

# A second sneak peek at our Brexit book 'Do They Mean Us?'

Our Bite-Size Brexit book series 'Do They Mean Us?' is now available for you to read and enjoy. In celebration of the book's release, we are giving you a sneak peek at a selection of the incredible writing from a wide variety of foreign correspondents.

'Do They Mean Us? – The Foreign Correspondents' View of Brexit' explores the views of Brexit from a wide variety of influential voices. With seismic changes in UK politics, its relationships with the EU and the rest of the world, John Mair and Neil Fowler have commissioned and edited this collection of essays which reveal how some of the world's most influential journalists view the referendum, the negotiations and the future for the UK.

***Your sneak peek...***

**Diana Zimmermann – Variations on this one topic**

**Variation 1: The cringe factor**

As I write in early 2019 I have just experienced quite a shocking trip to Germany to celebrate Christmas. Of course, on such a trip you inevitably meet up with good old friends and your dear family and talk on how the past year has been. But before I could even open my mouth, to tell them about the amazing new V&A gallery in Dundee, or the Abortion Referendum in Ireland or my trip to Blackpool, I was faced with knowing expressions of sympathy: "You poor thing," they said. But somehow, I had the feeling they were referring to themselves. "That awful Brexit, it must all be so boring for you".

Did they mean me? Or themselves, I thought. Well, yes, maybe it is a bit boring actually. I do now and then struggle to find an angle to the whole story that hasn't yet been explored. But it is also very exciting to be a foreign correspondent in a country at such a historically meaningful point in time. And there has been so much work to do I haven't really been bored over the past year at all.

“My mind starts going around in circles as soon as I hear the word ‘Brexit’ now”, a friend said to me. “Will it ever end?” asked a relative, in the same tone he just used to address his screaming three- year- old.

The frustrating thing is that the Germans I met with over those few weeks are all completely fed up with the tedious details of Brexit. “Can’t you just report on it once they have made their minds up?” was one common and well-meaning suggestion.

No, I cannot, I snapped. I found it very difficult not to take it personally. You spend years trying to explain the trials and tribulations of the island to the German viewer and all you get in return is the suggestion to just not bother. Instead of finding examples, carrying out interviews, presenting stories of immigrants, migrants and emigrants, fearful employers, hopeful Brexit opponents, scheming party members, I could have just spent the whole time using the same Asterix quote: “These Brits are crazy!”

### **Bettina Schultz – Did the British ever understand Europe?**

Too many people believed in the populism of Farage, of Boris Johnson, of David Davis, of Michel Gove, and of Jacob Rees-Mogg. They told the British people that their life will be better outside the EU and enough people did vote for Brexit, but they had no clue about the difference between the EU, the Single Market, the Customs Union, the European Economic Area, Schengen and the Monetary Union (EMU).

The UK does not need to leave the EU to export and trade successfully, to get Free Trade Agreements (the EU has more than 50), to get its borders back (the UK is not in Schengen), to be able to devalue the pound (not being in the EMU). The UK does not need to fear the European Court of Justice (no other country has so many cases decided in favour of its position).

On the contrary membership of the EU allowed the City of London to grow as the powerful gateway to the financial markets of Europe; membership of the EU fuelled inward investment in manufacturing as a bridge into European markets; being a member of the EU gave

Britain a powerful seat at the table whenever anything was negotiated and decided by Brussels.

And immigration? In 2004, the Blair government opened the UK labour market for 10 new EU countries even before the UK was forced to do so. And the 'vast' amount of money the UK pays to Brussels (remember the rebate) is a tiny fraction of the whole budget. And still, during more than two years of negotiations with Brussels the UK Government was at pains **not** to explain anything of this to the British public.

### **Catherine Lough – Strangers on the shore?**

For the Polish community, the Referendum result has caused considerable uncertainty. Outside St Mary's Church, I speak to Eva Kowalska, an administration worker who moved from Poland in 2006. She describes Boston then, when it was 'a small village'; now, its streets are bustling. "Eastern Europeans built Boston, basically," she says. "Ninety-nine per cent of the people in the fields and the factories were Polish".

After Brexit, she feels she can no longer plan for the future. She is unconvinced by Theresa May's wavering assurances that EU migrants will be protected; the lack of clarity is too unsettling. "A lot of Eastern Europeans are terrified". She describes friends who have paid into mortgages, fearing they will return to Poland with nothing. "I think I will leave. I had a lot of dreams here [...] But [Theresa May] hasn't decided, and even if she does, she won't tell us the truth".

Eva had thought of Boston as her home, but she feels uncomfortable now. "I don't want to feel like a stranger here". Her experiences with locals have been positive, and she was shocked by the Referendum result. She feels people were swayed by promises of improvements to the NHS. "Maybe they thought there would be less [immigrants], but they didn't know what they were doing. I think they should have a second vote".

### **Tonje Iversen – A new identity, a new enemy**

Brexit was a massive surprise in Norway. A few months after the vote I moved to London to work as a reporter for two Norwegian news

outlets. Brexit was going to dominate in the world of foreign affairs for quite some time.

Of course, I was expecting people to have opinions about Brexit and to feel strongly about it, but I was not expecting it to be as divisive as it has been. People I have known as very calm and composed, clearly showed their outrage in social media. Sometimes in a brutal way, especially when they wrote about Leavers.

Brexit was personal. A new identity was created. Either you were a Leaver or a Remainer. And depending on which box you ticked you became friend or enemy.

Brexit appeared to be the painful heartbreak you never get over. A heartache followed by denial, followed by rage and resentment. Followed by ideas about how the UK could get back together with its long-term partner again. The impossible break up, a love story coming to an end.

**‘Do They Mean Us?’**, commissioned by John Mair, in a partnership between the Birmingham City University Centre for Brexit Studies, looks at the most important UK political decision for 40 years. The writers, all distinguished foreign correspondents based in the UK or elsewhere, have in many cases lived and worked in the UK for many years and they each discuss their experience and perspective of Brexit in 16 entertaining, and often hard-hitting, articles.

**Do They Mean Us? The Foreign Correspondents’ View of Brexit is available NOW in paperback and digitally on Kindle. Find out more [here](#).**