

In Limbo

Claudia Delpero



Claudia Delpero edits Europe Street News, one of the best online sources for Brexit. When In Limbo was published during summer 2017, she interviewed Elena Remigi, whose idea it was to collect Brexit testimonies of EU citizens in a book.

EUROPE STREET
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With all the stories that appeared over the past 17 months on the plight of EU citizens living in the UK, it was only a matter of time before someone collected the testimonies in a book. The title is *In Limbo – Brexit testimonies from EU citizens in the UK*, which first appeared in June, with new revised editions due to be published by Byline Books in December 2017.

On 23 June 2016, the UK voted in a referendum to leave the European Union. That moment started a period of distress for EU nationals in the UK and for British citizens living in the rest of the EU. Their rights to study, work and live in another EU country, like any other European citizen, derive from EU Treaties and will cease to apply once the UK leaves the European Union. A solution might be found as part of the exit negotiations and the European Commission has put forward proposals to guarantee that nothing will change for these groups after Brexit. But there are areas of disagreement with the British government and there hasn't been any unilateral commitment to secure the rights regardless of the outcome of the negotiations. Hence living 'in limbo'.

The idea to gather the stories for a book came to Elena Remigi, an Italian translator who moved to Britain 12 years ago after living in Ireland and Canada. Véronique Martin and Tim Sykes, French and British academics, also joined the project.

'After the EU referendum people started to share their feelings in Facebook groups. They expressed grievances, sadness and a sense of betrayal. Brexit made a large community feel unwelcome in the UK. The emotional impact was strong, but people

around us did not understand it. There are Europeans with British in-laws who voted to leave the EU without recognising this would deeply affect their family members,' says Elena Remigi. 'We wanted to show this human side of the Brexit story. If we only left the testimonies on Facebook, they would have got lost. We thought they should be preserved, shared and delivered to history.'

In Limbo includes some 140 stories of people who tell directly their experiences. Almost all EU countries are represented. There is a Dutch widow, who lost her British husband and does not qualify for permanent residence, although she has lived in the UK since 1967. There is a French mother who is ill and does not know if she can still rely on the British health system. There is a Romanian who remembers the Soviet Bloc and explains what borders mean to East Europeans. There are also British people married to EU nationals and British living in other EU countries, who voice their fears about the future.

The stories are grouped in five chapters, each representing a feeling: sorrow, disappointment, worry, anger and betrayal. There was little editing to maintain the authenticity of each testimony. Adding to the personal accounts, the Foreword is by the award-winning poet George Szirtes, a British-Hungarian who arrived in the UK as a refugee at the age of eight.

In total, almost 200 people sent their memoirs through the Facebook group 'Our Brexit Testimonies'. Those that didn't make it into the book are published online (ourbrexitblog.eu).

The purpose of the initiative is not profit, but awareness. The publication continues to be distributed to politicians in the UK and in Brussels. The first edition of *In Limbo* (£8.99 from Amazon) was self-published and the £6,000 needed to cover distribution and advertising was raised through a crowd-funding page. Proceedings from sale are used to support citizens' rights, says Elena Remigi.

She adds, 'when the UK triggered Article 50 of the Treaty starting the Brexit process, I described how I felt using some verses of Dante's Divine Comedy, Inferno.'

*'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai in una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era perduta...'*

*'Midway upon the journey of life,
I found myself in a dark forest,
for the straightforward path had been lost...'*

She also recalls the final verses of Dante's *Inferno*:

'E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.'

'Thence we came forth to re-behold the stars.'

'This is my wish for each one of us. Our limbo is not only about having the right documents or not. There is a psychological limbo too, in which we all feel we have plunged. My hope is that we can all return to behold the stars, content and settled as we first were before this referendum.'

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