
BORIS JOHNSON: UK TO BEGIN EU EXIT TALKS IN EARLY 2017

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The UK's foreign minister has said the country will trigger formal exit talks with the EU by early next year. His comments followed a meeting between Prime Minister Theresa May and EU Parliament President Martin Schulz.

British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson's comments came on Thursday at the UN in New York. Previously, May had said only that the UK wouldn't begin formal talks before the end of this year.

"We are talking to our European friends and partners in the expectation that by the early part of next year you will see an Article 50 letter," he told Sky News television, referring to the withdrawal clause that would trigger formal discussions for the UK to leave the bloc. "We will invoke that."

Johnson, who was one of the main figures campaigning for a so-called Brexit, said he doubted the process would take the full two years allowed by Article 50.

The foreign minister also called suggestions that the UK would need to allow free movement of people from the bloc in order to gain access to the EU's single market "complete baloney," saying he rejected the idea of a link between trade and migration.

"The two things have nothing to do with each other. We should go for a jumbo free-trade deal and take back control of our immigration policy," he said.

Theresa May and Martin Schulz meet in London

'Good first discussion'

Johnson's interview came the same day that Prime Minister Theresa May met with the European Parliament president at 10 Downing Street in London, where the two discussed plans to formally begin Brexit negotiations.

In a tweet on his official account, Martin Schulz said the parliament would be a "constructive and responsible partner."

"The goal of my visit also is to ensure that the next coming months are the start of very close cooperation between the European Parliament and the United Kingdom government," Schulz said at the beginning of the meeting.

May also stressed the importance of cooperation. "I think this period of preparation is valuable for

all concerned and while we are going to leave the European Union, we are not leaving Europe," she said.

In a referendum in June, a narrow majority of voters decided to leave the EU, although there are still questions about what Brexit will actually entail for the country.

blc/kl (dpa, AFP, AP)

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