

## International

# 'Painful': Britons, Europeans count Brexit's personal cost

## Some Europeans frustrated, afraid of the future

**LONDON:** Frustrated by Brexit negotiations, angry at Brussels or simply afraid of the future, ordinary Britons and other Europeans are already taking life-changing decisions a year before Britain leaves the EU. Office workers, farmers and radio hosts are taking on new nationalities, relocating their businesses or looking forward to lucrative alternative trade deals, as politicians struggle to come up with a plan. "Other people my age, they are starting settling down, they make more long-term plans with their lives," said 32-year-old Matt Davies, a British expat in Madrid.

"It's very difficult for me to plan anything beyond March 2019 because you just have no idea what is going to happen," the call centre worker said. British and EU diplomats resumed negotiations in Brussels last week and are hoping to agree next month on a post-Brexit transition period. But the shape of future relations between Britain and the EU is far from certain and the British government is deeply divided over how to proceed.

That uncertainty is even more pressing for the three million EU nationals living in the UK, many of whom are now questioning their future there. Brexit affects "every part of our lives", radio presenter Gosia Prochal, one of nearly a million Polish citizens living in Britain, told AFP. The 25-year-old is based in Februaryborough, a city in eastern England that has seen a sharp rise in immigration in recent years and voted 61 percent in favour of leaving the EU in the 2016 referendum.

### 'Can't work with uncertainty'

AFP spoke to five EU nationals and five Britons in the UK, as well as five British citizens living in continental Europe about their hopes and fears ahead of the expected Brexit date of March 29, 2019. William Lynch, from Northern Ireland, farms oysters in Lough Foyle. He faces having to move his business two kilo-

metres downstream to the Republic of Ireland-across a currently invisible boundary-if customs tariffs come in after Brexit. "I can't really leave it till the last minute to do that," the 63-year-old ex-fireman said. The oysters he lays down this year, largely for export to France, will not be harvested until after the UK has left the EU. "I can't work with uncertainty," he said.

### Britain 'tearing itself apart'

Brexit-backing sheep farmer Pip Simpson said he felt Brussels was making the negotiations "as awkward as possible" to deter other countries from leaving the bloc. The 51-year-old voted to leave the European Union in the June 2016 referendum but now faces the prospect of losing the EU subsidies his farm relies on.

Polls in recent months have shown a slight increase in the number of people who, in hindsight, think Britain was wrong to vote to leave the EU, but experts say the difference from the referendum is negligible. "The country was divided down the middle 18 months ago and not a great deal has changed," political scientist John Curtice told a conference

## Politicians struggle to come up with a Brexit plan

this month. The discord has left some Britons living in the EU feeling alienated. Business intelligence consultant Andrew Ketley, 41, who moved to Munich in February last year, is putting down roots.

"We don't want to live in a country which is tearing itself apart," he said. Barnaby Harward, 44, an editor who has lived in Warsaw with his Polish wife since 2005, is applying for Polish citizenship and ending thoughts of moving back home. "The whole Brexit thing has put me off. It kind of made me feel that my country is not what I thought it was," he said. EU citizens in Britain are taking similar decisions. Gabriela Szomor, 32, a Romanian who has lived all her adult life in Kent, southeast England, is now applying for British nationality, as well as UK accountancy qualifi-



This combination of pictures shows (from up left to bottom right) British citizens leaving abroad David Rooney, owner of the My Woodie rock bar in Paris; Barnaby Harward, a law firm language editor living in Warsaw; Andrew Ketley, a business intelligence consultant who moved to Munich, and Emily Macintosh, a communications officer at the European Environmental Bureau in Brussels. AFP spoke to 15 people across Europe whose careers are already deeply impacted by Brexit more than a year before Britain's departure date. —AFP

cations. "England is my home now," the salad-farm bookkeeper said.

### 'A painful process'

For people in business, clarity cannot come soon enough. Richard Stone, 44, the chief executive of London retail stockbrokers Share, wants Britain to sign trade agreements with the growth markets of China and India. "It is important that we do a deal, and relatively quickly in terms of clarifying and giving business certainty," said the Leave voter, speaking in a personal capacity. "I am reasonably optimistic we will get there, but it will be a painful process." Since the Brexit vote,

Stone's business, all done in sterling, has been unruffled.

But French wine importer Laurent Faure, 50, who owns Le Vieux Comptoir bistro in central London, said the plunge of the pound due to the Brexit vote has wiped out his profit margin. "You have to envisage doing something else-if necessary, leaving England," the former lawyer said. "It would be the last resort." Dimitri Scariato, 40, an Italian composer who lectures at the Royal College of Music in London, said Brexit had changed his perception of Britain-and of himself. "The only positive outcome of Brexit-that made me feel really European. I really gained my sense of being European," he said. —AFP

## Britain wants degree fees to reflect choice of subject

**LONDON:** Students at British universities could be charged variable tuition rates that reflect the economic value of their degrees, Minister for Education Damian Hinds said yesterday, before the launch of a review of higher education funding. University tuition fees in England are high compared with elsewhere in Europe at around 9,000 pounds (\$12,640) a year, and the opposition Labour Party gained support from students in last year's election with a pledge to abolish fees in the future. Hinds defended tuition fees in principle yesterday, saying they divided the cost of university education between the taxpayer and the student, but he wanted to see more variety in the way higher education is funded.

"What we need to look at is the different aspects of pricing, so the cost to put on the course, the value it is to the student and also the value to our society as a whole and to our economy for the future," he told BBC's Andrew Marr show. The Sunday Times said the government expected to see cuts in the fees for social science and arts courses which are cheaper for universities to provide. Hinds told the newspaper that almost all institutions were charging the same maximum amount for almost all courses and indicated he wanted to see more choice on price.

"Some have higher returns to the student than others," he said. "It's right that we now ask questions about how the system operates. I would like to see options available which have different costs." He said the review, due to be launched on Monday, would also look at the interest rate charged on student loans, used to fund tuition fees and living costs for students. Earlier yesterday, a parliamentary committee said the government should cut the interest rate it charges on loans to English students, and statisticians should review why the cost of hefty write-offs barely figures in official borrowing data.

Student loans taken out since 2012 charge a variable interest rate that is 3 percentage points higher than the prevailing rate of retail price inflation, taking the current interest rate to 6.1 percent. The British parliament's Treasury Committee said the use of RPI as a benchmark was unfair, and the 3 percentage point premium introduced in 2012, was hard to justify. "The government must reconsider the use of high interest rates on student loans," Nicky Morgan, the Conservative chair of the cross-party committee, said. —Reuters

## Trump turns on FBI over shooting after criticisms

**FORT LAUDERDALE:** US President Donald Trump said Saturday the FBI was so caught up in the Russia probe that it failed to heed signs which could have prevented the Parkland school shooting. His comments came as he faces criticism from survivors of the attack over his ties to the powerful National Rifle Association, and after several thousand rallied in Florida to demand urgent action on gun control. "Very sad that the FBI missed all of the many signals sent out by the Florida school shooter. This is not acceptable," he wrote on Twitter.

"They are spending too much time trying to prove Russian collusion with the Trump campaign - there is no collusion. Get back to the basics and make us all proud!" US authorities have come under mounting scrutiny for failing to act on a series of warning signs ahead of the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in which 17 people were killed. The FBI admitted Friday it received a chilling warning in January from a tipster who said the gunman Nikolas Cruz could be planning a mass shooting, but that agents failed to follow up.

But the attack, the 18th school shooting this year alone, has also renewed calls for greater gun control with several survivors leading the charge. One of them, 18-year-old Emma Gonzalez delivered a fiery address to a crowd of students, parents and residents in Ft Lauderdale. "To every politician taking donations from the NRA, shame on you!" she thundered, assailing Trump over the multi-million-dollar support his campaign received from the gun lobby. The crowd chanted in turn: "Shame on you!"

"We are going to be the last mass shooting... We are going to change the law," she vowed-slamming the fact 19-year-old Cruz was able to legally buy a semi-automatic

## US gun lovers defend rights amid debate

**MIAMI:** Pistols, rifles and ammunition are on display at a gun show in Miami, where Mike Vallone is buying an AR-15, a firearm at the center of debate on gun control as the weapon of choice of several mass shooters. Why would the 55-year-old, who already owns about 50 guns, want another one? "Because I choose to own them. I have the constitutional right to own them and I choose to exercise that right," he said on Saturday. Vallone was visiting the gun show three days after a 19-year-old massacred 17 people at his former high school with an AR-15 in Parkland, about an hour north of Miami.

The semi-automatic rifle was also used to carry out mass shootings in Las Vegas (58 dead), Sutherland Springs, Texas (26 dead) and Newtown, Connecticut (26 dead). The media "makes it look like it's evil," Vallone said, holding the \$600 gun he is about to buy. "This does nothing by itself. This takes a human being to take the rifle, point it and shoot someone." Every mass shooting reveals the deep fissures in American society between those who favor fewer restrictions on guns and gun ownership, and those who demand greater controls. The "right of the people to keep and bear arms" is guaranteed under the US Constitution's Second Amendment, which was adopted in 1791.

"The focus on gun control is an error and it won't stop someone determined to commit crimes," said Vallone, rais-

ing a common argument among pro-gun advocates. "I own guns, I choose to own guns, I choose to carry guns. That's my choice. It's not for everyone, I absolutely agree with that. Everybody needs a background check, I'm having a background check right now," he said, pointing at the gun vendor who was looking at a laptop. In the US, adults with a clean criminal record can generally buy a gun, as was the case with Nikolas Cruz in Parkland. Regulatory loopholes also allow for certain gun sales without background checks.

The issue is deeply political-on one side, the powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) aggressively lobbies lawmakers to maintain the status quo. On the other side, advocates for stricter gun controls say a criminal record check is not sufficiently thorough and often misses red flags that don't rise to the level of criminal charges, such as a mental health problems. The FBI admitted Friday it received a chilling warning in January from a tipster who said Cruz could be planning a mass shooting, but that agents failed to follow up.

### Missed warnings

In addition to the FBI's missteps, Cruz was also known to local police after his mother repeatedly reported him for violent outbursts, while records obtained by the South Florida Sun Sentinel show authorities investigated Cruz in 2016 after he cut his arms on messaging app Snapchat and threatened to buy a gun. The newspaper, citing Department of Children and Family Services documents, said the investigation came four days after Cruz turned 18 - legally an adult, and thus able to buy a firearm. Investigators said there were "some implications" for the teen's safety, but concluded that his "final level of risk is low as (he) resides with his mother, attends school and receives counseling" as an outpatient at a mental health center, the Sun Sentinel said. Cruz later passed a back-

ground check, allowing him in February 2017 to buy the AR-15 rifle used in the massacre.

### Russia probe

Trump spoke by phone Saturday with the Parkland mayor, the county commissioner and the principal of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School to express his condolences and offer his support. He then pivoted to politics late Saturday with his allegations against the FBI-though the federal government's investigation into allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential race and collusion with the Trump campaign has been led by special prosecutor Robert Mueller since last May. There was no immediate response from the FBI to Trump's latest allegation. Mueller's investigation has so far swept up four members of Trump's campaign, with two agreeing to work for the probe under a plea deal. On Thursday Mueller indicted 13 Russians for allegedly running a secret campaign to tilt the vote, but did not accuse any Americans of knowingly participating in that effort. —AFP



WASHINGTON: FBI Director Christopher Wray testifies on worldwide threats during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on Capitol Hill. —AFP

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### Popular show

Florida Gun Shows, which holds events in major cities throughout the state every week, opened its Miami show on Saturday. "Legislation is great to talk about, as long as it doesn't infringe upon your rights," said George Fernandez, a spokesman for the gun show, defending the Second Amendment. Some 140 exhibitors had their wares on display in booths, many decorated with alligator heads. One vendor displayed knives made from giraffe bones. Another seller highlighted the advantages of tasers and stun guns: "You don't need to go through the paperwork to carry it, you can just take it." The line to enter the exhibition hall was long and made up mostly of men, with some holding small children by the hand. —AFP



FLORIDA: Protesters hold signs at a rally for gun control at the Broward County Federal Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Seventeen perished and more than a dozen were wounded in the hail of bullets at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida- the latest mass shooting to devastate a small US community and renew calls for gun control. —AFP