



COULD BREXIT MAKE REPATRIATION MORE EXPENSIVE — BUT SIMPLER?

Repatriation of a deceased person has always brought with it challenges, with differing regulations, certification, transportation and other paperwork requirements from country to country. Will Brexit help or hinder the process?



The NAFD has long campaigned in the European Parliament to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy, with funeral firms needing to navigate their way through varying and outdated regulations within different EU Member States that can delay and increase the cost of repatriation.

The ongoing uncertainty regarding Brexit negotiations is adding an additional layer of complexity to the process, affecting the cost of repatriation and creating uncertainty about what the future holds. However, repatriation firms say that leaving the EU does offer a chance to address issues that have plagued repatriation firms for many years.

For this reason, using a specialist repatriation service with experience of working across international borders can be of real value to funeral directors – particularly in uncertain times such as those we are now experiencing. In this month's edition, *Funeral Director Monthly* speaks to repatriation specialists Rowland Brothers International and Homeland International to find



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out how the landscape has changed since negotiations with the European Union got underway in March 2017, and their advice to funeral directors.

Sue Ackerman from Rowland Brothers readily acknowledges the uncertainty that Brexit continues to create in the sector, but also highlights how future negotiated agreements with the EU, as part of the UK's exit from the European Union, might offer a chance to improve some of the documentation processes facing repatriation firms that have proven complex, way before the term Brexit was even invented.

"International funeral directors know that their service levels must remain constant, but until the EU agrees on the terms and conditions, we cannot predict if there will be any customs or administrative changes," says Sue.

"Funeral repatriation is traditionally paper driven, and regulation within the EU has changed little during years of EU membership. Any move that streamlines or simplifies documentation between countries would be welcomed, but it is a continuing irony that the countries which are closest to the UK geographically often need the most paperwork to accompany a deceased person on their final journey."

Sam Tester, from Homeland International, agrees: "The popular quote 'we do not yet know what Brexit will bring' is highly relevant to our sector and this uncertainty is felt by repatriation companies across the globe. We are able to make predictions about what may

happen post Brexit, but the key thing for us is to be fully adaptable to any change that may occur."

A more immediate impact of the Brexit vote that is being felt by repatriation firms, as with so many other sectors, is cost.

Adds Sam Tester: "The first thing we noticed was a greater fluctuation in exchange rates. Though the currency market has always been volatile, Brexit led to far greater swings than we were used to seeing. The nature of our business is time sensitive, we need to analyse all of the exchange rates so we may provide quotes to our clients that will not suddenly increase."

Sue Ackerman confirms that Rowland Brothers International has seen a similar trend, with the cost of repatriations back to the UK, in particular, increasing due to exchange rate fluctuations.

For Homeland International, there's another Brexit effect that it is paying attention to as well. "Some of our biggest clients are large insurance companies, so we can see the potential that companies may move to other locations post-Brexit. We have seen this in the past, with Dublin becoming a hotspot for large organisations. However, we provide assistance for insurance companies all over the world, so it is unlikely that our clients would stop using us due to relocation."

Given this uncertainty, there is all the more reason for funeral directors to place the repatriation of a deceased person in the hands of a professional firm like Homeland International or Rowland Brothers, which will have years of experience in navigating a way through the differing requirements and changing circumstances.

Adds Sam Tester: "Homeland International is here to support funeral directors with as much or as little information or assistance as one may require. We are able to support funeral directors with anything from arranging a full repatriation to simply booking the

flight or just attending the embassy for them. We can take care of international repatriation from anywhere in the globe back to their 'homeland' or back to the UK perhaps. We have seen a rise in families walking into funeral directors asking for repatriation from other countries, and it is important we advise families that this is possible, we do not just repatriate out of the UK, we provide assistance all over the world."

Sue Ackerman agrees. "Rowland Brothers International wants to ensure that we deliver the best service to both the family and the funeral director," she adds, going on to explain how using a specialist firm, with extensive experience, can also be of real benefit to a funeral director in helping to manage family expectations on specific issues, following a death abroad.

"An important part of our role is setting expectations around viewing. For example, in some countries the coffin remains closed after repatriation, so mourners cannot view at the destination. In the UK, however, the coffin can be opened. Families may expect to see their loved one immediately, but it's vital that the cause of death and condition of the deceased person is taken into account before relatives are invited to pay their respects."

A seamless transition back to the funeral director is key to the repatriation service. "With the repatriation logistics complete, we step away as the funeral director liaises with the Coroner and family to finalise the funeral arrangements," concludes Sue. "However, we are always available to follow up questions around documents, translations required for local administration or anything else they might need."

