

Remarks by President Juncker at the joint press conference with Theresa May, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Prime Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This morning, Prime Minister May and I had a meeting to take stock of progress since we met on Monday. I will not hide that in between Monday and this morning we had a lot of talks – the Prime Minister and myself; the Taoiseach and myself; the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister.

And that is the reason why I would like to thank the Prime Minister for her determination. I would also like to thank Michel Barnier and David Davis, as well as their teams, for the extremely hard and skilful work over the last weeks and months.

We discussed the Joint Report agreed by the two negotiators. Prime Minister May has assured me that it has the backing of the UK Government. On that basis, I believe we have now made the breakthrough we needed.

Today's result is of course a compromise. It is the result of a long and intense discussion between the Commission's negotiators and those of the UK.

As in any negotiation, both sides had to listen to each other, adjust their position, and show a willingness to compromise. This was a difficult negotiation for the European Union as well as for the United Kingdom.

On Wednesday, the College of Commissioners gave me a mandate to conclude the negotiation of the Joint Report. And it had to be concluded today – not next week – today because next week we will have the European Council and in order to allow our partners to prepare in the best way possible the meeting of the European Council we had to make the deal today.

On the basis of that mandate, the Commission has just formally decided to recommend to the European Council that sufficient progress has now been made on the strict terms of the divorce. Es wurden genügend Fortschritte erzielt, damit wir jetzt in die zweite Phase der Verhandlungen eintreten können. Nous avons pu faire les progrès suffisants pour que désormais nous puissions entrer en deuxième phase de la négociation entre le Royaume-Uni et l'Union européenne à 27.

The decision on sufficient progress will be in the hands of the 27 Heads of State or Government. I am hopeful, sure, confident – sure – that they will share our appraisal and allow us to move on to the next phase of the negotiations.

Last Monday I also met with the European Parliament representatives. From the start of this process, cooperation between the European Parliament and the Commission has been close and our positions closely aligned. These negotiations can only be successful if we take an inclusive approach; that is exactly what we did.

Without going into all of the detail, allow me to touch on what today's agreements mean in practice. Later on today, at 09:30, my friend Michel Barnier will be available to explain all the details of the agreement we reached today.

A few remarks on citizens' rights first. In this negotiation, citizens have always come first. It has been of great importance for the Commission to make sure that EU citizens in the UK will be protected after the UK leaves the European Union.

EU citizens have made important life choices on the assumption that the United Kingdom was a member of the European Union. Brexit created great uncertainty for those citizens and for their families.

Today, we bring back the certainty. The Commission's negotiators have made sure that the choices made by EU citizens living in the UK will be protected. We have made sure that their rights will remain the same after the UK has left the European Union. This is in particular the case for: EU citizens' right to live, work and study; EU citizens' right to family reunification; the protection of the rights of EU citizens' children; and the right to healthcare, pensions and other social security benefits.

We have made sure that the administrative procedures will be cheap and will be simple. This is an issue to which the Commission will pay particular attention when drafting the withdrawal agreement.

The same goes for UK citizens living in the EU27.

On the settling of accounts, the Prime Minister said in her remarkable Florence speech that the United Kingdom would honour its commitments, including beyond 2020. This was a detailed, line-by-line process but she has been as good as her word. She was negotiating in a gentlemanly manner, and I am very grateful, Prime Minister, for that.

On Ireland, the EU has consistently supported the goal of peace and reconciliation enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. The European Union has made it a priority to protect the peace process on the island. I have been in regular contact with the Taoiseach over the last days, including last night and including the last negotiations we had in the course of yesterday with our Irish friends. The UK has made significant commitments on the avoidance of a hard border after its withdrawal from the European Union.

All of the EU27 stand firmly behind Ireland and behind the peace process.

Let me be clear: we still have a lot of work to do.

The Joint Report is not the withdrawal agreement. That agreement still needs

to be drafted by the negotiators on the basis we have agreed yesterday and today, and then approved by the Council and ratified by the UK Parliament and the European Parliament.

534 days ago, the British people voted to leave the European Union. 249 days ago the United Kingdom notified its intention to leave the European Union. And in 477 days the United Kingdom will do just that.

I will always be sad about this development. But now we must start looking to the future. A future in which the United Kingdom will be and will remain a close friend and ally. The Prime Minister and I discussed the need for a transitional period. And we dedicated much of our meeting to our joint vision of a deep and close partnership. It is crucial for us all that we continue working closely together on issues such as trade, research, security and others.

We will take things one step at a time – starting with next week's European Council. But today, I am hopeful that we are now all moving towards the second phase of these challenging negotiations. And we can do this jointly on the basis of trust, renewed trust, determination and with the perspective of a renewed friendship.

Thank you.