

## **Brexit: a view from Europe**

Naturally, as someone who has lived abroad for more than forty years, I and all the Brits I know living in Italy and elsewhere in Europe were horrified at the result of the referendum. This feeling has not dulled with time. Fortunately, years ago I got Italian citizenship and thus dual nationality, which should be useful if the thing goes haywire with a no-deal. Many of my friends are now applying for Italian nationality, although their efforts are being partly thwarted by the nasty Salvini who was putting the brakes on immigrants getting citizenship. He's out of government for the moment, but poised to return if the centre-left bugger it up, which they're doing their best to do. It's a grim picture all around with the nationalist right gaining traction.

The initial response in Italy to the referendum result was one of surprise and the newspapers weren't quite sure how to handle it. The moderate press was concerned about the break-up of Europe, while the far-right papers (then with a small circulation) blathered on about a country having the courage to go it alone. The whole Brexit issue then came and went as front-page news and prime-time TV coverage. Lately it's been on the back-boiler as nobody seems to really know (or care any longer) what is happening. There are plenty of national issues to keep the press (and the social media trolls) busy. Johnson is seen as a bit of a joke (a British version of Berlusconi), Corbyn as a dithering no-hoper and Farage as a nationalist buffoon rather like Salvini (in fact they were matey with each other at the European Parliament). The other players are largely unknown.

There is concern about the Italians living in the UK, but there are so many Brits living here that that issue should sort itself out. Although if there's a no-deal you never know what might happen. I live in hope but am very worried about the nationalist stirrings and the way people flock to characters like Farage, Salvini, Le Pen and Trump. And the situation in the east of Germany. The European Union was designed to prevent such scenarios and I am sickened by the fact that my country is to be the first to upset that equilibrium.

There was nothing on the Italian TV news last night about Brexit, although the *Corriere della Sera* today carries an article about MPs (particularly female MPs) being insulted and threatened because of their political views. Very sad indeed. However, on a lighter note, an old (in all senses) friend stopped me in the street the other day and said "Hey, when are you going to do this Brexit thing then?" I replied that it was difficult to say because the political situation was changing every day. "Oh, that's no problem, in Italy it changes every 10 minutes!"