

Preliminary flash estimate for the fourth quarter of 2018 – GDP up by 0.2% in the euro area and by 0.3% the EU28 – +1.2% and +1.5% respectively compared with the fourth quarter of 2017

Seasonally adjusted GDP rose by 0.2% in the **euro area** (EA19) and by 0.3% in the **EU28** during the fourth quarter of 2018, compared with the previous quarter, according to a preliminary flash estimate published by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. In the third quarter of 2018, GDP had also grown by 0.2% in the **euro area** and by 0.3% in the **EU28**.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

Daily News 31 / 01 / 2019

TRADE: EU-Japan trade agreement enters into force

The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and Japan enters into force on 1 February 2019. Businesses and consumers across Europe and in Japan can now take advantage of the largest open trade zone in the world. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: *“Europe and Japan are sending a message to the world about the future of open and fair trade. We are opening a new marketplace home to 635 million people and almost a third of the world’s Gross Domestic Product, bringing the people of Europe and Japan closer together than ever before. More than anything, our agreement shows that trade is about more than quotas and tariffs, or millions and billions. It is about values, principles and fairness.”* Cecilia **Malmström**, Commissioner for Trade, said: *“This agreement has it all: it scraps tariffs and contributes to the global rulebook, whilst at the same time demonstrating to the world that we both remain convinced by the benefits of open trade. Our manufacturers, our service providers, our tech start-ups and our farmers all have something to celebrate in this agreement. I am also proud that we have locked in our Paris climate deal commitments into a trade agreement for the first time, as well as setting high standards for workers’ rights and consumer protection.”* For more information about the agreement and EU-Japan trade relations see a full [press release](#), [MEMO](#) and a [dedicated website](#) including thematic [factsheets](#), [text of the trade agreement](#), [exporter](#)

[testimonies](#), as well as an [interactive map](#) of EU businesses exporting to Japan and factsheets presenting impact on each EU Member State and [a video](#).
(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

EU report: Georgia making clear progress on its reform agenda

In 2018, Georgia confirmed its strong commitment to political association to and economic integration with the EU, as highlighted by its government's [high-level meeting with European Commissioners in November](#), and substantial progress in delivering on its Association Agreement commitments. The state-of-play of Georgia's implementation of its commitments under the [EU-Georgia Association Agreement](#) over the past year is detailed in the [3rd Association Implementation Report on Georgia](#), released today by the European Commission and the European External Action Service. The report comes ahead of the EU-Georgia Association Council, to be held in Brussels on 5 March 2019. *"The European Union and Georgia have excellent relations that we further intensified over the past year. Since March 2017, more than 300,000 Georgian citizens have been able to travel visa-free to the Schengen area for short stays, and since 2009, more than 63,000 businesses and farmers have received loans. The European Union will continue to accompany and support the Georgian authorities in implementing important reforms under the Association Agenda, which provides priorities for our joint work until 2020 – reforms that are bringing more and more benefits to Georgian and EU's citizens alike",* said the High Representative/Vice-President, Federica **Mogherini**. *"The implementation of the Association Agreement continues to bring positive results to Georgian and EU citizens. The implementation of the [agreed actions](#) of our [High-level Meeting](#) back in November will provide further momentum to our relationship. The EU is Georgia's largest trade partner and we will cooperate to further develop Georgia's export potential. In September 2018, the first European School outside the EU was launched in Tbilisi, and Georgia is stepping up its participation in programmes such as Erasmus+, encouraging student and youth exchanges",* said the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn**. A full press release is [available online](#), as is the [full report](#). For more information on EU-Georgia relations, visit the [website of the EU Delegation](#) and the [dedicated factsheet](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Adam Kaznowski – Tel: +32 229 89359; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 2 296 48 87)

With 2.7 million participants and nearly 44,000 events the 2018 edition of EU Code Week exceeded all expectations

[EU Code Week](#) achieved a new record in 2018 with 2.74 million participants, [43,657 events](#) and over 10% of European schools taking part. Activities took place in 72 countries in Europe and around the globe such as Peru, Malaysia, Egypt and many more. Italy was the most active European country with over 20,000 activities, followed by Turkey (7,700) and Poland (5,000). In France, almost half (49%) of participants were girls or women. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya **Gabriel** welcomed the results: *"I am proud that the European Commission is a strong partner of EU Code Week. Only by working with the young generations and giving them enough opportunities to*

get ready for their future projects, Europe will succeed in the global digital race. Our goal is to involve at least half of all European schools in the EU Code Week by 2020, hence I encourage even more organisers to get on board and offer coding activities during the EU Code Week 2019.” A grassroots initiative that started in 2013 and is run by volunteers, the EU Code Week aims to promote coding, computational thinking and digital literacy in a fun and engaging way. This year the EU Code Week will take place from 5 to 20 October. For more information about the results of EU Code Week 2018 see [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083 – Marietta Grammenou Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Electronic Product Information of EU medicines: launch of a public consultation

When put on the market, every medicine for human use authorised in the EU must be accompanied by product information (PI), which includes the [package leaflet](#) for patients and the [summary of product characteristics](#) for healthcare professionals. Throughout 2018, the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the Heads of Medicines Agency (HMA) carried out extensive discussions with all stakeholder groups (patients, healthcare professionals, regulators to the pharmaceutical industry) to determine whether this product information could be disseminated electronically. Key principles defining an EU-wide approach to support the harmonised implementation of electronic product information (ePI) have been put together. Today, the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency and the Heads of Medicines Agency are launching a six-month public consultation on the draft key principles that will form the basis upon which electronic product information (ePI) for medicines will be developed and used in the European Union. Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety said: *“The development of electronic product information for medicines is an important step in digitalising health and care. I am convinced that electronic product information for medicines can deliver a practical, tangible benefit for both citizens and healthcare professionals. I look forward to the results of this consultation as it is crucial that electronic product information (ePI) meets the expectations of stakeholders and citizens throughout the EU”*. See also [press release](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

Commission clears the creation of a joint venture by Sumitomo and Mahindra

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over a newly created joint venture by Mahindra Agri Solutions Limited (“Mahindra”) of India and Sumitomo Corporation (“Sumitomo”) of Japan. The joint venture will manufacture and distribute agrochemical products. Mahindra offers end-to-end solutions for farmers’ needs across the entire agricultural value chain. Sumitomo is a trading and investment company with activities in a wide variety of sectors, including agro-chemicals. Mahindra will transfer its agrochemical business to the joint venture. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns because the joint venture has no actual nor foreseen

activities within the European Economic Area. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9248](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Eurostat: Le PIB en hausse dans la zone euro et dans l'UE28

Au cours du quatrième trimestre 2018, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières a augmenté de 0,2% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,3% dans l'UE28 par rapport au trimestre précédent, selon l'estimation rapide préliminaire publiée par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Au cours du troisième trimestre 2018, le PIB avait également progressé de 0,2% dans la zone euro et de 0,3% dans l'UE28. En comparaison avec le même trimestre de l'année précédente, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières a enregistré une hausse de 1,2% dans la zone euro et de 1,5% dans l'UE28 au quatrième trimestre 2018, après respectivement +1,6% et +1,8% au troisième trimestre 2018. Selon une première estimation du taux de croissance annuel pour 2018, le PIB a progressé de 1,8% dans la zone euro et de 1,9% dans l'UE28. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229-56153; Annikky Lamp – Tél.: +32 229 56151; Enda McNamara – Tél.: +32 229 64976)

Eurostat: Le taux de chômage stable dans la zone euro et dans l'UE28

Dans la zone euro (ZE19), le taux de chômage corrigé des variations saisonnières s'est établi à 7,9% en décembre 2018, stable par rapport à novembre 2018 et en baisse par rapport au taux de 8,6% de décembre 2017. Cela demeure le taux le plus faible enregistré dans la zone euro depuis octobre 2008. Dans l'UE28, le taux de chômage s'est établi à 6,6% en décembre 2018, stable par rapport à novembre 2018 et en baisse par rapport au taux de 7,2% de décembre 2017. Cela demeure le taux le plus faible enregistré dans l'UE28 depuis le début de la série mensuelle sur le chômage en janvier 2000. Ces chiffres sont publiés par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tél.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tél.: +32 229 67094)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Gabriel in Cyprus to discuss the Digital Europe Programme and progress on the Digital Single Market

Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, is travelling to Cyprus today to exchange views on the state of play of various [Digital Single Market](#) files as well as the [Digital Europe Programme](#). The Digital Europe Programme will be a major contributor to helping Cyprus improve its performances in various important policy areas, such as digital skills, e-government, e-banking and e-commerce. During her visit Mariya **Gabriel** will also make a keynote speech to the Conference on "Digital transformation and

Innovation – A vision of growth #Cyprus2030” and will meet with the Minister of Finance, Mr. Harris Georgiadis and the Minister of Transport, Communication and Works, Ms. Vassiliki Anastassiadou to discuss the progress made in the last few years in developing the Digital Single Market, and the areas where more focus is needed. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083 – Marietta Grammenou Tel.: +32 229 83583)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

[EU-Japan trade agreement enters into force](#)

President of the European Commission Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: “Europe and Japan are sending a message to the world about the future of open and fair trade. We are opening a new marketplace home to 635 million people and almost a third of the world’s Gross Domestic Product, bringing the people of Europe and Japan closer together than ever before. The new agreement will give consumers greater choice and cheaper prices; it will protect great European products in Japan and vice-versa, such as the Austrian Tiroler Speck or Kobe Beef; it will give small businesses on both sides the chance to branch out to a completely new market; it will save European companies 1 billion euro in duties every year and turbo-boost the trade we already do together. More than anything, our agreement shows that trade is about more than quotas and tariffs, or millions and billions. It is about values, principles and fairness. It makes sure that our principles in areas such as labour, safety, climate and consumer protection are the global gold-standard. This only happens when you work with the most natural of partners, separated by thousands of kilometres but united in friendship and values.”

Cecilia **Malmström**, Commissioner for Trade, said: “This agreement has it all: it scraps tariffs and contributes to the global rulebook, whilst at the same time demonstrating to the world that we both remain convinced by the benefits of open trade. As of 1 February, European companies will benefit from removed tariffs and simplified customs procedures. Our manufacturers, our service providers, our tech start-ups and our farmers all have something to celebrate. I am also proud that we have locked in our Paris climate deal commitments into a trade agreement for the first time, as well as setting high standards for workers’ rights and consumer protection. The stage is set for a significant boost in trade between us, which in turn creates jobs and lowers prices. It is now up to businesses and individuals to make the very most out of these new trade opportunities. We also count on all EU Member States to spread this message far and wide.”

The Economic Partnership Agreement removes the vast majority of the €1 billion of duties paid annually by EU companies exporting to Japan. Once the

agreement is fully implemented, Japan will have scrapped customs duties on 97% of goods imported from the EU. The agreement also removes a number of long-standing non-tariff barriers, for example by endorsing international standards on cars. It will also break down barriers for key EU food and drink exporters to 127 million Japanese consumers and will increase export opportunities in a range of other sectors. Annual trade between the EU and Japan could increase by nearly €36 billion once the agreement is implemented in full.

The EU and Japan have agreed to set ambitious standards on sustainable development, and the text includes for the first time a specific commitment to the Paris climate agreement.

The key parts of the Economic Partnership Agreement

With regards to agricultural exports from the EU, the agreement will, in particular:

- scrap Japanese duties on many cheeses such as Gouda and Cheddar (which currently are at 29.8%) as well as on wine exports (currently at 15% on average);
- allow the EU to increase its beef exports to Japan substantially, while on pork there will be duty-free trade in processed meat and almost duty-free trade for fresh meat;
- ensure the protection in Japan of more than 200 high-quality European agricultural products, so called Geographical Indications (GIs), and the protection of a selection of Japanese GIs in the EU.

The agreement also secures the opening of services markets, in particular financial services, e-commerce, telecommunications and transport. It furthermore:

- facilitates to EU companies access to the procurement markets of 54 large Japanese cities, and removes obstacles to procurement in the economically important railway sector at national level;
- addresses specific sensitivities in the EU, for instance in the automotive sector, with transition periods of up to 7 years before customs duties are eliminated.

The agreement also includes a comprehensive chapter on trade and sustainable development; includes specific elements to simplify for small and medium-sized businesses; sets very high standards of labour, safety, environmental and consumer protection; strengthens EU and Japan's commitments on sustainable development and climate change and fully safeguards public services.

Concerning data protection, the EU and Japan adopted decisions on 23 January of this year to allow personal data to flow freely and safely between the two partners. They agreed to recognise each other's data protection systems as 'equivalent', which will create the world's largest area of safe data flows.

As of 1 February, a large part of another agreement – the **Strategic**

Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Japan – also applies on a provisional basis. This Agreement, which was signed in July of last year together with the Economic Partnership Agreement, is the first-ever bilateral framework agreement between the EU and Japan and strengthens the overall partnership by providing an overarching framework for enhanced political and sectoral cooperation and joint actions on issues of common interest, including on regional and global challenges. The Agreement will enter into force once it has been ratified by all EU Member States.

Next steps

The Economic Partnership Agreement is now in force. To take stock of the initial months of implementation, the first EU-Japan committee meeting will be convened in April 2019 in Brussels.

On the parallel issue of investment protection, negotiations with Japan continue on standards and investment protection dispute resolution, with a meeting of Chief Negotiators scheduled for March. The firm commitment on both sides is to reach convergence in the investment protection negotiations as soon as possible, in light of their shared commitment to a stable and secure investment environment in Europe and Japan.

For more information

[MEMO](#) on the Economic Partnership Agreement

[Dedicated website](#) including:

- [Text of the trade agreement](#),
- [Exporter testimonies](#),
- [Interactive map](#) of EU businesses exporting to Japan and factsheets presenting the impact on each EU Member State ([Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Croatia](#), [Cyprus](#), [Czech Republic](#), [Denmark](#), [Estonia](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Greece](#), [Hungary](#), [Ireland](#), [Italy](#), [Latvia](#), [Lithuania](#), [Luxembourg](#), [Malta](#), [The Netherlands](#), [Poland](#), [Portugal](#), [Romania](#), [Slovakia](#), [Slovenia](#), [Spain](#), [Sweden](#), [United Kingdom](#)),

Factsheet on the [Strategic Partnership Agreement](#)

Social media: @Trade_EU

[EU report: Georgia making clear progress on its reform agenda](#)

Today, the [3rd Association Implementation Report on Georgia](#) was released. This report sets out the state-of-play of Georgia's implementation of its commitments under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement over the past year,

ahead of the EU-Georgia Association Council, to be held in Brussels on 5 March 2019. The report highlights that continued legislative reform and steady implementation of rules and standards in line with the Association Agreement are crucial to allow Georgian citizens to fully reap the benefits of this close relationship between the EU and Georgia.

“The European Union and Georgia have excellent relations that we further intensified over the past year. Since March 2017, more than 300,000 Georgian citizens have been able to travel visa-free to the Schengen area for short stays, and since 2009, more than 63,000 businesses and farmers have received loans. The European Union will continue to accompany and support the Georgian authorities in implementing important reforms under the Association Agenda, which provides priorities for our joint work until 2020 – reforms that are bringing more and more benefits to Georgian and EU’s citizens alike”, said the High Representative/Vice-President, **Federica Mogherini**.

“The implementation of the Association Agreement continues to bring positive results to Georgian and EU citizens. The implementation of the [agreed actions](#) of our [High-level Meeting](#) back in November will provide further momentum to our relationship. The EU is Georgia’s largest trade partner and we will cooperate to further develop Georgia’s export potential. In September 2018, the first European School outside the EU was launched in Tbilisi, and Georgia is stepping up its participation in programmes such as Erasmus+, encouraging student and youth exchanges”, said the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, **Johannes Hahn**.

This 3rd Report takes stock of Georgia’s implementation of the Association Agreement and in particular the Association Agenda since the last EU-Georgia Association Council of 5 February 2018. Overall, Association Agreement commitments, including as regards its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, have been implemented in line with agreed timelines. Over the past year, Georgia has made progress in strengthening its democratic institutions, in the framework of the constitutional reform process and public administration reform. The Presidential elections were [held in an overall competitive environment but also raised some shortcomings](#). Modest progress was made in reforming the justice sector, but challenges remain to consolidate the results achieved and to make further progress in this area. In that regard, it is noteworthy that the 4th wave of legislative reform was initiated upon establishment of the Parliament-led platform for judiciary reforms. Going forward it is important for the Georgian government to continue fostering an open dialogue with all political actors and civil society. In the past reporting period, Georgian authorities also continued their efforts to tackle the issues regarding irregular migration.

The report underlines the benefits for Georgian citizens of the country’s economic integration with the EU through the implementation of its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area commitments. With the progressive approximation of technical regulations and standards with those of the EU, Georgia has been increasingly able to strengthen its participation in international value chains. Regarding external trade, the EU continued to be the most important partner of Georgia, with a 27% share in the country’s overall trade in 2017. Preliminary data for 2018 suggests a continuation of this trend. The opening

of the EU market to new animal-origin products from Georgia was an important milestone in this regard.

Last year marked the [10 year anniversary of the conflict between Russia and Georgia](#). The European Union continues to firmly support Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The European Union's commitment to peaceful conflict-resolution remains as strong as ever, through the work of the [EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia](#) and the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia. In June 2018, the Georgian Parliament adopted a legislative package "A Step for a Better Future" to promote peace and opportunities for the people in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia also continues to be an important partner of the EU in the area of security, the fight against terrorism and transnational organised crime. Georgia also participates in the EU-led missions and operations, which contribute to increasing the resilience of countries worldwide and strengthening the EU's role as a global security provider.

More information:

[Full text of the 3rd Association Implementation Report on Georgia](#)

[Full text of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement](#)

[Association Agenda between the EU and Georgia](#)

[EU-Georgia AA/DCFTA in brief](#)

[EU-Georgia AA/DCFTA Myth buster](#)

[EU-Georgia relations factsheet](#)

[High-level meeting continues to bring Georgia and the European Union closer together](#)

[Key outcomes of the EU-Georgia high-level meeting factsheet](#)

[Full outcomes of the EU-Georgia high-level meeting](#)

[Website of the European Union Delegation to Georgia](#)

[Speeches by President Juncker and Chief Negotiator Barnier at the](#)

Plenary session of the European Parliament on the occasion of the debate on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU

Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker

Mr President,

Honourable Members,

In less than 60 days, the United Kingdom is due to leave the European Union. This is a bad decision, as I find.

Even as the Commission has defended the interests of the European Union, this spirit of respect and friendship has accompanied us at every step in these negotiations. The Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration agreed by all 27 Leaders and the United Kingdom government is the result of that. The Withdrawal Agreement remains the best and only deal possible.

The European Union said so in November. We said so in December. We said so after the first meaningful vote in the Commons in January. The debate and votes in the House of Commons yesterday do not change that. The Withdrawal Agreement will not be renegotiated.

Both sides have said loud and clear that there can be no return to a hard border on the island of Ireland. No slipping back into darker times past. I believe the Prime Minister's personal commitment on this point. But I also believe that we need a safety net that secures us against this risk. We have no incentive nor desire to use the safety net. But at the same time, no safety net can ever truly be safe if it can just be removed at any time.

Sometimes, from time to time, I have the impression that some hope that the 26 other countries will abandon the backstop and so Ireland at the last minute. But this is not a game. And neither is it a simple bilateral issue. It goes to the heart of what being a member of the European Union means. Ireland's border is Europe's border – and it is our Union's priority.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We know from yesterday's debate that the House of Commons is against many things. It is against a no-deal Brexit. It is against the backstop. But we still do not know what exactly the House of Commons is actually for.

The concept of 'alternative arrangements' is not new. It was discussed in the negotiations. It is referred to in the Political Declaration. And in our

letter to Prime Minister May, Donald Tusk and I committed to exploring it further as a matter of priority. But a concept is not a plan. It is not an operational solution. Many in the House of Commons – both among those who voted for and those who voted against the amendment – are aware of this.

I will continue to be in close contact with Prime Minister May – for whom I have the greatest respect – and I will listen to her ideas. But I will also be extremely clear about the position of the European Union, that I have presented to you today.

Monsieur le Président,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Laissez-moi vous dire clairement que le vote hier a accru le risque d'un retrait désordonné du Royaume-Uni. Nous devons continuer à tout faire pour nous préparer à tous les scénarios, y compris le pire.

La Commission a commencé ses travaux préparatoires en décembre 2017. Et ces dernières semaines, en étroite coopération avec votre Parlement, Monsieur le Président, nous avons accéléré nos préparations. J'ai envoyé une équipe dans chaque capitale pour aider les Etats membres à être prêts. Le Conseil européen a apporté son appui à ce travail depuis le début.

Nous avons à ce jour publié 88 notifications montrant quelles seront les conséquences du Brexit dans différents domaines ainsi que 18 propositions ou actes législatifs. Les trois dernières propositions portant sur le programme Erasmus, la sécurité sociale et le budget de l'Union européenne ont été adoptées et présentées aujourd'hui. Je voudrais d'ores et déjà remercier tous les Membres du Parlement qui sont concernés afin de garantir que nous parvenions à des accords rapides sur ces propositions et sur tous les dossiers urgents en attente.

Il est plus que jamais important que l'Union européenne reste calme, unie, déterminée ainsi qu'elle a été tout au long de ce processus. Dans ce travail, nous devons suivre une règle d'or: nous ne devons pas reproduire les bénéfices de l'accord de retrait ou de la déclaration politique.

Dear colleagues,

I am – and still am – an optimist by nature, and a believer in democratic institutions by conviction. This leads me to believe that there can and will be agreement with the United Kingdom so that we can move on and move forward together with our new partnership.

We will work day and night to make it happen – and to ensure that we are ready in case it does not. Whichever way, I will always ensure that this House is the first to know and the last to decide.

Thank you.

.

Speech by Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier (English translation)

Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen, Members of Parliament,

Secretary of State,

Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me to speak before you again, and thereby building – day after day – alongside President Juncker, a climate of trust, transparency, and dialogue with you, and in particular with the Brexit Steering Group, chaired by Guy Verhofstadt, with a meeting almost every week.

Yesterday, for the first time, Prime Minister Theresa May openly called for the reopening of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Even before the votes last night, she distanced herself from the agreement she herself negotiated and on which we agreed.

The British government subsequently gave the government's explicit support to the amendment made by Sir Graham Brady, which requests that the backstop, which is foreseen in the Protocol on Ireland, is replaced by alternative arrangements, which have never actually been defined.

At the same time, the House of Commons, rejected the « no-deal” scenario, without, however, specifying how to avoid such a scenario.

This is the situation we find ourselves in this afternoon, in this long and extraordinary negotiation, at a serious and important moment.

President Tusk last night, and President Juncker just now recalled that we share the British Parliament's desire to avoid a « no-deal ». I agree with Theresa May: voting against a “no-deal” does not eliminate the risk of a “no-deal”.

For us, the Withdrawal Agreement is – and remains – the best and only way to ensure the UK's orderly withdrawal and to put in place, in an orderly manner, the sovereign decision of the majority of the British people to leave the European Union – which we respect.

I think that we can reach this objective, if each and every one of us is realistic and clear-headed, respectful and responsible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The backstop is part and parcel of the Withdrawal Agreement and it will not be renegotiated.

The December European Council conclusions – which are fully in line with the recent resolutions by the European Parliament – do not leave any room for doubt on this point.

This backstop is not about being dogmatic. It is a realistic solution. Under

your control, we looked for solutions throughout this negotiation to the problem created in Ireland by Brexit.

The backstop – as in the Withdrawal Agreement – is the result of extremely intense negotiations over the past two years with the United Kingdom, never against the United Kingdom.

The backstop is a pragmatic response to the unique situation on the island of Ireland, after the United Kingdom took a sovereign decision to leave the European Union, its Single Market and Customs Union.

Two years were necessary to find a solution that brought together several demands:

The first demand, for all of us, was to avoid the return of a hard border in Ireland, i.e. to preserve peace, stability and dialogue, which has existed on the island of Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. I recall that the United Kingdom confirmed its commitment as a co-guarantor of this agreement. And we ourselves have accompanied the success of this cooperation between communities over the past twenty years through the PEACE programme, through EU law, through EU policies, and through the EU budget.

The second demand was the British government's wish to keep Northern Ireland and Great Britain in a single customs territory;

The third demand, which was obviously ours, and for which we are collectively responsible, is the preservation of the integrity of the Single Market.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This last point is fundamental: the Irish border will become – as was the UK's decision – the European Union and Single Market's border. It will be our new external border. What is in play here is the protection of all EU consumers and businesses.

The UK's decision to leave the Union, the Single Market and the Customs Union has a practical consequence: every product that enters Northern Ireland from Great Britain enters not only Northern Ireland and Ireland, but also the Single Market, in your countries. Safety requires fiscal, sanitary, veterinary, regulatory controls. We do this at each of our external borders, everywhere in the European Union. We owe this protection to consumers and to all those who live in the Single Market.

And amongst those who are demanding the removal of the backstop, there are some British MPs, some of whom negotiated with us, and know perfectly well that the backstop was the solution found to respond to the core of our principles: the complete protection of the EU's Single Market.

I would like to say, after what President Juncker said, that we will do nothing to weaken the Single Market. We will do nothing that would lead to compromising the future of the European Union.

As the President said, we are, however, open to alternative arrangements, as

discussed by the House of Commons yesterday.

The Protocol on Ireland and the Political Declaration mention them. The letter by Presidents Tusk and Juncker made it a priority in the future negotiations. We are ready to work on them immediately after the signature of the Withdrawal Agreement.

But nobody today – on either side – is able to clarify precisely what these alternative arrangements are operationally and how they would effectively achieve the objectives of the backstop.

That is why, at this current moment and given the Withdrawal Agreement, we need the backstop as it is.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Rejecting the backstop as it is today would be to reject the solution that was found with the British, but the problem would still remain.

On this point, and beyond the question of alternative arrangements which I have just spoken about, the European Council, just like the European Parliament, have many times clearly rejected the idea of a time limit or a unilateral exit from the backstop because that would remove the meaning of the backstop, which is an insurance policy, something that we do not want to use, but that we need.

I would add, finally, that the Withdrawal Agreement goes beyond the Irish question:

It secures the rights of the 4.5 million citizens. President Tajani, you mentioned the Parliament's priority, we mentioned ours, and whatever happens, citizens' rights will remain our priority.

It protects all beneficiaries of the EU budget by ensuring that all commitments made at 28 will be financed at 28 ;

It puts in place a 21-month transition period during which businesses and administrations on both sides will have time to prepare for our future relationship and during which we will have time to negotiate our future relationship.

This agreement is necessary to build the trust that we need between the United Kingdom – which will remain an ally, friend, and partner – and the European Union.

On the future relationship, the EU is ready – and will remain ready over the coming days – to be more ambitious and to rework the nature and intensity of our future economic relationship, in particular. Many models of economic cooperation with third countries are possible, and we are ready to explore them, in respect of our European principles and the balance of rights and obligations. If the UK request evolves beyond a simple free trade agreement and towards one or more of these models, we will be immediately ready to discuss them, as you said in your resolutions, and as the European Council

has already said.

But, less than 60 days from the UK's withdrawal date and in the absence today of a positive majority in favour of an identified solution that is acceptable to the European Union, it is urgent for us to prepare for all scenarios and to put in place contingency measures – the preparation of which President Juncker has entrusted to the Secretary-General of the Commission and all the teams which work with you – and which are now more important than ever.

Discours comme prononcé en français par Michel Barnier:

Monsieur le Président,

Mesdames, Messieurs les Députés,

Madame la Secrétaire d'Etat,

Merci, Monsieur le Président, de me permettre à nouveau de m'exprimer devant vous et ainsi, jour après jour, de consolider, aux côtés du Président Juncker, le climat de confiance, la transparence, le dialogue que nous avons construits avec vous et en particulier avec le *Brexit Steering Group* présidé par Guy Verhofstadt, au rythme d'une réunion pratiquement chaque semaine.

Hier, pour la première fois, la Première ministre Theresa May a ouvertement plaidé en faveur d'une réouverture de l'accord de retrait.

Elle a, avant même les votes intervenus en fin de soirée, pris de la distance par rapport à l'accord qu'elle avait elle-même négocié et sur lequel nous étions tombés d'accord.

Le gouvernement britannique a apporté dans la foulée un soutien explicite à l'amendement présenté par Sir Graham Brady, qui demande le remplacement du *backstop*, que nous avons prévu dans le protocole irlandais, par des arrangements alternatifs, qui n'ont d'ailleurs à aucun moment été définis.

En même temps, la Chambre des Communes a rejeté le scénario d'un no deal, sans d'ailleurs aucune précision sur les moyens d'éviter un tel scénario.

Voilà la situation dans laquelle nous nous trouvons cet après-midi, dans le cours de cette très longue et extraordinaire négociation, et à un moment, que je veux qualifier de grave et de très sérieux.

Le Président Tusk hier soir, le Président Juncker à l'instant ont rappelé que nous partageons la volonté du Parlement britannique d'éviter un no deal. Je suis d'accord avec Theresa May : voter contre un no deal n'élimine pas le risque du no deal.

Pour nous, l'accord de retrait est et reste le meilleur et unique moyen d'assurer un retrait ordonné du Royaume-Uni et de mettre en œuvre, de manière

ordonnée, la décision souveraine, qu'a prise une majorité de citoyens britanniques, et que nous respectons, de quitter l'Union européenne.

Et je pense que nous pouvons atteindre cet objectif, à condition d'être réalistes et lucides, respectueux et responsables, les uns et les autres, les uns avec les autres.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Le *backstop* fait partie de l'accord de retrait et cet accord ne sera pas renégocié.

Les conclusions du Conseil européen de décembre – qui rejoignent en tous points les déclarations et les résolutions du Parlement européen – ne laissent place à aucun doute sur ce point.

Ce *backstop*, ce n'est pas du dogmatisme, c'est une solution réaliste. Nous avons cherché tout au long de cette négociation, sous votre contrôle, des solutions au problème créé en particulier en Irlande par le Brexit lui-même.

Le *backstop* – tel qu'il figure dans l'accord de retrait – est le résultat de négociations extrêmement intenses menées depuis deux ans, par nous avec le Royaume-Uni, jamais contre le Royaume-Uni.

Le *backstop* est une réponse pragmatique à la situation unique sur l'île d'Irlande, après que le Royaume-Uni a décidé souverainement de quitter l'Union européenne, son marché unique et son union douanière.

Deux ans ont été nécessaires pour trouver cette solution qui concilie plusieurs exigences.

La première exigence, pour nous tous, c'est d'éviter le retour d'une frontière dure en Irlande, c'est-à-dire de préserver les conditions de la paix, de la stabilité et du dialogue qui existent sur l'île d'Irlande depuis la signature du *Good Friday Agreement*. Je rappelle que le Royaume-Uni a confirmé son engagement comme co-garant de cet accord. Et nous avons-nous-mêmes accompagné depuis, vingt ans, par le programme PEACE, par le droit européen, par les politiques européennes, par le budget européen, la bonne réussite de cette coopération entre les communautés.

La deuxième exigence, c'est la volonté du gouvernement britannique de garder l'Irlande du Nord et la Grande-Bretagne dans un territoire douanier unique.

La troisième exigence, évidemment la nôtre, dont nous sommes responsables collectivement, c'est la préservation de l'intégrité du marché intérieur.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Ce dernier point est fondamental : la frontière irlandaise va devenir, par la volonté britannique, la frontière de l'Union européenne et du marché intérieur. Ce sera notre nouvelle frontière extérieure. Ce qui est en jeu, c'est la protection de tous les consommateurs et de toutes les entreprises de l'Union.

La décision britannique de quitter l'Union, le marché unique et l'union douanière a une conséquence pratique : c'est que tout produit qui entre en Irlande du Nord en provenance de Grande-Bretagne, entre non seulement en Irlande du Nord et en Irlande, mais aussi dans le marché unique, dans vos pays. La sécurité exige des contrôles d'ordre fiscal, sanitaire, vétérinaire, réglementaire, que nous faisons à chacune de nos frontières extérieures, partout dans l'Union européenne. Nous devons cette protection aux consommateurs et à tous ceux qui font vivre le marché intérieur.

Et parmi ceux qui demandent la suppression du backstop, il y a des parlementaires britanniques, qui ont pourtant négocié avec nous, et qui savent parfaitement que le backstop, c'est la solution que nous avons trouvée pour répondre à ce qui est le cœur de nos principes, c'est-à-dire la protection du marché intérieur européen, dans toutes ses dimensions. Je ne peux pas accepter le *blame game* qu'ils voudraient jouer contre nous.

Je voudrais dire après le Président Juncker que nous ne ferons rien qui fragiliserait le marché intérieur. Nous ne ferons rien qui conduise à compromettre l'avenir de l'Union européenne.

Comme le Président l'a dit, nous sommes cependant ouverts aux arrangements alternatifs qui ont été hier évoqués par la Chambre des Communes hier.

Le Protocole irlandais et la déclaration politique les mentionne. La lettre des Présidents Tusk et Juncker en fait même une priorité dans les futures négociations. Nous sommes prêts à y travailler aussitôt après la signature de l'accord de retrait.

Mais aujourd'hui, personne – ni d'un côté ni de l'autre – n'est en mesure de dire précisément, de manière claire, quelle serait la nature de ces arrangements alternatifs pour qu'ils soient opérationnels et qu'ils remplissent effectivement les objectifs du backstop.

Voilà pourquoi, au moment où nous sommes et s'agissant de l'accord de retrait, nous avons besoin de ce backstop tel qu'il est.

Mesdames, Messieurs,

Rejeter le backstop tel qu'il est aujourd'hui, cela revient à rejeter la solution qui a été trouvée avec les Britanniques, mais le problème lui, demeure.

Sur ce point et au-delà de la question des arrangements alternatifs dont je viens de parler, le Conseil européen comme le Parlement européen ont déjà, à plusieurs reprises et clairement, rejeté l'idée d'une limite dans le temps ou d'une sortie unilatérale du backstop puisque de telles idées dénatureraient l'idée même d'un backstop, qui est une assurance, que nous ne souhaitons pas utiliser, mais qui est là si nous en avons besoin.

J'ajoute, enfin, que l'accord de retrait va bien au-delà de la question irlandaise :

Il sécurise les droits de plus de 4,5 millions de citoyens. Monsieur le

Président Tajani, vous avez évoqué la priorité du Parlement, nous l'avons faites nôtre, et quoi qu'il arrive, la sécurité des droits des citoyens restera notre priorité.

Il protège l'ensemble des bénéficiaires du budget européen en assurant que les engagements pris à 28 seront financés à 28 ;

Il met en place une période de transition de 21 mois durant laquelle les entreprises comme les administrations, des deux côtés, pourront se préparer à ce que sera notre future relation et durant laquelle nous auront le temps de négocier cette future relation.

Cet accord est le préalable pour construire la confiance dont nous avons besoin entre le Royaume-Uni, qui restera un pays ami, allié, partenaire, et l'Union européenne.

S'agissant de la future relation, les Européens sont prêts et resteront prêts dans les jours qui viennent à être plus ambitieux et à retravailler sur la nature et l'intensité de notre future relation économique en particulier. Il existe plusieurs modèles possibles de coopération économique avec les pays tiers, que nous sommes prêts à explorer dans le respect des principes européens et de l'équilibre des droits et obligations. Si la demande britannique évoluait au-delà d'un simple accord de libre-échange vers l'un ou l'autre de ces modèles, nous sommes immédiatement prêts à en discuter, comme vous l'avez dit dans vos résolutions et comme l'a déjà dit le Conseil européen.

Mais à moins de 60 jours de la date de la sortie du Royaume-Uni et en l'absence aujourd'hui d'une majorité positive au Royaume-Uni en faveur d'une solution identifiée et acceptable par l'Union européenne, il est urgent de nous préparer à tous les scénarios et de mettre en place les mesures de *contingency* plus que jamais nécessaires et c'est le travail qui a été confié par le Président Juncker au Secrétaire général de la Commission et à toutes les équipes qui travaillent avec vous.