

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something EU

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After nearly four years of Parliamentary deadlock and social polarisation where the other is not just wrong, but evil, the British have finally made up their mind. We're going.

Like 2017 and the 2019 European elections, this was another Brexit election. There were other major issues – lack of trust, Britain's decay, the climate, politicians' incompetence – but Brexit was a key, if not the key, issue. This was reflected in leaders' priorities. Boris Johnson's simplistic but catchy mantra of **"get Brexit done"**, Nigel Farage pushing for immediate exit on WTO rules, Jo Swinson's aim of scrapping Brexit entirely, Nicola Sturgeon awkwardly balancing Scotland's membership of two Unions. Love them or loathe them, all of the leaders had clear Brexit positions. Except Jeremy Corbyn. After four years of vagueness, he couldn't choose. Corbyn's lack of clarity on the biggest peacetime political crisis the British have faced since the possibility of revolution in 1832, led his party to its worst defeat since 1935.

"Europe" is something old. The Liberal Democrats sought to maintain the status quo of 1973, and cancel Brexit. This backfired as it clearly did not appeal, even to the millions of Remainers the LibDems wanted to rally. Jo Swinson losing her own seat reflects concerns about how liberal or democratic the Liberal Democrats' proposal was. In the coming years this remembrance of the EU will grow, with "Europe" in Rejoinder imaginations.

"Europe" is something new. The Brexit Party planned to immediately exit the EU and enter the unknown on WTO rules. This would have been a novel, and very risky, leap in the dark. But like the Liberal Democrats, the Brexit Party completely failed. Neither Remain nor Hard Leave appealed to the British public. For backers of a Hard Brexit, "Europe" has morphed into a new enemy, an eternal foe which must be kept at arm's for years to come.

"Europe" is something borrowed. The Conservatives' **"Oven-Ready Brexit"** is not an a la carte option but a dried-out, reheated version of Theresa May's deal, a borrowed option but one which the public chose for want of anything better. For the winners of 2019, "Europe" is an inherited imagination which has barely changed since 1973 – something to work with, but something the British do not wish to really be part of.

"Europe" is something. Labour's refusal or inability to take a side meant that their position was vague, implausible, and frustrating to both sides. In a country where Remainers and Leavers were united only by how sick of Brexit they were, an empty promise of magical deals, more delay, and somehow achieving in three months what May spent three years struggling with, was crushed. In the years to come Labour will have to decide what relationship it wants with Europe.

With a huge Conservative majority, Britain will now exit the EU. But the future relationship with the EU is yet to be built, and imaginations of “Europe” will continue to evolve in British discourse. Some Remainers will become Rejoiners. Perhaps the most profound consequence of the 2019 UK election is that Britain’s withdrawal will be a defining aspect of what helps to strengthen, or terminally weaken, an EU which cannot delay change any more than the UK.