

Europe in 2018: Renaissance or plus Ça Change?

Written by Patrick Bijsmans and Russell Foster

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PATRICK BIJSMANS AND RUSSELL FOSTER, FEB 17 2018

Readers of the 'Brexit: A European Perspective Blog', we owe you an apology. During the last couple of months, it has been rather quiet from our side. We could come up with all kinds of excuses for this, but there really is no good excuse. *Mea culpa!*

But we are going to make things up to you! We are in the process of planning a whole year of Brexit blogging, with forthcoming posts on military cooperation between Britain and her neighbours, upcoming elections across Europe, the impact of Brexit on non-EU countries, and of course, the ongoing saga of Brexit itself. Because it is going to be another turbulent and exciting year in European politics, we will focus on predicted issues and events as they occur. A new German government appears to be just around the corner, one which is certain to fuel new discussions about the future role of Germany in the Union and the very future of the EU itself. Italian elections will offer another litmus test of public sentiment towards the status quo. New Eurosceptic governments in Austria and Czechia will face the harsh realities of government. And campaigning will begin for a new President of the European Commission. Where is the EU heading, and what kind of reforms – if any – can we expect to see in Brussels? Will we see a strengthened Eurozone, with a European Monetary Fund, a European Treasury, and perhaps even an EU minister for finances? And what can we expect from initiatives to strengthen EU military cooperation?

In 2018 Brexit negotiations enter their second year. The debate about a – hopefully – amical divorce continues on issues such as the financial settlement and future of EU-UK relations. While positive outcomes were agreed in late 2017, tensions between the UK and EU are emerging again. Questions have arisen over the likelihood that negotiations will be concluded within two years – a problem which is not helped by the growing possibility of Theresa May's besieged government calling yet another UK General Election in 2018. Calls for second referendum in the UK are growing louder, drawing the ire of frustrated Leavers and reigniting the tensions of 2016 among a politically exhausted population. The possibility of another plebiscite, or Brexit being negotiated by a left-Eurosceptic Corbyn government, raise the Kafkaesque questions of what Brexit will look like – or whether Brexit will even happen.

Looming over the debate about the EU's future and the Brexit negotiations are elections in several European countries, including Hungary, Italy, Russia and Sweden. The Italian elections look particularly interesting, with Beppe Grillo's *Movimento 5 Stelle* promising to do well. These elections have been heralded as being potentially dangerous for the future of the Eurozone. *Movimento 5 Stelle* seems to have gradually softened its stance on the Euro, but *Liga Nord* continues to voice Euroscepticism. And in the East, Russian presidential elections again seem to heading towards a clear victory for Putin. What can we expect from Putin's next term? And what could it mean for Europe?

Lots to consider and lots to write about. If you would like to write a post about any of the aforementioned issues or when you have an idea for another contribution, do not hesitate to get in touch through blogs@e-ir.info. See the *E-International Relations* website for previous posts and guidelines for blogs. We look forward to an interesting year and a continued debate about Europe's future – with or without EU!

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Dr. Patrick Bijsmans is Assistant Professor in European Studies at Maastricht University. His research interests include Euroscepticism, media coverage of EU affairs and the European public sphere, as well as issues related to teaching and learning in European Studies. He teaches BA and MA courses in European Studies, covering topics such as EU politics and academic research and writing skills. He also coordinates the teacher training trajectory of the university's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

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