Open letter to the Italian government, written by Italian scholars in the UK
2 July 2016

Dear President Renzi, dear members of the Italian government,

We, the undersigned, are concerned about the outcome of any Brexit negotiations for EU citizens. We ask Italy to act in solidarity with British Europeans who did not choose this result, by striving to protect their rights in any future EU exit agreement. Pushing for a premature trigger of Article 50 and UK exit from the EU in the name of unity between the other 27 member states contradicts the very notion of European solidarity.

The European Union is founded upon the values of democracy, justice and solidarity; it is founded upon unity in diversity in Europe and our multiple European identities. Through the development of a European political union, we have turned national citizens into EU citizens. After 43 years of EU membership, many British people – most particularly in the younger generations - have developed not just a strong sense of European identity but also European lives. EU citizens from other member states have also established British lives.

As academics and teachers of modern languages and European studies, we have been educating a young generation of Europeans, encouraging them to learn European languages, fostering an understanding of European history, politics and cultures that form the bedrock of European cooperation. Having taken up the opportunities afforded by Erasmus+ and their right to live and work abroad, many of our current and former students have personal and professional lives that depend upon their EU citizenship. They may lose their residence and work permits, their right to equal treatment, and be stripped of their democratic right to vote and stand for election where they live.

Last week, 75% of those under 25 who voted chose to remain in the EU. Soon, they may be denied the opportunities that European integration aims to offer. Instead of excluding young people from EU citizenship, we should work together to ensure that all people across Europe have the equality of opportunity they deserve.

Any moves to push the UK to trigger Article 50 for the purposes of unity amongst the remaining 27 states would betray our responsibilities to EU citizens - fellow Europeans – British or otherwise. While UK governments have not always been a force for unity in the EU, there is a generation of British citizens who want a future as EU citizens. Stripping them of their citizenship contradicts the principles of the European treaties that ask for European solidarity and prosperity for all. We ask you to defend the rights of EU citizens in any future exit negotiations with the UK.