



Press statement by Michel Barnier following the General Affairs Council (Article 50)

Brussels, 19 November 2018

Statement by Michel Barnier, Chief Negotiator for Article 50 negotiations at the press conference with Gernot Blümel, Austrian Federal Minister for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media after the General Affairs Council

Opening statement by Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier

Good morning everyone. I hope you are all well after a very busy few days and also busy nights.

Thank you very much, Gernot, for your appreciation. Thank you also to the team of the Austrian Presidency. If I may, at a very key moment where we are in this negotiation, I want to thank the Council, the team of the Council, the Parliament also, and obviously Jean-Claude Juncker and all the services of the Commission for their trust and their cooperation.

I have just debriefed the Ministers of the EU27 on the agreement that we reached last week at negotiators' level on the draft Withdrawal Agreement, as well as on the outline of the political declaration on the future relationship.

We are in fact at a decisive moment in this process. No one should lose sight of the progress that has been achieved in Brussels and in London.

I am pleased that Ministers today supported the overall package. In particular, Member States support the draft Withdrawal Agreement. On the EU side, we still need to determine the internal procedure of the Union for agreeing to extend the transition. But globally speaking, this deal is fair and balanced.

It takes into account the UK positions. In particular, we have found a compromise to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Both sides, both parties want to avoid using the backstop.

Finally, this deal allows for the orderly withdrawal which is in our common interest. An orderly withdrawal is the condition to lay the ground for an ambitious partnership.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have also informed Ministers of the state of play of the discussions on the framework for the future relationship. Discussions on that declaration are ongoing – now, today – with the UK negotiators. This is now our focus. The declaration will open the door to negotiations on an ambitious, economic and strategic partnership in the future once the UK will have left.

In any case, for the future relationship, both the EU and the UK will have full control of their own legislation and rule-making. This is essential, on our side, for the integrity of the single market. It is essential for the UK in terms of taking back control.

Now, more than ever, we must all remain calm – and I will remain calm – and keep our focus on the need for the UK to leave the EU in an orderly fashion.

Thank you very much.