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## BRITISH COMMUNITY NEWS

from the **Brussels British Community Association** *asbl*  
[www.britishinbrussels.com](http://www.britishinbrussels.com)

### CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Dear BBCA member,

The British government has just published a White Paper setting out its priorities for negotiating Britain's exit of the EU. It reiterates what Prime Minister May had said in her Lancaster House speech and Ambassador Rose has kindly summarized this in her article in this newsletter. Prior to the White Paper, a [bill was introduced in Parliament](#), giving the Prime Minister the power to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. This was the result of [a Supreme Court ruling](#), the constitutional significance of which was rather swamped by the inarticulate and politically motivated debate on whether this judgement was a disguised way of blocking Brexit. While the parties bringing the judicial review were indeed self-confessed remainers, the question before the Supreme Court had little to do with the referendum result, nor was it a comment on the merits of leaving or staying in the EU. What the Supreme Court had to decide upon were constitutional questions of parliamentary sovereignty, an issue of significance in English history. As the court's president Judge Neuberger said: "...any change in the law to give effect to the referendum must be made in the only way permitted by the UK constitution, namely by an Act of Parliament...To proceed otherwise would be a breach of settled constitutional principles stretching back many centuries." The Supreme Court's ruling underlines a concept, which should actually earn the approval of Brexiteers, namely to reaffirm a system in which the people live under their own law, as defined or repealed by Parliament. It is good to observe that in an era of political populism, the good old system of separation of powers with its checks and balances is still alive and kicking.

Nevertheless, not much has happened since our last newsletter to alleviate the feeling of insecurity UK expats have, whether as private citizens, as mothers or fathers, pensioners, employees or employers. The BBCA recognises that the Brexit vote is at the forefront of your preoccupations. We, therefore, want to provide a platform allowing

you to express your concerns and obtain information. We are planning a series of roundtable discussions on issues including residency, health insurance and social security, pensions, and taking Belgian or other EU nationality. In this newsletter, you will find an account of BBCA committee member Glynis Whiting's experience of obtaining dual British and Belgian nationality. If you have gone down that road, you will have come across a number of contradictions concerning the procedure depending in which commune you are applying. Some enforce the conditions more rigidly than others and the police interviews can also be very different. Our roundtable events will aim to provide you with the information you need. We will also be working closely with the British Chamber of Commerce in Brussels to enable access for our members to their Brexit-related events. The first such event will be held on the evening of 23 February at the Chamber on the subject of employing EEA and non-EEA nationals in Belgium.

The BBCA committee has embarked on a review of its strategy to further improve the effectiveness of our work. By the time of the AGM in May, we will be able to report on these changes in detail. One of our priorities is how to communicate more effectively with the community. We have decided to replace this newsletter with more web-based communications, including a blog that will be distributed via e-mail. Our newsletter editor Tim Reynolds is keen to hear your feedback on these proposed changes.

But it is not all about change: some things remain the same. The annual BBCA/British Chamber Christmas Cocktail at the British Residence took place last December and Ambassador Rose distributed funds raised from our activities to the BBCA's nominated charities. Last week, we also held our annual reception for leaders of our member organisations, which is always a great networking occasion.

You will hear from us again soon concerning our planned Brexit events, so watch this space!

Caroline Laske,  
BBCA Chair

## **Brexit Update from the Embassy** *Alison Rose, British Ambassador to Belgium*



**This is my third article for the BBCA on Brexit. A lot has happened over recent weeks. I hope you have been able to follow developments such as Prime Minister May's speeches in Davos and at Lancaster House, and the new UK industrial strategy, via Embassy social media ([Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)).**

In the Davos speech, Prime Minister May talked about her belief in free trade, partnership and globalisation as the foundations of a better world. And of the need to respond to concerns about whether those forces are working for the good of everyone, and show that the politics of the mainstream can deliver the change people need, and build support for the rules-based international system.

This is the backdrop to the new UK industrial strategy which was issued for consultation on 23 January. The strategy will see the UK Government stepping up to a new active role to back business and ensure more people in all corners of the UK share in the benefits of business success.

In the Lancaster House speech on 17 January, Theresa May set out the 12 priorities which the UK Government will use to negotiate BREXIT. These are as follows: 1) Certainty wherever possible; 2) Control of our own laws; 3) Strengthening the UK; 4) Maintaining the Common Travel Area with Ireland; 5) Control of immigration; 6) Rights for EU nationals in Britain and British nationals in the EU; 7) Enhancing rights for workers; 8) Free trade with European markets; 9) New trade agreements with other countries; 10) A leading role in science and innovation; 11) Cooperation on crime, terrorism and foreign affairs; and 12) A phased approach, delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit.

I cannot unpack all of these in a short article. Key points are that the Government wants a new strategic partnership between the UK and the EU. The UK will not seek membership of the single market or the European Economic Area, but rather greatest possible access to the single market through a new and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement on a fully reciprocal basis. We also do not want to be part of the Common Commercial policy or be bound by the Common External Tariff, but instead to have a customs agreement with the EU which allows for tariff free trade with the EU and for our cross-border trade to be as frictionless as possible.

A point of particular interest to readers is that the Prime Minister wants to guarantee the rights of EU citizens already living in Britain and the rights of British citizens in other member states as early as we can. She has told other EU leaders she is ready to resolve this issue now.

The final point to note is that, following a judgement in the Supreme Court, the Government has introduced a Bill in Parliament to give the Prime Minister the power to notify the UK's intention to withdraw from the EU. That is expected to get through Parliament in time to meet our deadline of notifying withdrawal (Article 50) by the end of March 2017.

The Prime Minister has been clear that though we are leaving the EU, we are not leaving Europe. We seek a new and equal partnership with our friends and allies in the EU. And we do not want the EU to unravel. It remains overwhelmingly in the UK's national interest – and those of the wider world – that the EU should succeed.

As well as these regular updates, do please continue to follow our social media accounts for the latest developments.

#### **Editors note: Brexit recent key documents**

[Prime Minister Theresa May's Lancaster House speech of 17 January](#)

[Supreme Court Judgement of 24 January 2017](#)

[UK Parliament: EU \(Notification of Withdrawal\) Bill documents](#)

[The Government White Paper published 2 February 2017](#)

### **Why not the EEA?**

*A brief guide to the alt-EU European single market*



**The European Economic Area (EEA) is not the same as the European Union (EU). With or without Article 50, the UK is a member of the EEA in its own right and all UK citizens have rights to live, work and trade within the Single Market. And these rights don't disappear because we leave the EU.**

To trigger our departure from the EEA single market, the UK Parliament should trigger Article 127 of the EEA Treaty and give a 12 month notice period. Currently the UK Government disagrees: it says once it triggers Article 50 we are heading for the door for the EU and the EEA.

Covering over 500 million people comprising 31 different countries, the joint GDP of the EEA is estimated at nearly £12 trillion. It is also our invention: in 1992 Britain's brainchild, the EU Single Market came into force and in 1994 it was extended across all Europe to the 31 nations currently signed up to the European Economic Area Treaty.

Remaining in the EEA may be a 'third way' that resolves the bitter post-Referendum divisions in the UK. Consider the following:

- Border control vs single market: After triggering Article 50, the UK will negotiate access to the single market in exchange for more border control. But the EEA offers both the single market and national border controls already.
- The EEA is covered by the EFTA court not the *bête noire* of Brexiteers: the European Court of Justice. The EFTA Court was set up by the UK and its official language is English.
- The EEA has no 'Commission' or 'Parliament'. It is solely about pan-European free trade.
- With EEA membership no money goes to the EU budget.

Could remaining an EEA member offer a unifying Brexit solution? A recent poll showed the UK may have voted to leave the EU, [but 90% want to stay in the EEA.](#)

## Post Brexit employment requirements

### *British Chamber seminar open to BBCA members*

The British Chamber is organising a seminar on employing European Economic Area (EEA) and non EEA nationals in Belgium on the evening of 23 February. The rules to employ EEA nationals vs non-EEA nationals in Belgium are substantially different. The formalities for self-employed persons in Belgium vary also depending whether or not you are an EEA national.



Although it is too early yet to know if Brexit would imply more immigration restrictions for UK nationals, during this session our panel of experts will address the issues to consider when employing EEA nationals and non-EEA nationals in Belgium. Topics that will be addressed include:

- Who needs a professional card and/ or a work permit?
- Which authorities are competent?
- Which conditions must be complied with?
- How long does it take?
- Applicable social security, taxes, employment rules and other formalities when seconding foreign employees to Belgium.

The two panel speakers are Sophie Maes of law firm Claeys and Engels and Hugues Thibaut from business services provider Group S. The event starts from 6pm at the British Chamber offices and is free for BBCA members, however prior registration is required. You can get more information on the event at the [British Chamber website](#).

The BBCA is planning to work more closely with the British Chamber on Brexit issues including on the possibility of organising joint British Chamber/ BBCA events on the issue and its ramifications for the British community in Belgium.

## An Alternative White Paper

### *Ex-pat groups highlight their priorities*

A consortia of ten groups representing British citizens living and working in continental Europe have sent an “[alternative white paper](#)” to MPs and peers demanding their rights be prioritised in the UK’s EU exit talks and firmly guaranteed in the future divorce agreement.

The document spells out some of the serious concerns now facing those of us who have relied on our rights as EU citizens including setting out a Governing Principle for the Government’s approach under which the pre-Brexit rights of all those UK citizens living in the EU, and of all those EU citizens living in the UK, would be preserved and stresses that simply confirming a right of residence is not enough.

Those rights should not be confined to residence but must include the continued rights to acquire citizenship, study, have academic and professional qualifications recognised, work, run a business, move freely between EU member states, and receive healthcare, pensions and other social benefits.

## Date for your Diary

### *BBCA Annual General Meeting 2017*

The Association’s 2017 Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday 18 May at the offices of the British Chamber of Commerce at Boulevard Bischoffsheim 11, Brussels. All members and associated organisations are welcome to attend. Reports from the BBCA Council will be presented, a summary of our financial situation given, and our future plans outlined. Further details to follow.

## **BBCA Christmas Cocktails** *Festive fun and fundraising*

The annual BBCA / British Chamber Christmas Cocktail Reception took place on the evening of 8 December at the British Residence in Brussels.



As ever the evening was a very enjoyable affair with the disbursement of some large cheques to the BBCA's nominated charities: €1 5000 going to the British Charitable Fund, the Community Help Service, and the Royal British Legion and €1 000 to the Wednesday Club. All these funds coming from BBCA activities during the year.

Speeches were made by HM Ambassador Alison Rose and British Chamber President Thomas Spiller from Walt Disney. BBCA Council member Stuart Dowsett (left above) spoke on behalf of the association.

## **Democracy for UK Ex-Pats?**

### *UK government policy paper published*



In October 2016 the government published details of its approach to removing the current 15 year rule on British citizens living overseas voting in parliamentary elections. The policy seeks to remove the current rule that means British citizens abroad can only vote for 15 years from the point they were last registered to vote in the UK.

The policy seeks to give the right to vote to all British citizens overseas who were previously resident or registered to vote in the UK. It will ensure that all eligible overseas electors are able to register to vote and renew their registration in a convenient and timely fashion while maintaining the integrity of the electoral register and guarding against fraud. Overseas electors will be able to vote in parliamentary elections, but not in any other elections (such as local elections or elections to the

devolved legislatures). The franchise for referendums will continue to be set by Parliament on a case-by-case basis.

You can download [the full policy paper here](#). The government is asking for feedback on these proposals. Comments can be sent directly by email to [overseas-electors@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:overseas-electors@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

## **BBCA President Group Reception**

### *Membership networking*

Thursday 26 January saw the now annual gathering of the leaders of our member organisations to network and exchange their experience running activities within the community. The gathering was hosted at the premises of the British Chamber of Commerce near Madou in Brussels.



This central location for the Reception helped to boost the number of attendees and a packed audience heard contributions from our Ambassador Alison Rose and BBCA Chairperson Caroline Laske who spoke about the BBCA's future plans and ongoing strategy review (see below). Their contributions were followed by intense networking as group leaders got to know each other better and talked to BBCA council members about how we can work together to add value to each others events and activities.

## **BBCA Strategy and Communications Review**

### *Newsletter to become a Blog... tell us what you think*

**As part of an overall review of its strategy BBCA Council members have considered how we can better communicate with our membership and the wider ex-pat and anglophile community in Brussels and beyond.**

The review highlights that although the newsletter is informative and receives very positive feedback from its readership, the organisation needs to adopt faster and more effective tools to reach as wide an audience as possible. It was therefore recommended, and Council has accepted, that rather than producing a quarterly pdf / printed newsletter, effort should be redirected to a blog and a greater focus on our web-based communications such as our Facebook page.

Our aim is to produce a final newsletter after the BBCA AGM in May 2017 and then move to blog articles that will be distributed via email and available via the website. This will allow more timely coverage of Brexit and other fast moving issues for the community. A printed compilation of blog articles would be produced periodically for our members who do not have access to email.

If you have any views on our ideas for future BBCA communications, please contact Newsletter Editor, Tim Reynolds, via email ([tim.reynolds@intacomm.net](mailto:tim.reynolds@intacomm.net)).

## **Potverdekke or it's great to be a Belgian!**

*BBCA Council member Glynis Whiting recounts her journey to citizenship*

**After 20 years of living and working in Brussels, the UK referendum was undoubtedly the catalyst that encouraged Glynis (third left below) to take out dual British and Belgian nationality.**

My local commune, Woluwe St Lambert, was helpful and gave me a print out of the documentation that would be required. However, it is worth noting that, as ever here, if you don't know exactly the right questions to ask, you can spend time on fruitless activity – which I certainly did (!).

The advice to me as a company owner for over five years in Belgium, was that my company would be the best route to take to obtaining citizenship.

I eventually established that my original birth certificate would not suffice, so I needed to apply for a new version, with a date of issue of less than six months ago. It was easy to order online. I opted for the more expensive certified version, for which I had to have an authorised translation. The certificate then was required to be attached to a formal translation “à cheval”. This legal phrase took some time to clarify, but eventually I was advised it meant the translation had to be fixed to the original with an official stamp across the join between the pages.



The only other forms required were from my social security organisation to confirm that my social security payments were fully up to date. My accountant was helpful in getting exactly the right format for this – again it was not obvious.

Anyway, a year ago I finally submitted the documentation to my commune who advised that the response would take about five months.

I had originally hoped that the application would be an “insurance policy” in case there would be a referendum decision to leave the EU (surely not!). In the event of course, I was very relieved to get the response last July that I had indeed been successful and I could go to the Town Hall to collect my new ID card. I am really pleased to now be a Belgian, and thanks to everyone who helped me to get there, so here's a “Potverdekke” toast to all!

Editors note: *Potverdekke* means something like “Gosh darn it” in Flemish. You can find more information on obtaining Belgian citizenship here: [Expatica.com](http://Expatica.com) – Belgium and the [Kingdom of Belgium](http://Kingdom of Belgium).

### **To be.. or not to be a Belgian..**

BBCA is keen to hear your experience of seeking Belgian citizenship. From anecdotal evidence we are hearing of widely ranging approaches with many inconsistencies between procedures from commune to commune.

If you would like to share your experiences, anonymously if you wish, please contact Tim Reynolds, via email ([tim.reynolds@intacomm.net](mailto:tim.reynolds@intacomm.net)). All correspondence will be treated in the strictest confidence.

## British International Catholic School

*'Happy children achieve more'*

The Brussels International Catholic School is an independent school located in central Brussels very close to the European institutions. It offers a bi-lingual education (English-French) to over 600 students coming from over 60 different nationalities. The school follows the curriculum of the Cambridge Examinations Board of which it is a recognised test centre (IGCSE and A Levels). The school is also fully accredited and is a full member of the European Council of International Schools (ECIS).

The school believes that 'Happy children achieve more' and places the individual child at the centre of its attention. Working as a committed and dedicated community, and inspired by Christian values, the school seeks to achieve academic excellence in a caring environment where the individual needs of every child are fully catered for.

The school accepts children aged from two and a half to eighteen. Specialist language support teachers ensure that children can integrate into the school at all levels, regardless of their level of English and French. The school attempts to maintain the school fees as low as possible.

The school believes that education is a collective endeavour, in partnership with parents and children alike. Seeking to incorporate new technology with tried and trusted methods, the school combines modernity with classical methods of education, especially in those critical years where children are learning to read and write, and acquire those life skills that will prepare them for leadership in the future.

Believing that the creative arts are an invaluable means of personal development, the school offers the opportunity to excel in music and drama, producing a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta every year. In addition the school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities ranging from Languages and Sports to Opera and Science clubs.

BICS is also host to the BBBCA Film Club whose activities, that take place twice a month on a Friday evening, have contributed significantly to charitable funds during 2016. For more information you can email the school on [info@bicschool.be](mailto:info@bicschool.be) or visit the school website ([www.bicschool.be](http://www.bicschool.be)) or Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/bicschool.be>).

## BRIDFAS

*Decorative and Fine Arts*

**If you enjoy or are you interested in the Arts in their widest sense then the events of the British Decorative and Fine Arts Society of Brussels (BRIDFAS) are for you.**

The next BRIDFAS event is 'The Tragic Beauty of Ice' with Peter Warwick at the Woluwe St Lambert Town Hall on Wednesday 15 February. The talk will cover the film and photography of Herbert Ponting and Frank Hurley, and the paintings of Dr Edward Wikson and George Marston who captured the wonderful world of Antarctica well before today's natural history programmes.

The following event is on the Renaissance Art of Armour with by Tobias Capwell at L'Arrière-Scène in Etterbeek on Wednesday 15 March 2017. Armour was one of the great Renaissance art-forms creating of a living sculpture that demanded fantastic skills in the sculpting of iron and steel.

The events are welcoming and relaxed with the talks starting at 8 p.m. with free refreshments served from 7:30 p.m. Membership fees are 80€ for the season of 8 talks, guests: 15€ per lecture, students: 8€ per lecture. You will find more information on the BRIDFAS website: [www.bridfas.org](http://www.bridfas.org).



## BBCA 2017

### BBCA Membership subscriptions 2017

For those members who have not yet paid their BBCA membership subscriptions for 2017, payment can be made by bank transfer to our bank account number IBAN BE36 0014 4200 0481 / BIC GEBABEBB stating the category of membership and your name.

Membership rates are now: **Student €10, Single €20, Family €25, Group €30.**

More information can be obtained from our Membership Secretary:  
Stuart Dowsett 0475 70 17 82 [stuart.dowsett@eurocity.be](mailto:stuart.dowsett@eurocity.be)

### For Events visit the BBCA website

#### BBCA Annual General Meeting – 18 May 2017

The [BBCA website](#) has an emphasis on events. Why not visit now? And don't forget to send us your event news to get maximum publicity.

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A general contact email can be found at our website: <http://www.britishinbrussels.com/contact.php>

## BBCA Facebook Page

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Don't forget the BBCA Facebook page! Our Facebook page is the fastest way to get the latest BBCA information, news and events for Brits (and others too) living or working in Brussels.

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## The Crucible

*ATC present the Arthur Miller classic*



**The American Theatre Company (ATC) will present Arthur Miller's classic American drama, directed by Christopher Flores on 7 - 11 March at 20:00 at the Viage Theatre, Grand Casino Brussels.**

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is a powerful and disturbing fictionalized account of the Salem witch trials that took place in 17th century Massachusetts. When a young girl and her friends begin to accuse people of witchcraft, an incendiary blend of rigid religious views, superstition, and personal grudges kindles a community's mass hysteria.

The American Theatre Company is proud to present its version of one of the greatest works of American drama.

## The Cripple of Inishmaan

*ITG shows sold out – but waiting list available*

**The Irish Theatre Group (ITG) is performing 'The Cripple of Inishmaan' by Martin McDonagh and directed by Noreen Doyle on 7-11 and 16 – 17 February at the [Warehouse Studio Theatre](#).**

Set on a remote island off the west coast of Ireland in 1934, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is a dark comedy. Inspired by a real event – the filming of *The Man of Aran* on Inishmore in 1934 – the story follows the impact of the news of the filming on young Cripple Billy and the other inhabitants of Inishmaan. Cruel, sad, sometimes violent, yet achingly funny, the story reveals the characters in a way that makes you realise that people are not always as they seem.

**All shows are currently sold out**, however tickets may become available before opening night and a waiting list is in operation via an email to [itg.asbl@gmail.com](mailto:itg.asbl@gmail.com)

## Earth Observation on Valentine's Day

*RSC Belgium present the EU's Copernicus Programme*

**Few people are aware of the wealth of data and insights provided by Earth observation satellites. Fewer still know how successful Europe has been in realising the most ambitious Earth observation programme yet.**



All will be explained at RSC Belgium's next public lecture on Tuesday 14 February at the British School of Brussels. In a personal view, Dr Peter Bregier from the Commission, will describe the EU's Copernicus Space Programme presenting the progress made over the last decade, giving a brief overview of the satellites flying, what they measure and what information they already make available to all of us on a daily basis, free of charge.

Some examples of the public services derived from Copernicus data include supporting emergency response during natural catastrophes, tracking land use and changes, forecasting of air quality and ocean dynamics, and, its latest addition, projections of climate change and the impacts on our environment and economic life.

The talk will commence at 7:45pm and entry costs EUR 5 (*bona fide* students free). To reserve your seat(s), or to obtain more information, please contact RSC Belgium via email ([rscbelgium@gmail.com](mailto:rscbelgium@gmail.com)). NB prior reservation is obligatory to enable your access to the school.

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