

All change in Europe in 2017

The political turmoil of 2016 will have an impact on the year ahead, writes Euromat general secretary *Kieran O'Keefe*

2016 was a year that didn't reflect well on the professional pollster. Brexit and then the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States wrong-footed most informed commentators. Received wisdom looks set to be challenged again in 2017.

The resignation of Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, following his failure to win a referendum on constitutional reform, looks likely to be followed by elections this year. While Renzi may hope to make a comeback, the country's anti-establishment Five Star movement is likely to do well. In France Marine Le Pen is making a populist play to traditional voters of the French Left. In Germany the anti-immigration, Eurosceptic Alternative für Deutschland may make gains and in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders is likely to make inroads on a similar platform. This is likely to spell more uncertainty for Europe.

Change in Brussels is guaranteed. The mid-point of any parliamentary term means a reshuffle of committee chairmanships. The UK's impending Brexit will mean that Brits in key positions will be under pressure to step aside.

The President of the European Parliament, the German Socialist Martin Schulz, had been widely predicted to hold out for a five-year term (renegeing on a gentleman's agreement to step aside in favour of an EPP candidate). However, he has surprised many by announcing a premature exit to Germany where he will seek elected office in next year's elections.

The Commission will also see changes. The departure of the Bulgarian Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva to the World Bank and the acquisition

of her brief by the German Commissioner Günther Oettinger will trigger a wider switching of roles within the Commission College.

If you thought 2016 was disruptive for Europe then think again. 2017 could be the most disruptive year yet.

