

# Brussels wants to tie down UK's €60bn exit bill before beginning trade talks

ALEX BARKER — BRUSSELS

The EU's Brexit negotiators expect to spend until Christmas discussing Britain's divorce from the bloc, denying London any trade talks until progress is made on a €60bn exit bill and the rights of expatriate citizens.

A narrow divorce-first approach favoured by Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator, would be a big setback for Britain's aim for a fast-tracked EU trade deal by the end of 2018.

A move to delay trade talks sets the stage for a high-stakes stand-off once formal Brexit negotiations begin. David Davis, the UK's Brexit secretary, wants all elements of the separation to be handled "in parallel", saying he has told Mr Barnier that his "sequential" plan for talks "does not seem practical".

In recent weeks Mr Barnier has outlined to the EU's remaining 27 members his views on the timing and order of talks, which move from basic terms for the disentanglement, to trade relations and finally preparations for a transition.

"He thinks we will be discussing money and acquired rights [of expatriate citizens] until December," said one senior eurozone official in contact with Mr Barnier. "No trade, nothing about the future, just the past."

Five other national diplomats involved in Brexit talks confirmed Mr Barnier's rough year-end timetable. Many noted that Theresa May, Britain's prime minister, had avoided acknowledging the break-up challenges and outstanding budget liabilities.

"If we don't get them down to earth early in the game then we never will," said one EU-27 diplomat involved in talks. Another senior adviser to a northern European leader said: "At this stage only the Brits are saying they want it all solved in parallel."

However, the EU-27 have different views on how talks will be staggered once Britain invokes Article 50, which is expected next month. A special summit is expected in early April.

Some, including French officials, want Britain to honour its financial commitments as a first step while others such as Spain have backed early talks about the future relationship.

One diplomat closely involved in Brexit preparations said EU leaders "won't be fooled by vague promises" on the divorce.

A deal on principles around money and citizen rights is hoped for by December, allowing the EU-27 to trigger trade talks at their summit that month.