

Sneak peek at Brexit book ‘Do They Mean Us?’

The first book in our Bite-Size Brexit book series ‘Do They Mean Us?’ has now been published and is 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...

Angela Antetomasa – Television anchor and host for CNBC (Italian)

The Great Divide

The bus to the City

It happened on a bus, one cold morning in November 2018. I was going to work, happily planning the day ahead. Being a television presenter, I was smartly dressed and made up, going through my notes and preparing for my live show.

On its way from Chelsea to the City, the bus was nearing Parliament Square when an elderly man nicely approached me. He smiled, said good morning and asked me where I was from.

I didn’t see it coming.

As soon as I uttered the word Italy, his attitude suddenly changed: a long string of insults and abuse came out of his mouth, leaving me – and the crowd on the bus – totally shocked.

“Get the f*** out of this country, what are you doing here? Go back home, you are not welcome!”

Wait – was he really talking to me? I was frozen.

The entire crowd of commuters was looking in awe, but nobody uttered a word or raised an arm to stop him.

I got out of the bus as if in trance. I couldn't even react to that. I was speechless. Did THAT really happen? Did it happen to ME? I looked smart and business-like, I was happily minding my own business. How could that be?

Not a Londoner

In my mind, the images of my life in London started unravelling. I had been living and working here for about 20 years, this was MY home now. Did he really say I wasn't welcome – in my own home?

And that was when it really hit me hard. I had always proudly seen myself as a Londoner. After the Referendum, I expected there could be some kind of divide, but not directly impacting my life. I was a Londoner, I had been here for so long...but only then I realised: for them I was not a Londoner, I was Italian. I was on the other side.

I was European – and by default, 'not welcome'. I didn't belong any more. It didn't matter that I had a (great) job, nor that I already had a job when I came here.

I had moved from New York to London because I was offered a position as a television presenter in the City, at Bloomberg Television. After a few years I had joined CNBC: ever since, I had been working as a presenter for its Italian-speaking channel.

Not only I had a job, but from the very beginning I had done all it was necessary to fit in. I arrived here in the late '90s: I landed in the UK on a Sunday afternoon and a few hours later, on the Monday morning, I was at work. The first day in the job my new employer did everything possible to make sure I could properly begin my new life in the UK. Before my training even started, they helped me open a bank

account, set up my National Insurance number, sort out the formalities to help me rent a flat.

Since then, I had been steadily working every single day, and done all I could to settle in. I paid taxes, I registered with a GP, I had bought a house, a car, I had friends.

London was not only my dream – it was my home, and it had been for a very long time. I had a life here. I was settled. At least, I was – until now. All of a sudden, I started wondering if my future was really going to be here.

Tristan de Bourbon-Parme – Correspondent in the UK for the national newspapers in Belgium (La Libre Belgique), Switzerland (La Tribune de Genève and 24 Heures) and France (La Croix and L’Opinion)

A rational vote against a rational argument? (Or what was it really about?)

Leaving what?

In the months preceding the Referendum, I travelled across the country for my articles, and met nobody who liked the EU and thought that remaining would be a good idea. Apart from a handful of rare exceptions of former or aspiring Erasmus students, from Romford to Glasgow, via Dover, most of my interviewees usually expressed a wish to leave the EU, though often with a tinge of self-doubt, as one stated: “I want to leave the EU, but will I be brave enough to vote to leave?”

None, it seemed to me, were rejecting this European organisation in and of itself; neither Remainers nor Leavers know the ins and outs of the organisation well enough to vote on it. For the latter, the EU represented the status quo touted by David Cameron, and the political and economic reality their country has known for the last 40 years. To reject it meant to reject a system that had turned them into second-class citizens.

Paole De Carelis – UK correspondent at Corriere della Sera, Italy

Citizens of somewhere or citizens of nowhere? (Or what are so-called British values?)

When I arrived in London in the mid-1980s, I was one of a handful of non-British students at my school. My otherness made me exotic. Did I really leave Italy for the UK? Did my grandmother make pasta by hand? How had I managed to learn English? I was praised for my accent and questioned about the weather. I have now lived in the UK for more than 30 years, but I began to feel properly foreign in the run-up to the Referendum.

The hostility towards immigrants took me aback. ‘Cockroaches’ (*The Sun*, 17 April 2015), ‘Violent thugs and rapists clogging up the prisons’ (the *Daily Mail*, 3 June 2015), invaders, pests, leeches sucking the blood out of the NHS, social provisions, the job market. Whatever ends up happening with Brexit, it’s the language on immigration that for me was the biggest disappointment.

Initially, the Referendum was disheartening because it crystallised the lack of belief in a world order that had, amongst other things, made my existence possible. I had relished the ability to travel and settle where I wanted without paying too much attention to geographical borders. If I could attend university – at the time there were no fees – and apply for jobs in this country, it was because of the EU.

The economic forecast for a post-Brexit Britain were dire, but would it really be that bad? A divorce, after all, doesn’t have to be ugly. A deal would be found, Britain would leave the EU in an orderly fashion and the new situation would become normality. I hung on to optimism, until it was no longer possible.

Tessa Szyszkowitz – UK correspondent Austrian news magazine profi

The flipside of Brextremism (Or why journalists should get politically active sometimes)

The idea that Britain might leave the European Union had upset me since the idea of a Referendum was floated by Eurosceptics in the Tory party. To me it is a sign of civilisation if European leaders spend their time negotiating over the degree of how much a cucumber

should be bent, rather than sending their armies against each other on the battlefields.

As an Austrian I was always convinced of the need for the EU. I know Britons do not necessarily feel that way. Unlike the countries on the European continent the United Kingdom has not been invaded for nine centuries. The prospect of peace and security on the European continent is not as ostensibly important to people here.

As I watched Euroscepticism rise and Brexit becoming a real option, I decided to forgo my usual journalistic impartiality and to become politically engaged. After the British General Election in May 2015 my friend and colleague Birgit Maass, the UK correspondent of *Deutsche Welle* said to me: "I think we should do something to prevent Britain from leaving the EU". I instantly agreed with her. Although it somewhat clashed with our belief in journalistic neutrality, we came to the conclusion that in matters of principle journalists should be allowed to take a stance, too.

Philip Sime – Producer on the Raw Politics programme at Euronews NBC

The view from Brussels (Or how the so-called capital of Europe is an increasingly important diplomatic destination after Brexit)

What now?

I hadn't expected it but there existed a strong recognition in Brussels that Scotland was significantly more pro-EU than its neighbours south of the border. It was a recognition those in favour of Scottish independence believed could prove vital in the coming years. SNP MEP Alyn Smith described a 'chill' which existed towards his party during the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. However, it now seemed that Brexit had shifted the political sands in Brussels. Smith said that the UK's withdrawal from the EU had 'hugely inverted' the way many viewed Scottish independence in Brussels. While polls failed to show a groundswell of support for Scottish independence, it could not be denied that a pro-EU, independent Scotland could prove to be the victory that Brussels could snatch from the jaws of Brexit defeat.

More than 40 years after it was first raised, the lowering of the Union Flag in the capital of Europe will see the UK walk away from the institutions which govern its largest trading partner. As a result, Brussels will become more, not less important for British diplomacy as London seeks to influence the EU after Brexit. Despite what many might expect, the UK's exit from the EU will likely lead to a much-larger and more active British presence in Brussels.

Nick Miller – Europe correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, based in London.

The view from Down Under; “What’s in it for us?” (Or how Australia cannot understand what some see as an act of simple self-sabotage)

In Liverpool, a month or so after the Brexit Referendum vote, I tried that old foreign correspondent standby: interrogate a taxi driver. “How did you vote?” I asked. “Brexit, no question,” he said, emphatically, with a challenge implicit in his voice. “Why?” I replied. He told me he had once picked up a distressed woman from a nightclub, late at night, and she told him she had just been sexually assaulted by a North African immigrant.

After taking a few moments to digest this, I asked the obvious question: “But what’s that got to do with Brexit?” He had barely begun answering before he accidentally drove through a red light, triggering a camera flash. This was going to cost him.

For an Australian, getting to understand Brexit has been a process of getting to understand the English. I had a slight advantage on some of my compatriots. I was born in England, though my family moved to seek sun, sand and work after the Winter of Discontent in 1978/79 when I was a child.

I retain enough Englishness (and English relatives) to appreciate the lingering distrust of the continent and its people, the instinctive rejection of the post-war plan for all Europe to join in an ode to joy and brotherhood. Europe, I understood, has always been a market to the British, not a project.

And that's why, when my editors in Australia queried the prospect of Brexit in disbelief, I assured them it was a very real chance.

From Down Under it looked like a pointless act of self-sabotage. Australia is one of the world's biggest fans of trade deals. As a self-aware 'middle power', we know that we prosper through alliances. We have few Empire romances to fall back on (though we have the Commonwealth, more of that later). We instinctively seek to draw ourselves closer to our neighbours, friends and trading partners through deals and forums.

The sight of a country deliberately throwing away a close, mutually beneficial partnership, wilfully damaging its economy and influence on a point of cultural principle, was a surprise.

'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](#).

Other books in the Bite-Sized series include The Case for Brexit, Keeping the Wheels on the Road – UK Auto Post Brexit and Will the Tory Party Ever Be the Same?, and are set to be published in early 2019.