Brexit update from Belgium

FOR NUJ members in Belgium, the main Brexit effect so far is uncertainty about their future status, whether freelance or employed. The uncertainty covers both the right of British members to remain in Belgium (and other Continental countries) and the right to continue working as up to now.

Some members fear that, if the UK continues to treat EU nationals with such hostility, Continental countries might respond in kind. Anyone posted to Belgium by their employer is likely to be under a UK contract, but it’s unclear whether tax agreements will be affected by Brexit. Also, they would still need to register with their local authority, so Brexit could affect those members’ future status in the country.

The NUJ’s Continental European Council plans to put a motion to the Delegate Meeting in April calling on the union to work with the European Federation of Journalists to increase cooperation with EU organisations, to ensure continued UK media coverage of the EU and to avoid a UK-centric view of news by UK outlets.

The NUJ Brussels branch is likely to call for the NUJ to seek continued post-Brexit access by members to EU institutions – particularly important for many Brussels members.

The fall in the value of the pound against the euro after the Brexit vote has hit freelances in Belgium, and other Eurozone countries, who work for UK outlets. Members in Belgium already face some of the highest tax and social security charges in Europe, so UK rates for the job were never very attractive.

Some NUJ members in Belgium have opted to apply for dual British-Belgian citizenship. Some see Irish nationality as an easier route to continued EU citizenship. Dual citizenship is not possible in Spain, while in France, getting citizenship can reportedly take two years. However, as elsewhere, clock up five years of continuous residence in Belgium and you can apply for citizenship. That usually requires proof of: professional activity; payment of social security and taxes; and a fairly low-level mastery of one of the country’s three national languages.

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NUJ Continental European Council report on Freelance Industrial Council

See www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1702belg.html for NUJ Brussels Branch’s guide to post-Brexit Belgium for UK nationals.

Brexit – millions still in limbo

OVER FOUR million people are still in limbo over Brexit – including our members who are either EU citizens living in the UK or UK citizens in other EU countries. All are in the same state of uncertainty they’ve endured since the 2016 referendum.

UK Prime Minister Theresa May’s speech in Florence in September clarified that the “transitional period” after the UK is expected to leave the EU on 29 March 2019 is to last “at least two years” after that date.

During that transitional period, the current freedom of movement within the EU will remain. EU nationals arriving in the UK from 29 March 2019, however, will be “registered”. The same speech gave assurances that the rights of EU citizens would be written into the exit treaty between the EU and the UK. UK courts will “take account of” European Court of Justice rulings on the rights of EU nationals after the transition ends sometime after March 2021.

In the “technical document” Citizens’ rights: administrative procedures in the UK published on 7 November, the UK Government gave more detail on its “proposal” on settled status for EU nationals. Those seeking settled status will “not have their applications refused on minor technicalities,” with an automatic right of appeal if rejected. There is a promise that the “new system will be streamlined, low-cost and user-friendly”.

The proposal was immediately rejected by the European Parliament, which said it has “major issues,” adding that EU nationals had an automatic right to stay in the UK. The Parliament’s Brexit co-ordinator Guy Verhofstadt criticised the document as “inadequate”.

There are reports that the European Parliament is preparing to veto the final exit deal between the EU and the UK over citizen’s rights issues.

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TRAUMA from page 1 can cause the same reaction as if you were there. Gavin suggested strategies to process this material, to mitigate its effects. One “vital act of self-care” is to “take time out from the material”. Avoid working alone on this stuff, or late at night.

When you have traumatic material piling up, “do active things… hit the space bar to stop video… get up, walk around.” Do things that put you in control. Don’t pause the footage during the traumatic bits. There’s also one thing you always still have control over: your breathing.

Other actions you can take when viewing traumatic content include covering images of “the dead bodies” when you have to rewind through a clip. Or “play it with the sound off;” or change the dimensions of the video box. Such actions ensure “you’re controlling it, it’s not controlling you.”

Molly Clarke of the Rory Peck Trust told LFB that “there is more awareness of trauma as a result of Grenfell and recent terror attacks.” (See more on the Trust on page 5.) Since these events, the Dart Centre’s also seen more requests from news organisations for “intervention.”

Trauma, as well as the modern market economy that we freelances are in, are inherently isolating, notes Gavin: so solidarity and connection are particularly important for us – and the Branch is an example of seeking those. Also vital is “celebrating the meaning and purpose” of what you do. Gavin commented that “there’s no point in going through all this harrowing… stuff, if it’s pointless; people can put up with all kinds of extraordinary things if they feel their work has a meaning and value.”

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