

why bojo might welcome fiery return to the eu council; INSIDE POLITICS

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BORIS Johnson can expect to be in unfamiliar surroundings next week attending his first EU Council summit for more than 20 years.

With the Brexit negotiations intensifying dramatically last night, the Prime Minister is scheduled to be in Brussels ONTHURSDAY as the tortuous Article 50 departure process hurtles towards its conclusion.

Mr Johnson last attended an EU Council in his old job as a newspaper correspondent covering the machinations of the bloc's bureaucracy in the early 1990s. Back then, European statesmen Jacques Chirac, who died last month, and Helmut Kohl were the dominant figures.

The bizarre egg-shaped Europa summit building, where the gathering of European leaders will take place, was not even a glint in a lavishly-paid architect's eye.

Still, with his experience of reporting on the infuriatingly drawn-out procedures of the EU elite, the Prime Minister may have some insight into the hours of tedium that await him.

If anything, meetings are now even more languid given the EU's expansion, which has added more bodies to the room than on his last visit.

David Cameron's recent memoir, *ForThe Record*, vividly captures the torpor of such gatherings. "Sometimes I would sit there and count how many people around the table were asleep," the former prime minister wrote.

He recalled how the then French president Nicolas Sarkozy "would often be reading the French papers" while German Chancellor Angela Merkel "had to be told to turn the football down on her laptop because she'd forgotten to plug her headphones in".

Mr Johnson has plenty of reasons to hope a Brexit deal is close at hand, not least because agreement could well mean his return to the EU Council ONTHURSDAY will be the last time he has to attend such a dreary event.

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