criticism from members of the Berlin Senate.

"I have a few questions for the airport hierarchy that I won't be saying in public," said Berlin finance minister Christian Görke of Die Linke (The Left Party).

Berlin authorities have pledged that the airport will open in 2017, six years behind schedule. A major cause of the delay has been problems with fire detection systems which did not meet national fire safety standards.
An internal report seen by Bild earlier in the year suggests that the airport is unlikely to open before 2019, with work currently crawling along at a snail's pace. One former project planner for the airport has even suggested that the airport will never open due to complications involved in rebuilding its fire safety systems.
On social media, news of the bonuses was met with ridicule.
***Der Humour-Austicker commented "Construction companies set to receive millions in bonuses if BER is finished by the end of next year… at least botching things pays."***
Germans have sarcastically been calling the project not Flughafen (airport) but Fluchhafen (cursed-port).
Focusing on twenty airports in Estonia, Greece, Spain, Italy and Poland the court concluded that a need for the work undertaken could only be demonstrated in around half of the cases, that delays affected 17 of the projects , cost-overran in 9 and that "more than half of the newly built (or upgraded) infrastructures were not fully used. In some cases this was even so at peak hours." The funding, the court says, was "not cost-effective and that seven of the 20 airports examined are not profitable." Only with continued public financial support will they be guaranteed to stay open.
Specific examples include Kastoria Airport, where revenue was just €176,000 for the period 2005-2013 and the cost to keep the airport open was €7.7 million. Over this period a mere 25,000 passengers used the airport representing a loss of €275 per person. At this same airport €16.5 million was spent on extending the runway in order to accommodate a different (presumably larger) type of aircraft. However none of these aircraft have utilised this new facility and in the words of the European Court of Auditors: "this cannot be considered as an effective use of public funds."
**Spain (24 per cent), Poland (21 per cent), Italy (17 per cent) and Greece (13 per cent) accounted for 75 per cent of the EU's Cohesion Funds allocations for** airport infrastructure investments between 2000-2013.
It seems beyond belief that such massive amounts of money – a juicy €2.1 billion (if you include the contributions of the European Regional Development Fund) has been given to these four countries alone (N.B. not all of this spending is included in the audit).
In the audited period only four of the airports were regularly profitable, seven had a vague prospect of being profitable in "the medium term" but another seven had significant losses. More than half of the funds went into projects that were "unnecessarily large." For example the tripling of the terminal space at Fuerteventura airport in Spain added 14 boarding gates, 8 luggage belts and four additional contact gates for a tidy €21 million. The reason for such large scale upgrades was a passenger forecast of 7.5 million. However by 2013 only 4.3 million had been achieved. There is a certain irony that part of the airport has been closed in order to reduce overall costs.
There are many more such examples in the report **just be clear that taxpayer's cash is being thrown around in a fashion reminiscent of the last days of ancient Rome.**
And talking about EU White Elephants, don't for god's sake mention the Strasbourg Parliament, only occupied for 48 days a year, costing it is estimated around to Europe's taxpayers - 2 homes rather than one - was estimated in a recent report to be £105m a year.
Austerity may be hitting some countries hard, but looking at certain EU funded projects, one would never know. From Brandenburg Airport to Donkeypedia, these and other white elephants are flushing billions of taxpayer's euros down the drain.
Looking at some of the projects the EU has funded over the last decade, one would think the organization had limitless funds at its disposal. Millions across the continent are currently living in poverty following the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis. One in three Greeks is living below the poverty line, while the nation has an unemployment rate of nearly 30 percent. However, that figure is double amongst the country's youth. Spain is not fairing much better, with almost a quarter of the working population unable to find a job.
Despite pressing needs to address these problems, the EU has been lavishing billions of euros on extravagant projects, with poor oversight into what will happen to these schemes when completed.
Have a look at another six 'white elephants' the EU has funded, which are leaving taxpayers around the European Union thinking why they were ever sanctioned.

## Fun in the Sun: The EU's diplomatic mission in Vanuatu

A diplomatic career certainly has its perks, with great living conditions and plenty of high profile connections. However, perhaps the best posting of the lot could be to the far-flung Pacific island of Vanuatu, with its endless, stunning beaches and relaxed, dolce vita lifestyle. The tiny island archipelago, located some 2,000 kilometers northeast of Brisbane, Australia, was the home to an EU mission of seven lucky diplomats, who also had the bonus of being some 15,700 kilometers distant from HQ in Brussels.
A decision to maintain an EU diplomatic presence on the island was a strange and certainly costly decision. Only four nations, France, Australia, China and New Zealand have permanent embassy's on the island, while from 2008 to 2013, the EU spent €23.2 million ($26.4 million) to help boost economic growth and to create jobs. From 2014 to 2020, a further €31 million ($35.3 million) has been earmarked for Vanuatu, according to the EU External Action website.
The permanent diplomatic mission was finally shut down after 29 years at the end of 2013. However, it managed to spend $184,000 on teaching the locals how to play cricket… This was presided over by the charge d'affaires Robert de Raeve, a Belgian national, who after benefits were thrown in, took home a salary of around $200,000, while paying a paltry 15 percent tax.

## Spain's desalination conundrum

A desalination plant built in one of the driest areas of Europe would seem like a good idea. However, changes in the economic climate together with political mismanagement have made Europe's largest desalination facility, built in Spain, one of the continent's biggest white elephants.
The project started in 2007, with the aim of being completed in 2009. Six years on, the plant has finally been finished. It is

just lacking power, and perhaps more crucially customers to make the expensive facility viable. The project has already lost €55 million ($62.6 million) worth of EU funding because it wasn't completed on time. This sum was to be provided by Europe as a subsidy to help fund the cost of the €300-million ($341-million) facility. It won't receive this money until the plant is operational. Torrevieja, in the Alicante region of the country's southeast, was chosen to build the second largest desalination facility in the world. It was part of a grand scheme to guarantee water supply to one of Spain's booming growth areas.

The aim was to provide two million cubic meters of fresh water per day, but interest dried up following the economic crisis in 2007. Since the crash, electricity prices have almost doubled, while water costs have remained the same – the lowest in Europe, according to Eurostat. The Spanish Association of Water Supply and Sanitation states that only 40 percent of the cost of desalinizing seawater is covered, rendering it unviable.

*"It's incompatible to raise electricity prices without raising water prices,"* said Miguel Ángel Sanz, a veteran of the country's desalination industry. *"But they haven't passed on the deficit because water is a political issue and raising water bills pays a price in elections,"* Sanz added, as quoted by the New York Times. *"The problem is that, unlike the power sector, most of the companies involved are public."*

The need for the desalination plant to get up and running is pressing. The surrounding area is arid and water shortages are common. The new facility would provide enough water to supply the Murcia region and half the Alicante region. However, residents may have to wait a long time until the facility reaches full capacity.

### Tunnel vision: Does Lyon need underground link to Turin?

It has been hailed as the final link in connecting Barcelona and Bucharest – a rail network spanning the continent. However, the Turin to Lyon tunnel is proving to be a headache for the EU, which has pumped billions into the project. Work began on the 57-kilometer tunnel in 2013, designed to link Lyon and Turin. The EU has agreed to provide around €3.4 billion ($3.87 billion) of the €8.5 billion ($9.6 billion) needed for construction costs. The overall cost for the project has risen to €26 billion ($29.6 billion), the Euractiv website reports. However, the project has proved unpopular with locals and environmentalists and Green MEP's have managed to get the EU's anti-fraud office, OLAF, to investigate the spiraling costs of the tunnel, with the French and Italian governments providing the rest. They see the project as a complete waste of taxpayer money.

*"Trans-European projects have been a strategic disaster for the European Union. The EU thinks these big projects are the only way to bring about a transport union,"* said the Italian co-president of the European Green party, Monica Frassoni. She warned that the Lyon-Turin line could use up a large amount of EU investment *"to the detriment of other projects,"*according to Euractiv. The total EU budget for transport infrastructure on the continent for 2014-2020 is €23.3 billion ($26.5 billion).

Opponents of the tunnel say it is a complete waste of European funds because an existing tunnel already exists that provides rapid transport through the Alps, and this transportation route is being used at 20 percent of potential capacity.

*"We do not want the Rhône Alpes and the Susa Valleys to look like those developing countries, where infrastructures built have never served any purpose ... except for benefiting their developers, and directly financed by European or international solidarity,"* Frassoni said, as reported by the European Greens website.

### Spanish sporting suicide: €60m stadium lying idle

The Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid and the Camp Nou in Barcelona are two of the world's most famous sporting stadiums in the world. Hundreds of thousands of footballing 'pilgrims' travel from around the world to get a glimpse of these iconic grounds. However, it is unlikely the Reyno de Navarra Arena will ever achieve this status, or will even host an event.

The arena, located in Pamplona, in the north of Spain, was approved for construction in 2008, as an anti-crisis measure by the Socialist government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. It cost €58 million ($66 million) and can hold 10 thousand spectators. The city has a local basketball team, which has its own arena. Given that the team are not one of the leading lights of the sport in Spain, it is unlikely they would want to become tenants of the new facility, whose security and maintenance alone cost €250,000 a year ($284,000).

*"The demands and habits of the general public have changed due to the crisis,"* Angel Vazquez, a consultant for the project, told Spanish newspaper El País.

Socialist party politician, Roberto Jimenez said, *"If we could go back to 2008, nobody would have taken this decision (to go ahead with the build), we thought that the crisis would be over quickly,"* as reported by the Local.

The local government has said it will not finance the costs of running the arena alone and is looking for private investors to help out. However, given Pamplona has a population of just under 200,000, it's difficult to see how the arena can become profitable, and it looks as though it's destined to become yet another white elephant.

### The EU's $10 million 'Donkey' ride

The EU has been involved in some wasteful projects, but this may trump the lot! The scheme involved a real life donkey visiting schools in the Netherlands and recording what it saw. Donkeypedia was part of a $9.9 million cultural project to get people to think about the similarities and differences of various European identities. It involved a real-life donkey called Asino trotting around various schools in the Netherlands, to meet school children and **report the findings in a blog! (Give me a break!)**

According to Mats Persson, research director of Open Europe, a pan-European think tank: ***"Too often, EU money is wasted on inefficient projects which are based on unrealistic expectations, or for which there is no real demand."***

***"Because of the way the EU's spending schemes are set up, bizarre or wasteful projects can receive funding, which never would have received money if subject only to national spending priorities."***

### Gone to ruin: the £3.4m white elephant backed by the EU and paid for by taxpayers

When it opened five years ago, dignitaries promised there would be "nothing else" like the **Canolfan Cywain rural heritage** centre. If, by that, they meant that the centre in North Wales would become a £3.4 million white elephant and local laughing stock, they would have been spot on. For the building, opened in 2008 with the help of a European Union grant, now stands empty, overgrown with weeds and falling into ruin.

Built beside an isolated farmer's lane, the centre, which boasted of bringing together art appreciation, agricultural education and Welsh heritage, was supposed to "allow all sectors of the community to participate in the economic and social development of the area". Instead, it officially closed more than a year ago in the face of dwindling visitor numbers and with spiralling debts. Final accounts for the company running the project suggest almost negligible trading, although precise figures are hard to come by.

It is perhaps the most striking example of wastage by the EU's structural and cohesion fund — **a £40 billion a year behemoth that accounts for just over a third of all the EU's spending — but it is far from the only one.**

The EU is co-financing as many as a million projects across the continent through the fund — and the calls for radical reform are intensifying.

Designed to "narrow" the gap between the EU's richest and poorest regions, the failure of such flagship projects as Canolfan Cywain is an example, the critics say, of Brussels waste at its worst.

A dossier compiled by the Conservative Party in Europe has highlighted a series of controversial projects to have received taxpayers' money via the fund, including: A replication of a Roman village, complete with fake hot baths, which was constructed in Perl-Borg, a small town in a wealthy area of west Germany with the help of a £1.8 million EU grant. The EU insists it only paid for the Roman gardens; A "Beach City" in the Hungarian countryside with a version of Venice's Bridge of Sighs that received £4.5 million; A Belgian university — "Provinciale Hogeschool" in Limburg — that received £412,000 over seven years for "project GameHUB", to develop computer games, including one involving the "history of puppet theatre".

The Court of Auditors, the official body which inspects the EU's finances, has raised concerns about the spending of structural funds.

**In the summer it published a critical report into the £54 billion spent on road building schemes** across the EU since 2000. **The court concluded that "insufficient attention was paid to ensuring cost-effectiveness of the projects". It found that motorways were being built where regular "express" roads would have sufficed.**

Out of 24 road schemes audited, only seven were built at the original contract price. In almost half, the costs overran by at least a fifth.

Britain already contributes more than £4 billion a year to the structural fund, via Brussels, which then redistributes the money around Europe.

Some money comes back to the UK in a bureaucratic carousel, described as "irrational" by opponents of the funding scheme. They question why Britain, Germany, France, Sweden and other wealthy EU countries receive structural funding at all. Examples of taxpayers' money sent to Brussels and then returned to the UK include: £5 million earmarked for the British Fashion Council, based in Somerset House, in central London; and £22 million spent on building a cable car across the Thames, in east London, which has been criticised for dwindling numbers of passengers. Daily usage is down to 2,653 journeys, of which just four are said to be taken by commuters.

Marta Andreasen, a former European Commission chief accountant and now a Conservative MEP and spokesman on budgetary control, said: "The levels of taxpayers' money wasted here is staggering but not surprising.

"While millions of European citizens are still suffering the effects of austerity, the EU is happy to lavish billions on ludicrous Roman villages. It really is a case of expensive fiddling while Rome burns."

## READER OPINIONS PLEA

I am very curious, and unfortunately quite opinionated, and as you realise, I am firmly on the side of Brexit, have done my best to put forward logical, fact based arguments,I still would welcome hearing from Readers who contend that the EU is a good thing. I seemed to notice a prevalence on Facebook entries, particularly very Pro the EU. I can point to for example one very good project that affected this region. The EU promoted the planting of better quality AOC vines, over twenty years ago, and as a result the region, particularly Cotes des Provence appelations have garnered wholesale appreciation, and exports worldwide. They also paid to subsidise replanting of olive groves, so that after many years of the olive industry in the Var, and along the Mediterranean, being in the doldrums, farmers replanted, and now the olive oil industry is booming. However at the same time I would point out that through lack of oversight, lack of inspection, there are also hundreds of fake, fairy tale, and totally non-existant olive groves throughout the region, particularly, and I hate to point the finger, in Southern Italy. One wonders how many, let's say, millions of euros found their way to private pockets. People found a way of rubber stamping the paperwork etc, and getting the funding.

**MOBILE PHONE ROAMING CHARGES**

Yes the EU finally managed to get mobile phone manufacturers to all issue their products with the same plug re-charger, how many years did that take?

However they still have totally failed to get same mobile phone manufacturers to cut down their roaming charges, which are exhorbitant, it one moves from one country to another.

This was supposed to have happened years ago, it was all but signed this spring, but for another spanner in the works, the phone manufacturers were imposing a 90 day cap! Consumers rebelled, why a 90 day cap, one might be travelling all year. So as far as I know mobile phone roaming charges are still as expensive as were before.

But do let me know of interesting policies, successful projects the EU has brought about – hopefully without excessive costs to the EU taxpayer.

And the thing is, is that it is not EU money that is being spent so profligately, it is our money, yours, mine, our taxes. The EU does not make money, and is not in any way held acccountable. If they were a commercial company, obeying commercial company rules, they would have gone bust in the first year.

EU bureaucrats had spent seven years on negotiating the CETA agreement with Canada only for it to meet a last minute objection from the province of Wallonia, Belgium. This was eventually ironed out, but then met a further objection. On the whole demonstrating how incredibly difficult it is to negotiate with 27 partners, any of whom at any time can throw a spanner in the works, usually for totally insular, protectionist interests. So how much are the much vaunted values of EU negotiators worth, given the above history, possibly the UK is much better off without them.

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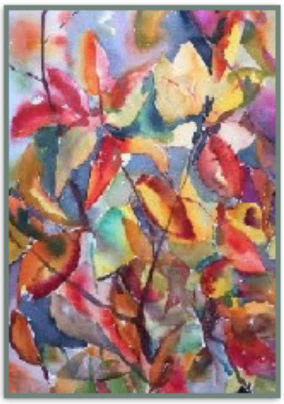

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