

LORGUES

Samedi 14 décembre 2019
20 h 45 - Espace François Mitterrand

Concert de Noël

Ensemble Choral de Lorgues
 Direction : Bruno PICAUDÉ

Ensemble Cad Vocal
 Direction : J.M GARDON

Harmonie Lorguaise
 Direction : David TALLENT

Concert organisé par la municipalité
 Entrée libre



LES ARCS SUR ARGENS

16 h 30 - Eglise Saint Jean Baptiste
 Entrée libre

DIMANCHE 05 JANVIER

Ensemble CAD VOCAL

Ola Gjeilo
 Eric Whitacre
 Travis Cottrell

"Les classiques de demain"
"The Latin Jazz Mass"
 Martin Völlinger

Choeur & orchestre
 Direction : Jean-Marie GARDON



REGUSSE

20 h 30 - Eglise Saint Laurent
 Entrée libre

SAMEDI 21 DECEMBRE

Ensemble CAD VOCAL

Ola Gjeilo
 Eric Whitacre
 Travis Cottrell

"Les classiques de demain"
"The Latin Jazz Mass"
 Martin Völlinger

Choeur & orchestre
 Direction : Jean-Marie GARDON



Ensemble CAD VOCAL

DIMANCHE 12 JANVIER
 Salle Frédéric Mistral
16H



Ola Gjeilo
 Eric Whitacre
 Travis Cottrell

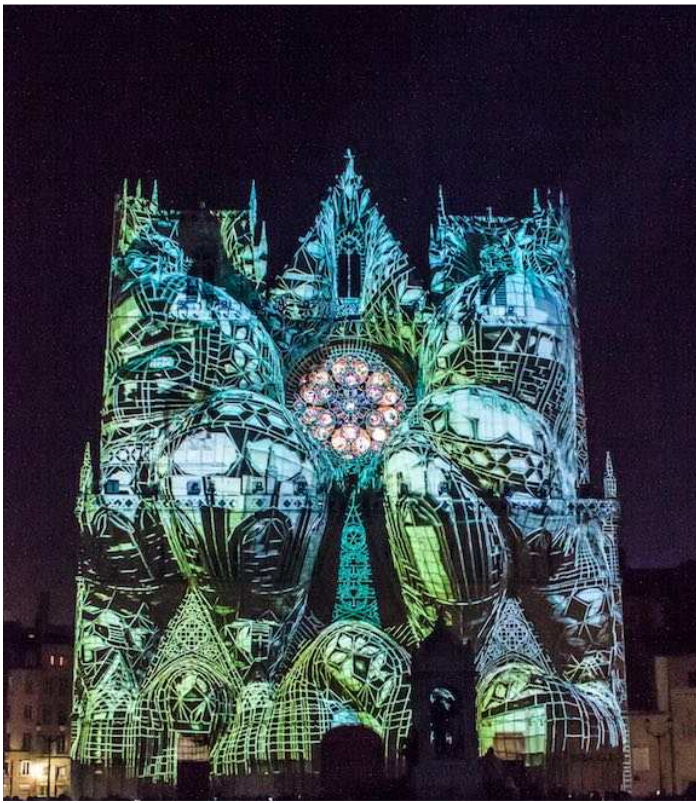
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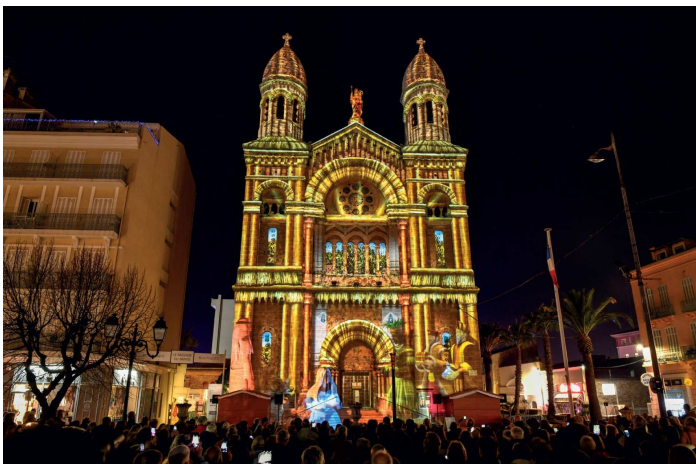
GRATUIT !

SEILLONS SOURCE D'ARGENS



Fête des Lumières 2019 — Lyon
Thursday 5 - Sunday 8 December
Thursday & Sunday: 19h à 23h
Friday & Saturday: 20h Midnight
<http://www.fetedeslumieres.lyon.fr/>



ST. RAPHAEL – FETES DE LA LUMIERE

All sorts of wonderful entertainments 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. In Saint-Raphaël, December is full of colour: light parades, magical moments, light displays and other colourful shows, ice-skating, a Christmas village, and more. Every year, the Festival begins with a opening sequence, over the course of which, the lights are switched on in a theatrical, musical way. Skating rink of course. From 21 December



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Loads of magical Christmas Lights, Illuminations, skating rinks, and Father Christmas, all over the Var. Skating rinks all over, Montauroux, Draguignan, St. Tropez. The illuminations start 6 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.

Baz'Art

Marché de Noël

Vendredi 13
de 14 h à 19 h
Le pot du Baz'Art à 17h30

Samedi 14
de 10 h à 19 h
Le pot du Baz'Art à 17h30

Dimanche 15
de 10 h à 13 h

Samedi 14
à 17 h 30

Concert de Noël Église St Martin
par les élèves du Conservatoire
Rostropovitch Landowski

ENTRÉE LIBRE

Le Plan de la Tour

DECEMBRE 2019

Ancien Presbytère - Place Clemenceau

Culture
cultures

Renseignements
Office de Tourisme 04 94 43 28 27

Inscriptions au Service Animations 04 94 55 20 50 et C&C 06 03 35 77 22

conception Alain Rolland 04 94 97 17 03

PLAN DE LA TOUR CHRISTMAS MARKET

The Christmas market in Le Plan de la Tour takes place from 13th - 15th December in the Ancien Presbytère, close to the village church. It will be open on Friday afternoon, throughout the day on Saturday, and Sunday until 13h. The event is known as the Baz'Art de Noël as there's an emphasis on hand made and artistic item that may be used as Christmas decoration, or as gifts. Also on sale are various British goods, including Christmas crackers and charity greetings cards, shortbread, English sweets, mincemeat, etc.



OPERA DE TOULON – BIZET'S THE PEARL FISHERS

Friday 27 December 20h

Sunday 29 December 14h30

Tuesday 31 December 20h.



AND THEN ! BY TRENCHERMAN

It has been our habit for many years, to make a trip to Venice, an important entry in our calendar.

The habit takes place at the end of November, which coincides with the birthday of she who must be remembered, although now it is a little confusing as she, does not have birthdays any more.

Venice was the first amazing place I ever visited in my life, it was 1956 and a generous and loving aunt and uncle took me on a Mediterranean cruise for three unimaginable weeks, so unimaginable that upon my return to school, mentioning this odyssey was greeted with contempt and disbelief. The two days spent in Venice left an indelible mark upon my being, which has never diminished.

And so this year in the face of the worst floods since records were large black discs with a whole in the middle, we set off our vision unblurred, our expectations undiminished.

We did take the precaution of wellies and rainwear, and I am delighted to say that on the one occasion we wore them, they were unnecessary. Venice was high and dry and blissfully empty of tourists.

We are even more creatures of habit in that we use the same restaurants, eat much the same food, drink too much Amarone and complain even more about Harry's Bar, even though we always go. I wrote an article some years ago which I entitled Harry doesn't love here any more, and it is true.

We always visit an Osteria called Alla Madonna, where I first broke bread in 1956, a story I always share with their very jolly staff who look at me and say, that was before I was born sir.

We make our restaurant reservations three months in advance, the restaurants we go to are always on the small and snug side and the whole event is usually one of content and contentment.

Over the years we have experimented with the journey, car plane , car, car etc. and this year it was the turn of the train.

The outward journey was delightful Nice to Milan a splendid ride alongside the Ligurian sea, and the an easy change in Milan, and straight into Venice, onto a vaporetto and into our hotel.

Effortless and comfortable and without a hitch until we reached Ventimiglia on the return journey, where it was announced that due to unfavourable weather in France, the train would stop here and we would be bussed to Nice. The rain which we had not seen in Venice had come to meet us, we trooped off the train, formed an Italian queue surrounding the bus and there was the usual ' after you, no, after you. Always pronounced with elbows at head height. As we approached Nice where a dear friend was

due to collect us, the rain intensified and by the time we reached Nice Station it was biblical.

Our friend was there to meet us and we set off on the last leg of our, by now, less than grand tour.

And that is when it began. We could not get onto the motorway, it was closed, we could not get to the coastal road, it was closed. After making several circuits trying to escape Nice, we got onto a road going up to Mougins, wondering if we might find a bit of the route Napoleon still available.

We had been almost surfing in the car and this was undoubtedly why, when a serious threat lit up on the dashboard, and in the middle of a forest, we came to a juddering halt. It was not a good night to be broken down and definitely not a good place.

To raise our spirits we regaled our faithful friend with tales of our triumphal trip, singing the praises of Antiche Carampane, a family owned and run restaurant which produces the best home cooking you are likely to encounter, and made famous by the ubiquitous Rick Stein setting out on one of his wonderful crusades from there. We went on about Alle Testiere, now famous because of Angela Hartnet saying it was her favourite place to eat, and is now harder to get into, but worth it. We spoke of the baby razor clams, as sweet as a Maharajas delight, of the fresh new seasons soft shell crabs, of the now hard to get fresh water eels from the lagune. Of the opera we had enjoyed, of the load of Pollocks on the walls of the Guggenheim, and all of this in a small car steaming up and getting smaller as the rain lashed down making Venice seem like the Kalahari desert.

And just when you thought that nothing else could go wrong, it didn't!

The nice man with his Depannage truck rolled up, took a look at the menacing message and with a few deft strokes the car was back and running. We set off down the hill towards Cannes to look for a hotel and as we passed the A8, it opened and we were the first car to get onto it.

The rain stopped. We scuttled along to our exit and just after the witching hour we set off up the hill for home. Even the large sign which announced that the road was closed in 7 kms, did not disturb our new found joy. She who was keen to see her cats announced that she would walk the last part, but did not have to. So writing this down helps me overcome the memories and is a cathartic experience, according to an eminent Psychiatrist. So there you have it, and by the time it comes to return to La Serenissima. All the worst bits will be forgotten.

Pip, pip

THE EU & CAP How Oligarchs and Populists Milk the E.U. for Millions

The European Union spends \$65 billion a year subsidizing agriculture. But a chunk of that money emboldens strongmen, enriches politicians and finances corrupt dealing.

By Selam Gebrekidan, Matt Apuzzo and Benjamin Novak

CSAKVAR, Hungary — Under Communism, farmers labored in the fields that stretch for miles around this town west of Budapest, reaping wheat and corn for a government that had stolen their land.

Today, their children toil for new overlords, a group of oligarchs and political patrons who have annexed the land through opaque deals with the Hungarian government. They have created a modern twist on a feudal system, giving jobs and aid to the compliant, and punishing the mutinous.

These land barons, as it turns out, are financed and emboldened by the European Union.

Every year, the 28-country bloc pays out \$65 billion in farm subsidies intended to support farmers around the Continent and keep rural communities alive. But across Hungary and much of Central and Eastern Europe, the bulk goes to a connected and powerful few. The prime minister of the Czech Republic collected tens of millions of dollars in subsidies just last year. Subsidies have underwritten Mafia-style land grabs in Slovakia and Bulgaria.

Europe's farm program, a system that was instrumental in forming the European Union, is now being exploited by the same antidemocratic forces that threaten the bloc from within.

This is because governments in Central and Eastern Europe, several led by populists, have wide latitude in how the subsidies, funded by taxpayers across Europe, are distributed — even as the entire system is shrouded in secrecy.

A New York Times investigation, conducted in nine countries for much of 2019, uncovered a subsidy system that is deliberately opaque, grossly undermines the European Union's environmental goals and is warped by corruption and self-dealing.

Times Insider: The Story Behind the Story

We Just Wanted to Talk E.U. Farm Policy. Why Was Someone Always Looking Over Our Shoulders?

Nov. 3, 2019

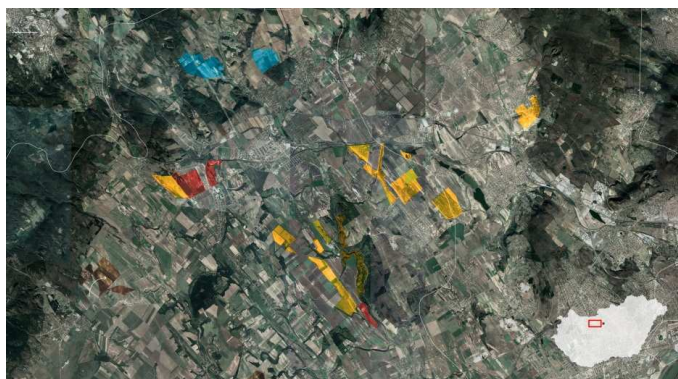


Europe's machinery in Brussels enables this rough-hewed corruption because confronting it would mean changing a program that helps hold a precarious union together. European leaders disagree about many things, but they all count on generous subsidies and wide discretion in spending them. Bucking that system to rein in abuses in newer member states would disrupt political and economic fortunes across the Continent.

This is why, with the farm bill up for renewal this year, the focus in Brussels isn't on rooting out corruption or tightening controls. Instead, lawmakers are moving to give national leaders more authority on how they spend money — over [the objections of internal auditors](#).

The program is the biggest item in the European Union's central budget, accounting for 40 percent of expenditures. It's one of the largest subsidy programs in the world.

Yet some lawmakers in Brussels who write and vote on farm policy admit they often have no idea where the money goes. One place it goes is here in Fejer County, home to Hungary's populist prime minister, Viktor Orban. An icon to Europe's far right and a harsh critic of Brussels and European elites, Mr. Orban is happy to accept European Union money. The Times investigation found that he uses European subsidies as a patronage system that enriches his friends and family, protects his political interests and punishes his rivals.



Mr. Orban's government has auctioned off thousands of acres of state land to his family members and close associates, including one childhood friend who has become one of the richest men in the country, the Times investigation found. Those who control the land, in turn, qualify for millions in subsidies from the European Union.

"It's an absolutely corrupt system," said Jozsef Angyan, who once served as Mr. Orban's under secretary for rural development.

The brazen patronage in Fejer County was not supposed to happen. Since the earliest days of the European Union, farm policy has had outsized importance as an immutable system of public welfare. In the United States, Social Security or Medicare are perhaps the closest equivalents, but neither of them is a sacrosanct provision written into the nation's founding documents.

The European Union spends three times as much as the United States on farm subsidies each year, but as the system has expanded, accountability has not kept up. National governments [publish some information on recipients](#), but the largest beneficiaries hide behind complex ownership structures. And although farmers are paid, in part, based on their acreage,

property data is kept secret, making it harder to track land grabs and corruption. The European Union maintains a master database but, citing the difficulty of downloading the requested information, refused to provide The Times a copy.

In response, the Times compiled its own database that, while incomplete, supplemented publicly available information on subsidy payments. This included corporate and government records; data on land sales and leases; and leaked documents and nonpublic land records received from whistle-blowers and researchers.

The Times confirmed land deals that benefited a select group of political insiders, visited farms in several countries, and used government records to determine subsidy payments received by some of the largest of these beneficiaries. The Times investigation also built on the work done by [Hungarian journalists](#) and [others](#) who [have investigated](#) land [abuses](#) despite a [media crackdown](#) by Mr. Orban's government.



Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary arriving at the European Union headquarters in Brussels in October. Credit...Olivier Matthys/Agence France-Presse —



Prime Minister Andrej Babis of the Czech Republic is his country's most prominent recipient of European farm subsidies. Credit...Martin Divisek/European Pressphoto Agency

In the Czech Republic, the highest-profile subsidy recipient is Andrej Babis, the billionaire agriculturalist who is also the prime minister. The Times analysis found his companies in the Czech Republic collected at least \$42 million in agricultural subsidies last year. Mr. Babis, who denied any wrongdoing, is the subject of two [conflict-of-interest audits this year](#). The Czech government has, in recent years, ushered in rules that make it easier for big companies — his is the biggest — to receive more subsidies.

"The European Union is paying so much money to an oligarch who's also a politician," said Lukas Wagenknecht, a Czech senator and economist who used to work for Mr. Babis. "And what's the result? You have the most powerful politician in the

Czech Republic, and he's completely supported by the European Union."

In Bulgaria, the subsidies have become welfare for the farming elite. The [Bulgarian Academy of Science has found](#) that 75 percent of the main type of European agricultural subsidy in the country ends up in the hands of about 100 entities. This spring, the authorities carried out raids across the country that exposed corrupt ties between government officials and agricultural businessmen. One of the largest flour producers in the country was charged with fraud in connection with the subsidies and is awaiting trial.

In Slovakia, the top prosecutor has acknowledged the existence of an "agricultural Mafia." Small farmers have reported being beaten and extorted for land that is valuable for the subsidies it receives. [A journalist, Jan Kuciak, was murdered](#) last year [while investigating Italian mobsters](#) who had infiltrated the farm industry, profited from subsidies and built relationships with powerful politicians.



A vigil for the Slovak journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée, Martina Kusnirova, last year. Credit...David Duducz/European Pressphoto Agency

Despite this, proposed reforms are often watered down or brushed aside in Brussels and many other European capitals. European Union officials dismissed [a 2015 report](#) that recommended tightening farm-subsidy rules as a safeguard against Central and Eastern European land grabbing. The European Parliament rejected a bill that would have banned politicians from benefiting from the subsidies they administer. And top officials swat away suggestions of fraud.

"We have an almost watertight system," Rudolf Mőgele, one of Europe's top agricultural officials, said in an interview earlier this year.

Unstated is that, while audits can catch incidents of outright fraud, rooting out self-dealing and legalized corruption is far more difficult. The European Union seldom interferes with national affairs, giving deference to elected leaders. Few leaders have attempted such widespread, brazen exploitation of the subsidy system as Mr. Orban in Hungary. At rallies, he deploys a false narrative that Brussels wants to strip away farm aid and use it to bring in migrants, and that he alone can stop it.

Farmers who criticize the government or the patronage system say they have been denied grants or faced surprise audits and unusual environmental inspections, in what amounts to a sophisticated intimidation campaign that harkens to the Communist era.



An old Trabant at the farm of Istvan Teichel in Lepseny, Hungary. Credit...Akos Stiller for The New York Times

"It's not like when a car comes for you at night and takes you away," said Istvan Teichel, who farms a small plot in Mr. Orban's home county. "This is deeper."

One man who did speak up was Mr. Angyan, the former under secretary for rural development. A jowly, gray-haired rural economist with a mischievous smile, Mr. Angyan became an unlikely crusader for small farmers. He served under Mr. Orban, initially thinking him a reformer, only to leave angry and disillusioned. He canvassed the countryside, documenting the government's dubious land deals and mistreatment of small farmers.

And then he disappeared from public life.

A Thief Economy

To understand how leaders like Viktor Orban exploit Europe's largest subsidy program requires going back 15 years, to when Hungary was spinning with optimism and change.

In a moment that symbolized Western triumph in the Cold War, the European Union officially absorbed much of the breadbasket of Central and Eastern Europe on May 1, 2004. Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia — all former Soviet satellites — were among 10 nations that joined the bloc that day (Romania and Bulgaria joined three years later).

Amid the celebrations, Mr. Orban was in political purgatory. He had been the prime minister who helped guide Hungary into the union — only to see voters turn him and his party, Fidesz, out of office in 2002. Now he noticed one of the first protest groups to emerge in the new Hungary: farmers.

Hungarian farmers clogged Budapest's narrow streets in 2005 for a mass demonstration. They did not oppose European Union membership. Far from it. As new European citizens, they wanted the subsidies they were eligible for under the bloc's Common Agricultural Policy, or C.A.P., but the payments hadn't arrived. Hungary's left-leaning government was too disorganized and unprepared.



Hungarian farmers protesting in Budapest in 2005. Hundreds of farmers drove their tractors to the capital to demand the payment of European Union and national subsidies.Credit...Laszlo Balogh/Reuters

From the outset, the European subsidies represented a pot of money scarcely fathomable to farmers accustomed to Communist austerity. The program was designed after the Second World War to boost farming salaries and ramp up food production in countries laid waste by conflict. Over time, it became a critical foundation in creating the borderless economy that would grow into the modern European Union.

European leaders understood that absorbing former Soviet satellites would bring challenges, but never fully grasped the potential for corruption in the subsidy program.

At its heart, the program is defined by a simple proposition: Farmers are mostly paid based on how many acres they harvest. Whoever controls the most land gets the most money.

And Central and Eastern Europe had lots of land, much of it still state-owned, a legacy of the Communist era. European officials worked closely with incoming governments on issues such as meeting food testing standards, or controlling borders, yet only limited attention was paid to the subsidies.

"They thought they would change us," said Jana Polakova, a Czech agricultural scientist. "They were not prepared for us."

Mr. Orban showed hints of what was to come even before Hungary joined the bloc. Before he left office in 2002, Mr. Orban sold 12 state-owned farming companies, which became known as the "Dirty Dozen," to a group of politically connected buyers. Buyers got cut-rate deals and exclusive rights to the land for 50 years, making them eligible for subsidies when Hungary became part of the system two years later.

"This is a crony economy, where friends and political allies get special treatment," said Gyorgy Rasko, a former Hungarian agriculture minister. "Orban didn't invent the system. He's just running it more efficiently."

Out of office, Mr. Orban watched the farmers' protests in Budapest and saw the potential political and economic power of subsidies in the countryside. He also was intrigued by the man who negotiated successfully on behalf of the protesters: Jozsef Angyan.



Farmers at home near a pig farm partially owned by Lorinc Meszaros, a childhood friend of Mr. Orban. Under Communism, it used to be a collective farm.Credit...Akos Stiller for The New York Times

After the fall of Communism, Mr. Angyan made the case that small landholders could keep villages alive through sustainable practices. He founded an environmental program at one of the nation's most prestigious universities and helped build an organic farm called Kishantos with 1,100 acres of wheat, corn and flowers.

"He wanted to help the local farmers," said Mr. Teichel, the farmer from Fejer County, who said Mr. Angyan was a rare

champion of the small farmer in a countryside where corrupt politicians ran a "thief economy."

Eight years after losing office, Mr. Orban again ran for prime minister in 2010 and wanted to court the rural vote. Mr. Angyan was now a member of Parliament, and his ties to the farmers gave him political clout in the countryside. Mr. Orban summoned him to his modest home west of Budapest.

It was a chilly February morning and Mr. Angyan had a cold. So Mr. Orban fixed tea over a wood-burning stove and, for two hours, the two men spoke about the future of Hungarian farms. Mr. Angyan envisioned a government that gave small farmers more political and economic clout. Mr. Orban made it clear that he wanted to implement Mr. Angyan's ideas and offered to make him under secretary of rural development.

"When Orban speaks, he speaks with such conviction," Mr. Angyan said. "You believe him. I believed him."

After a landslide victory, Mr. Orban moved quickly, just not as Mr. Angyan had anticipated.

Mr. Angyan's proposal called on the government to carve up its massive plots and lease them to small and midsize farmers. But Mr. Orban instead wanted to lease whole swaths of land to a coterie of his allies, a move that Mr. Angyan predicted would make the countryside beholden to Mr. Orban's party, Fidesz, and its allies.

He also knew that European subsidies would follow the land, widening the gap between rich and poor and making it easier for those at the top to wield power.

"I had absolutely no chance to carry out what I wanted to do," Mr. Angyan said.



Jozsef Angyan, the former under secretary for rural development in Hungary, became an unlikely crusader for small farmers.Credit...Akos Stiller

In 2011, Mr. Orban's new government began leasing out public land. At first, officials said that only local, small-scale farmers would be eligible for leases. But the plots ultimately went to politically connected individuals who, in some cases, had been the sole bidders present at auctions. By 2015, hundreds of thousands of acres of public land were leased out and much of it went to people close to Fidesz, according to records obtained from the government and Mr. Angyan.

New leaseholders paid low rates to the government, even as they became eligible for European subsidies. The deals drew sharp criticism in the local media, yet ordinary farmers stayed quiet, despite being left out.

In one example, a powerful Fidesz lawmaker, Roland Mengyi, inserted himself into the leasing process in Borsod-Abaúj Zemplén County, where one of his associates won leases for more than 1,200 acres. Mr. Mengyi is an outsized character, [who](#)

[referred to himself as “Lord Voldemort.”](#) He was later convicted and sentenced to prison in a separate case for corruption related to European subsidies.

Mr. Orban’s sudden change in policy left Mr. Angyan disillusioned, and feeling betrayed. He quit the government in 2012 but remained in Parliament, where he tried to push his vision, even as the government moved in the opposite direction. At a closed-door meeting in early 2013, Mr. Angyan confronted Mr. Orban in front of the prime minister’s most trusted allies in Parliament.

“You’re going to destroy the countryside!” Mr. Angyan recalled saying.

“You are a well-poisoner,” Mr. Orban shot back, according to Mr. Angyan, startling the crowd with a blunt rebuke of a former member of his cabinet. “You have abandoned me.”

As a shocked silence fell over the party faithful, Mr. Orban launched into a soliloquy comparing politics to a battlefield. Those who are loyal, he said, could count on their brothers in arms for protection.

“But those who aren’t?” the prime minister asked. “We will also fire at them.”

A Modern Feudalism

In 2015, Mr. Orban started moving even faster. His government sold hundreds of thousands of acres of state farmland, much of it to politically connected allies. Technically, it was an auction. But many local farmers say they were told not to bother bidding because winners had been predetermined. Few could afford the large plots, anyway, and many more did not even know about the sales.

One pensioner, Ferenc Horvath, 63, lives in a shack in Fejer County, and belatedly discovered that the government had sold all the state-owned land surrounding his tiny plot.

“It happened so fast,” Mr. Horvath said. “We had no idea you could buy land here.”

On nearly all sides, Mr. Horvath had a new neighbor, Lorinc Meszaros, a childhood friend of Mr. Orban and former pipe-fitter who is now a billionaire. Fences sprung up overnight, and the stench of pig manure fell over the area.



A farm owned by Lorinc Meszaros in Alcsutdoboz. He and his relatives appear to own more than 3,800 acres in Fejer County alone. Credit...Akos Stiller for The New York Times

Mr. Meszaros, along with his relatives, has bought more than 3,800 acres in Fejer County alone, according to a Times analysis of land data compiled by Mr. Angyan and other sources, and confirmed by visits to the farm. Mr. Orban’s son-in-law and another friend of the prime minister’s have also bought large estates a short drive away, The Times found.

The prediction made by Mr. Angyan — that Mr. Orban’s policies would make the countryside beholden to Fidesz and his allies — was being realized.

It is a type of modern feudalism, where small farmers live in the shadows of huge, politically powerful interests — and European Union subsidies help finance it. In recent years, according to a Times analysis of Hungarian payment data, the largest private recipients of farm subsidies were companies controlled by Mr. Meszaros and Sandor Csanyi, an influential businessman in Budapest.

Last year alone, companies controlled by the two men received a total of \$28 million in subsidies.

The two men have radically different relationships with Mr. Orban and his party.

Mr. Csanyi is seen as someone Mr. Orban cannot afford to antagonize. He is chairman of OTP Bank, one of the nation’s most important financial institutions, and has a reputation for outlasting mercurial leaders. He has hired out-of-work politicians from all parties, and his farming conglomerate, led by his son, now controls two of the “Dirty Dozen” companies privatized by Mr. Orban.

Mr. Meszaros’s fortune, by contrast, is tightly bound to the prime minister. He has built an empire by winning government contracts for projects largely financed by the European Union and has recently snapped up companies that once belonged to a business tycoon who had fallen out of favor with Mr. Orban.

They are eligible for a range of subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy, whether direct payments based on acreage, subsidies directed at livestock and dairy farming or rural development programs — all of which is distributed at the national level by the Fidesz government.

“I’m always accused, and I am very angry about it, that I got the biggest subsidies,” Mr. Csanyi said in an interview. The reason, he said, is not politics. It is pigs. “I produce about one-sixth of the Hungarian pig production.”

On paper, landowners should face restrictions. The Hungarian government has capped subsidy payments to the biggest farms, a seemingly progressive policy advocated by reformers. But farmers say it is easy to skirt the rule by dividing plots and registering the land to different owners.

Rajmund Fekete, a spokesman for Mr. Orban, said that Hungarian subsidy procedures “fully satisfy” European regulations but declined to answer specific questions about Mr. Angyan, or about land sales that benefited Mr. Orban’s relatives and allies.

“Hungary is also fully compliant in the sale of state land, which is regulated by law,” he said.

In Brussels, European officials were specifically warned about problems in Hungary even before the auctions. [A May 2015 report](#), commissioned by the European Parliament, investigated land grabbing and cited “dubious land deals” in Hungary. The report even cited Mr. Orban’s home of Fejer County.

More broadly, the investigators found that wealthy, politically connected landowners had the power to annex land across Central and Eastern Europe. “This is particularly so when they conspire with government authorities,” the report said.

In Bulgaria, for example, land brokers had pushed for laws allowing them to effectively annex small farms.

Investigators pointed to the farm subsidy program as a major factor, saying it encouraged companies to acquire more and more land.

“The C.A.P. in this sense has clearly failed to live up to its declared objectives,” said the report, which was prepared by the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute.

In a written response, European agricultural officials denounced the findings as unreliable, and in bold letters declared that it was up to the countries' leaders to set and enforce national land use policies.

That deference to national governments is a hallmark of the European Union. But it has left the bloc unable or unwilling to confront leaders who try to undermine its efforts, said Tomás García Azcárate, a longtime European agriculture official who now trains the Continent's policymakers.

"The European Union has very limited instruments for dealing with gangster member states," he said. "It's true on policy, on agriculture, on immigration. It's a real problem."



Mr. Orbán and Mr. Meszaros, center-left, at the opening ceremony of a soccer stadium in 2014. Credit...Akos Stiller



Sandor Csanyi, an influential businessman in Budapest, is seen as someone Mr. Orbán cannot afford to antagonize. Credit...Akos Stiller/Bloomberg

As Mr. Orbán's government began auctioning off thousands of acres to his allies, Mr. Angyan began his own project. Out of government, he meticulously studied the land sales, compiling a record that officials could not easily purge. He interviewed farmers who had been abandoned by the government and mapped political connections among the buyers — findings now supported by the Times analysis.

Beyond the biggest oligarchs like Mr. Meszaros, other supporters and sympathizers of Mr. Orbán got blocks of public land.

In Csongrad County, for example, family members and associates of Janos Lazar, a Fidesz lawmaker, were among the biggest buyers, obtaining about 1,300 acres. In Bacs-Kiskun County, associates and family members of a former business partner of Mr. Meszaros bought big chunks of land. And in Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok County, associates and relatives of current

and former Orbán government officials were among the biggest winners in the land auctions. Many have since leased the plots, with a markup, to big agricultural firms that receive European subsidies.

"This is what the European Union resources do, and the revenues from the land do," said Mihaly Borbiro, a former mayor of Obarok, a tiny village in Fejer County, a short drive from Mr. Orbán's hometown.

While political patrons get rich, many small farmers count on the subsidies to survive. That discourages them from criticizing the system too loudly, many of the farmers said, especially in the face of retribution.

Ferenc Gal, who raises cows, alfalfa and a few pigs on his family farm, said he applied to lease about 320 acres because the European subsidies alone would have made it profitable before he even planted anything. Local farmers were supposed to get preference, but the land went to wealthy out-of-town investors. When he complained, he quickly found himself a pariah. He said government inspectors showed up at his farm, suddenly concerned about environmental and water quality. He said local officials told him not to bother applying for future rural grants. "Once you're on a black list," Mr. Gal said, "that's it."

A Policy of Fear

Retribution also found Jozsef Angyan.

Months after he quit the cabinet, government officials retracted the lease on Kishantos, the organic farm he had helped operate for 20 years. They gave the land to political loyalists, who plowed over the fields and sprayed the cropland with chemicals. Then school officials shuttered Mr. Angyan's department at Szent Istvan University, destroying his legacy.

"Orbán understands when to keep people in fear," Mr. Angyan said.

In interviews in Hungary, some agricultural scientists and economists refused to discuss land ownership or asked to not be identified when discussing their research. Farmers, too, saw what happened to the man who spoke up for them.



"If Angyan can't do anything, what can I do?" said Istvan Teichel, a farmer near Mr. Orbán's hometown. Credit...Akos Stiller for The New York Times

"If Angyan can't do anything, what can I do?" said Mr. Teichel, the family farmer near Mr. Orbán's hometown.

Mr. Orbán's control of the European subsidies helps prevent another rural uprising, Mr. Angyan said. As long as the government administers the grants, nobody can afford to speak up. "If you're critical of the system," he said, "you get nothing." Besides, he added, there is no real opposition in the countryside. Mr. Angyan's small farmers' association forged an alliance with

Mr. Orban's far-right party to get the prime minister re-elected. That relationship has outlasted Mr. Angyan, and those in charge of the farming group now hold powerful government positions. Mr. Angyan has receded from public life. This year, he met twice with The Times, providing the data he had been compiling. After the second meeting, Mr. Angyan stopped returning phone calls.

When Mr. Teichel saw him recently at a funeral, he looked defeated. "He's given up the fight," Mr. Teichel said. As usual, Mr. Angyan asked how the farmer and his family were doing. "I don't matter," Mr. Teichel replied. "I'm just a soldier. How are you doing? You are the general."

Mr. Angyan replied: "How should I continue when nobody is behind me?"

Reporting was contributed by Agustin Armendariz in London, Hana de Goeij in Prague, Milan Schreuer in Brussels, Akos Stiller in Budapest and Boryana Dzhambazova in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Matt Apuzzo is a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter based in Brussels. He has covered law enforcement and security matters for more than a decade and is the co-author of the book "Enemies Within." @mattapuzzo

COMMENTARY

It is somewhat discomfiting that the above article was written and researched so competently for an American newspaper, the New York Times, all praise to them, exposing the absolute corruption at the heart of CAP, but comforting in that at least now American readers might better understand why the UK so badly wants to leave the EU. The article has received some coverage in the UK, and hopefully translations will penetrate to Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria, also fighting corruption amongst its politicians.

THE EU- CORRUPT – UNACCOUNTABLE AND DEEPLY, DEEPLY UNDEMOCRATIC

""Mr Babiš has been under pressure for quite some time, owing to a series of scandals over EU subsidy fraud. This was only brought to wider attention in the anglosphere recently, after a report published in the New York Times named him, alongside Hungary's Viktor Orban, as having been a beneficiary of agricultural subsidies through his business empire, the Agrofert conglomerate. ""

""A bizarre episode had earlier seen him accused of fraud by the Czech police, after money was paid to the Stork's Nest hotel and conference center, owned by members of the Babiš family, by the EU, before it was then incorporated into Agrofert. Within 24 hours of the recommendation, the Czech minister of justice was gone from office, to be replaced by an ally of the prime minister. The charges, of course, were subsequently dropped, but the damage had been done; the EU report, published by the NYT, has since suggested he has had a say in the allocation of other EU funds whilst retaining an interest in Agrofert. ""

""The EU, for all we hear of its unity and single direction, is not a happy family. People in the east, having lived under the yoke of communism, have taken to calling the transition away from 1989 'the grey revolution' – the transfer from a communist orthodoxy largely dictated from Moscow, to a Western liberal one from Brussels, and with postwar Germany at its heart. For all things

are better than they were, the effect is still the same: A feeling of suppression from a bigger neighbour intent on you seeing things their way.

Under communism, many elements of national identity were suppressed beyond the Iron Curtain – their reassertion was an integral part of movements to break away from the Eastern Bloc. But any hope that they would be allowed to flourish has been dashed. In the West, nationalism and its associations are, understandably, taboo. The problem is that countries like Germany, whose historic nationalism was often imposed on others through force, have, through feelings of acute guilt, taken to telling their Eastern neighbours that their own nationalism, that they themselves played a part in suppressing, is also bad, and must continue to be stamped on. That doesn't do much to persuade people that the new regime they find themselves under is necessarily that much better than the old, or that some nations, specifically Germany, have changed. ""

Three reasons why a level playing field with the EU is the last thing we need



By Matthew Lynn

Why would we want a level playing field with our biggest neighbour – and competitor?

Workers will be stripped of their rights. We will be flooded with chlorinated chicken. Safety standards will be ripped up, we will be dominated by American technology giants and turned into an offshore gangster economy unfairly undercutting all our rivals. Once we finally get around to negotiating our relationship with the European Union after we have left, it is likely to demand regulatory convergence with a post-Brexit UK to avoid all that and to ensure a "level playing field".

In this country lots of people, including big businesses, will argue we will have to give into that if it secures open access to the European market. But hold on? Why would we want a level playing field with our biggest neighbour – and competitor? The EU's regulations have become too burdensome, and we could grow faster once freed from them. It is dominated by lobbyists and special interests, while we should focus on entrepreneurs and consumers. And we can lead the world in ripping up tariffs and protections and opening up our economy. In fact, all competition is "unfair". We can have higher, and better, standards than the EU, and also maximise our economic strengths – and if that means we never get a trade deal with the EU so be it.

Amid all the drama of how, when and whether we ever finally manage to leave the EU there is still relatively little attention paid to our relationship once we are out. But across Europe, concerns are already being raised about the potential for “unfair competition” from post-Brexit Britain.

Earlier this month Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, made a significant speech warning that the UK, once it is outside the EU, will be a competitor alongside America and China. Emmanuel Macron, the French president, has already warned the EU will not tolerate what he termed “tax dumping”. Guy Verhofstadt, the arch-federalist who serves as the European Parliament’s Brexit co-ordinator, has argued that a trade deal will be impossible if Britain chooses “regulatory divergence” from the rest of Europe.

In this country, there is plenty of sympathy for that view, both from the Left where departing the EU is often seen as part of agenda to rip up regulations and labour laws and also, interestingly, from big business which is often protected from bothersome competition within the EU’s tightly regulated market.

Of course, it is easy to see what the rest of Europe is worried about. Operating a high-tax, high-spending economic model is a lot easier when you don’t have to worry about anyone competing with you. If necessary, you can protect yourself with tariffs, even if you know they will hurt you in the long run.

But it would be crazy for Britain to play along with that. Regulatory alignment with the EU would be ridiculous, and many of the demands it is making are unreasonable. What Macron refers to as “tax dumping”, for example, simply means another country choosing to have lower taxes than France, which, lets not forget, happens to have the highest taxes in the OECD. Just because one country decided to have incredibly high taxes it doesn’t mean everyone else has to do the same.

Likewise, just because some countries decide to have incredibly restrictive labour laws, even when it means creating permanently high unemployment, especially among the young, does it mean every other nation it trades with has to follow suit? In fact, there are three reasons why we should be looking to create a playing field that is as lopsided as possible.

First, EU regulations, especially in areas like technology, have become ridiculously burdensome and unnecessary. Its data protection rules have already led to a sharp drop in venture capital money going into new companies, and that will worsen the already yawning gap with American and Chinese rivals. Its labour market laws are entrenching a system that discriminates against companies hiring new staff. The single market has been slowly turned from a way of opening up the economy to more competition to closing it down under the deadweight of regulation.

Outside of the EU, the UK is still going to have high health and safety, work-life balance and privacy rules. In areas such as the export of live animals, energy generation, and working hours, we might well decide to have higher standards than the rest of Europe. It is hard to imagine any government would survive in office that believed in ripping up rules wholesale. But we can create a regulatory system that operates with a far lighter touch than the EU, and often has higher standards, and reap the benefits in more investment and faster growth.

Next, EU regulations are increasingly dominated by special interests and corporate lobbyists. Brussels is starting to make Washington look like a paragon of political virtue.

In total €1.7bn (£1.5bn) is now spent a year on lobbyists, and the number of registered influence-peddlers has risen 35-fold since registration was required.

Officials move with unseemly frequency from the Commission to lobbying firms and back again, while two of the latest picks for Commissioners were ruled out by the European Parliament, itself hardly squeaky clean, for “financial conflicts of interest”. The truth is most EU rules are drawn up by companies to protect themselves from competition. Why would the UK want to match that? On our own, we can draft regulations designed to create a more competitive economy that works for entrepreneurs and consumers rather than big business. Finally, the EU is becoming more and more protectionist all the time. It is intent on creating a series of “European champions” that will receive government money and be shielded from rivals. It wants to close off its economy from foreign takeovers especially by the Chinese.

It wants to equalise corporate taxes to stop member states from undercutting each other. It doesn’t make a lot of sense for the UK to subject itself to all that. Take a couple of examples. The EU is finding it almost impossible to pass trade deals because they might harm one special interest or another – the much-hyped Mercosur deal with Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay looks likely to fail because French and Irish beef farmers don’t want to compete with South American meat.

Scotch whisky, our largest physical export, is facing punitive taxes in the United States, its largest market, because of an argument over subsidies to Airbus, a largely French project that is one of the EU’s “champions”. It is crazy for the UK to get caught up in all of Europe’s trade disputes. It would be far better to take a global lead by removing tariffs, and opening up our own market – our economy will grow faster regardless of whether other countries do the same.

Of course it would be great to have a free-trade agreement with the EU. But not at any price. We might well find over the next two years, as negotiations get under way, that the regulatory demands it places upon us are simply too high. If so, we should walk away. Once we leave, we need to make competition as “unfair” as possible – and completely forget about a level playing field.



LES CARRIERES – LES BAUX – 2019
– January 2020

An immersion in Van Gogh's finest masterpieces!

Since March 2019 (to January 2020), the Carrières de Lumières are exhibiting the work of the genius painter Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), who only achieved fame after his death. Spanning the 7,000 m² of the Carrières, a visual and musical production retraces the intense life of the tormented artist, who, during the last ten years of his life, painted more than 2,000 pictures, which are now held in collections around the world.

Van Gogh's immense oeuvre—which radically evolved over the years, from the *Mangeurs de pommes de terre* (The Potato Eaters, 1885) to the *Nuit étoilée* (Starry Night, 1889), *Les Tournesols* (Sunflowers, 1888), and *La Chambre à coucher* (The Bedroom, 1889)—will be projected onto the giant stone walls of the Carrières.



The clouds, suns, and portraits, represented in the artist's unique style, come to life on walls that are more than fifteen metres high, evoking the artist's boundless, chaotic, and poetic interior world. Via a thematic itinerary relating to the various phases of his life—his time spent in Arles, Paris, and Saint-Rémy-de-Provence—visitors will be immersed in his first works and those of his later years, from his sunny landscapes and night scenes, to his portraits and still lifes.

The Dutch painter's expressive and powerful brushstrokes produced works with bold colours and an unrivalled style that highlight a permanent dialogue between light and shadow. The visual and musical experience produced by Culturespaces and created by Gianfranco Iannuzzi, Renato Gatto, and Massimiliano Siccardi, highlights this chromatic richness, as well as the power of the artist's drawings and impasto.



Plus – DREAMED JAPAN – an Immersive journey

HOTEL CAUMONT – AIX EN PROVENCE



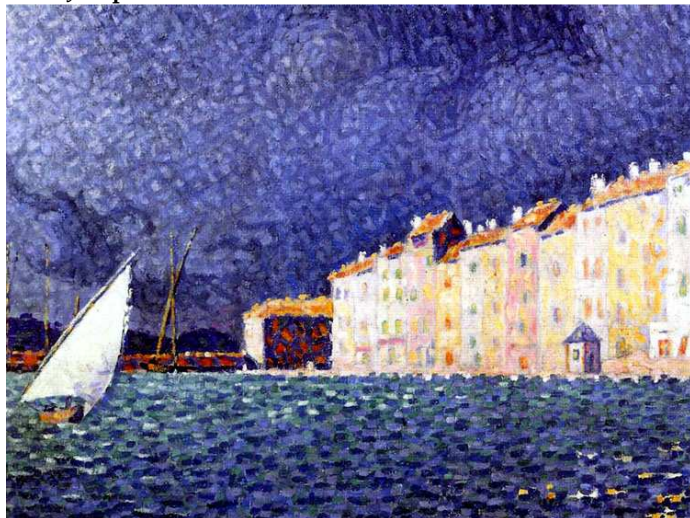
And of course one can make a visit to this Museum a complete day's outing, housing as it does a very sophisticated collection of 18th c artefacts, pictures, furniture, tapestries, everything that complimented life in that era, plus there is a charming courtyard, gardens, and café cum restaurant serving appetising snacks lunches an immersive experience, total culture.

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Annonciade Museum –

The Annonciade Museum in St. Tropez is one of the treasures of the Riviera, housing as it does a superb collection of post impressionist works by the principally Fauvist (savagely) artists of the day – above one of my favourite fauvist works, of St. Tropez harbour!. It is my favourite Museum, which I can visit with pleasure time and time again. It has not staged any new exhibitions for a while, one suspects due to budgetary concerns, not only are they expensive to mount, but the insurance is prohibitive - but its collection is such that every visit yields more pleasure.

Musée de l'Annonciade, Place Grammont. St. Tropez

Closed Mondays. Entry 6 euros.



Musée Bonnard – Le Cannet

Another lovely Museum to visit not too far away is the Bonnard Museum in Le Cannet, just up from Cannes, housing as it does a fine collection of Bonnard works.

Pierre Bonnard lived in le Cannet from 1922 to 1947, eventually acquiring the villa Le Bosquet, up on the heights of the town.

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AFTER THE LORD MAYOR'S SHOW

By SIMON EVELEIGH

Having spent October glued to the World Cup, the return to domestic action in November has been rather disjointed, with fixtures in both the Top 14 and European competitions. Of course, the Top 14 began while the World Cup was going on, but the feeling is that this was a phoney war, with Lyon and Bordeaux occupying the top two places. That is not to say that either of these two are bad teams, but having fewer players away on international duty certainly helped them compared to some of their more illustrious opponents.

Toulon's season so far has been neither good nor bad, much like many of their performances, and on the face of it they are reasonably well placed in 5th. However, only 4 points separate them from 13th placed Agen and they are 10 points behind Bordeaux-Bègles in second and another five off top of the table Lyon.

The month began with a 19-19 home draw with Montpellier before everyone headed off into European action.

Normally the pool stages take place in blocks of two matches in October, December and late January, but because

of the World Cup, this season the blocks of two are closer together, with there being only two weeks between games three and four.

As a result of their poor league position last season, this year Toulon find themselves in the second tier Challenge Cup. Although the winners qualify for the Champions Cup the following season, many clubs do not take this competition very seriously and it gets rather lost on European weekends when the spotlight falls on the glamour of the main competition.

As well as that place in the Champions Cup next season, there is another incentive for Toulon this year, as the finals will be played in Marseille in May.

Having begun their campaign with a 20-13 win at Bayonne, Toulon followed that up with a narrow home victory over Scarlets. In a game where their opponents looked superior for long stretches, Toulon managed to score a late converted try to squeak home 17-16. It was far from a scintillating game of rugby, but a win's a win.

With back-to-back fixtures with London Irish in December, Toulon will hope that they can capitalise on this winning start and book themselves a home quarter-final spot.

In the big boys' cup, one team who would normally feature amongst the favourites, serial winners Saracens, may not be taking it as seriously as they usually would. Having been found guilty of breaking the salary cap in each of the last three seasons, Saracens have been fined over £5.3 million and docked 35 points, so they will have to put a lot of their attention into the Premiership if they want to ensure that they do not get relegated.

The arguments for and against a salary cap have raged for many years, but whether you think it is a good thing or not, rules must be adhered to, otherwise what is the point of them. To put it another way, I may well think that the St Maximin- Brignoles motorway is perfectly safe at 150 km/h, but my local gendarmerie do not and they are right because the rules say they are!

Having said all that, after a resounding defeat in Paris against Racing 92, a 44-3 win over Ospreys the following week did not necessarily give the impression that Saracens have written off the European Cup.

As far as Toulon are concerned, off the field, the club have announced the signature of Argentinian full back Ramiro Moyano who featured for The Pumas in Japan.

On the pitch, by the time you read this Toulon will have rounded off their month with a trip to Pau before they head back into European action.

Before Christmas, Toulon play those aforementioned back to back fixtures with London Irish (home on 7th December and away the week after), before rounding off the pool stages with a trip to Llanelli on 11th January and a final game at home to Bayonne on 17th January.

Sandwiched in between the European games are Top 14 fixtures at home to Clermont on the Sunday before Christmas, a trip to Toulouse on the weekend between Christmas and New Year and the first fixture of 2020 is a home meeting with Castres, which will also be the final match of the first half of the season.

After completing their European matches, the last game of January will be a visit to Lyon, a team coached by former

Toulon favourite Pierre Mignoni and who, as mentioned earlier, currently sit at the top of the Top 14 table. Such is the non-stop nature of professional sport, when we next go to press the 6 Nations will be upon us, but before that we all need to spend time eating and drinking too much and catching up with friends and family (at least that's how I spend my Christmas!)

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It just remains for me to say enjoy your rugby over the next couple of months and I would like to wish a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all readers.