

Boris Johnson to travel to Brussels for ‘make or break’ talks

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Boris Johnson's trip to Brussels may prove to be a perfunctory exercise. (Photo: Reuters)

London, December 9 (RHC)-- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is preparing to travel to Brussels “in the coming days” for a final push to break the seemingly intractable deadlock on post-Brexit trade talks. In Brussels, the prime minister will meet European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, who has the final say on a deal on the European Union (EU) side.

Johnson and Von der Leyen spoke on the phone on Monday, their second telephone call in 48 hours, but they reportedly failed to make any substantial progress. However, while on a visit to a National Health Service (NHS) site on Tuesday, ostensibly to observe the roll out of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine, Boris Johnson warned that a trade agreement may prove to be out of reach.

"You've got to be optimistic, you've got to believe there's the power of sweet reason to get this thing over the line. But I've got to tell you it's looking very, very difficult at the moment", Johnson said.

The PM was at pains to stress that there "may come a moment when we have to acknowledge that it's time to draw stumps" and prepare for a no-deal outcome ahead of the end of the Brexit transition period on December 31st. According to Johnson, the UK and the EU are "a long way apart still" on the issue of fisheries, and specifically long-term French access to British waters.

During their 90-minute phone call on Monday, the British prime minister and EC boss von der Leyen also identified so-called "level playing field" commitments and governance issues as other points of disagreement.

Johnson's downbeat assessment comes against the backdrop of continuing intensive negotiations in Brussels between chief EU negotiator, Michel Barnier, and his UK counterpart, Lord David Frost. However, an EU source has told Sky News that Barnier had informed member states that the "chances of reaching an agreement are now very slim."

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