

Brexit D-day

Well here we are, after nine months of build-up following the vote for Britain to leave the European Union (EU), Prime Minister Theresa May has triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. Now starts a two-year countdown to negotiate the final agreement for Britain's exit.

What happens now? Each country has set their guidelines for the discussion. For the UK, this means taking back sovereignty, determining the fate of European citizens in the UK and in other member states and a likely withdrawal from the single market. Meanwhile the 27 EU member states will look to negotiate a temporary leaving treaty, which will come into action after the two-year negotiation period expires. This means an initial discussion on the price of exiting, currently estimated at tens of billions of euros by several observers. Suffice to say this will be the first of several controversial topics and will set the tone for negotiations.

What about business? With the uncertain nature of the future agreement, yet a strong performance from the UK economy carried by household spending, predictions are difficult, to say the least. Over the last few months, the Franco-British Chamber has led investigations and round tables, the results showing a unanimous demand for an ambitious and comprehensive free trade agreement between the UK and the EU.

Until then, do we take advantage of the pound's weakness and invest? Or do we wait and see what happens? Many British companies have already contacted us looking to establish a branch or an affiliate in France. We're seeing the same on the other side of the channel as well – with French companies stopping off in the UK on their quest for global expansion.

We must not forget, however, that during these two years the United Kingdom will still remain a part of the EU and its four freedoms of movement of people, capital, goods and services will continue.

The Chamber continues to play its role during this transitional period and is available to support and advise members and others at all times throughout the process.