

How more EU damages political parties

The traditional parties like the Christian Democrats and Social democrats in most continental countries, and Labour and Conservative in the UK, have a history of changing leaders and changing policies whenever their popularity falls or their electoral success is threatened. That is the nature of democratic politics. Parties that want to govern have to please enough people enough of the time.

So what is bizarre is the way the EU holds them in thrall, in the case of the continental parties to the point of self destruction. Undue support for the austerity policies of the Euro has swept aside the traditional parties of Greece, Italy and France, throwing up new parties that have taken over government. In both Spain and Germany the two old giant parties have been deeply wounded by their adherence to the EU/Euro scheme.

The UK parties have been less damaged because self preservation – and a lot of pressure from a few of us in Parliament – kept them out of signing up to the Euro. At the last election the promise both made to take us out of the EU took support for Labour and Conservative back up to a combined high 83%. It is not surprising to see Conservative support now falling with the PM trying to persuade people of her delayed and partial exit in the Chequers proposals. Many Conservative voters from 2017 feel let down, as they voted for a party that would get on with Brexit.

Mrs May needs to remember just how much damage too much EU has done to the Conservative party before. Mr Heath who took us into the EEC lost in 1974, the first election that followed that fateful decision. It was not just the EEC that cost him, but Labour offered a renegotiation and a referendum which proved more popular, as people thought Mr Heath had done a bad deal. Sir John Major sacrificed his party and did huge damage to the UK economy by insisting on joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism. This duly plunged us into high inflation followed by recession, as I predicted at the time. This in turn meant the Conservatives spent the next 18 years from the 1997 election without a majority in Parliament, with 13 years in opposition with few seats, paying the price for the economic incompetence too much EU delivered. The false explanation that he lost in 1997 owing to disagreements about the EU can be easily rebutted by looking at the opinion poll graphs. The Conservatives lost support heavily as soon as the economic damage of the ERM was revealed, and never regained it – nor lost more – during the rows that followed.