

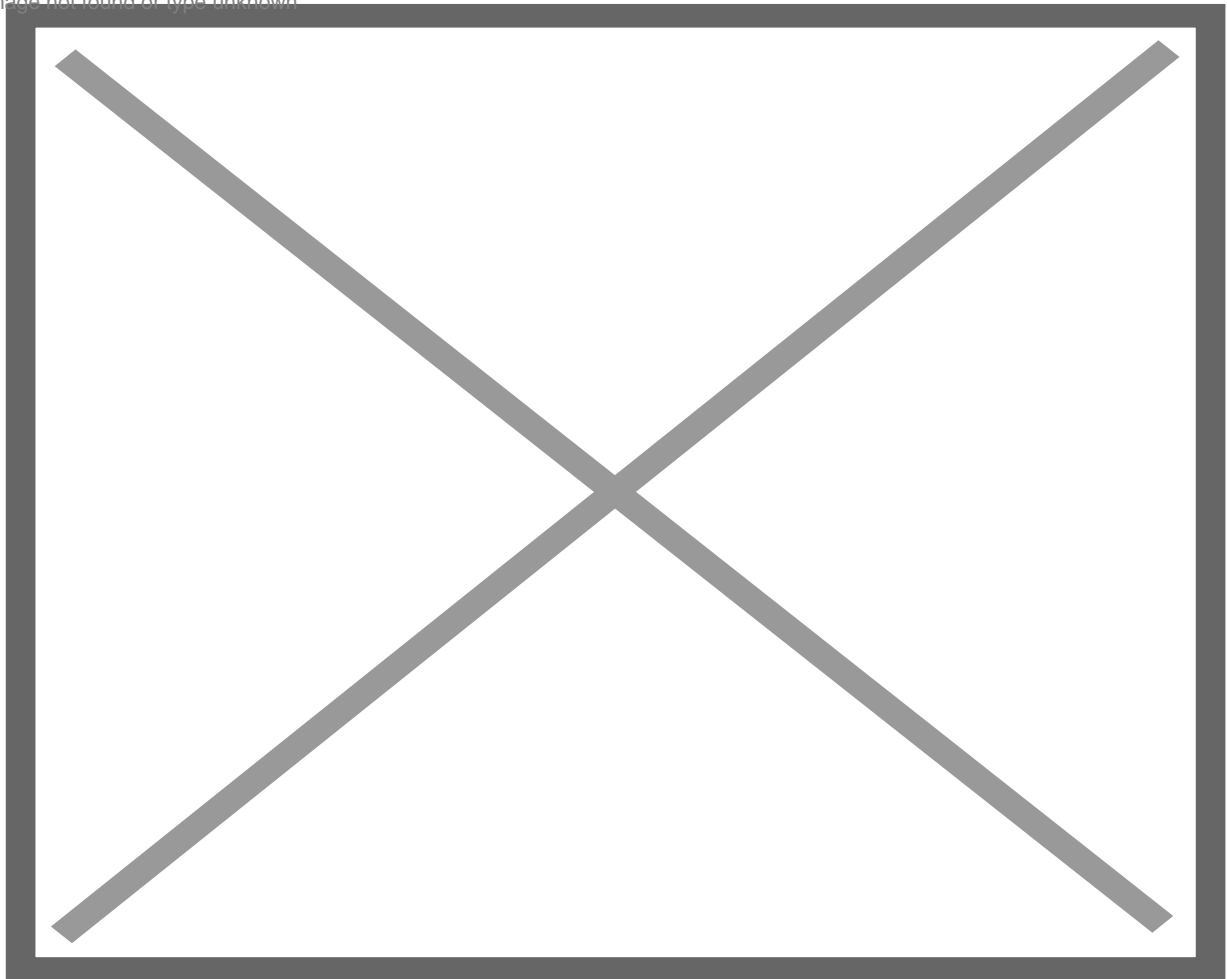
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Britain Has Left the European Union

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AP — Britain has left the European Union after 47 years of membership, taking a leap into the unknown in a historic blow to the bloc.

Brexit became official Friday at 11 p.m. (6 p.m. ET) -- midnight in Brussels, where the EU is headquartered.

Thousands of enthusiastic Brexit supporters gathered outside the U.K. Parliament in London cheered as the hour struck.

In a recorded message, Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Britain's departure "a moment of real national renewal and change" that would lead to a bolder, more energetic nation.

But many Britons mourned the loss of their EU identity. And there was sadness in Brussels, where British flags were quietly removed from the bloc's many buildings.

There's another deadline at the end of 2020, which will mark the close of what's known as the transition period.

Until then, the UK is out of the EU but still following its rules.

It's an 11-month window for both sides to thrash out a whole new functioning relationship, especially on the hugely important issue of trade.

Written by: By JILL LAWLESS and RAF CASERT

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