

Joint statement by President Jean-Claude Juncker and Taoiseach Leo Varadkar

The Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration have been negotiated in good faith and have been agreed by all 27 Leaders of the European Union Member States as well as by the United Kingdom Government.

As we have said on many occasions, the Withdrawal Agreement is the best and only deal possible. It is not open for renegotiation.

The backstop is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement. While we hope the backstop will not need to be used, it is a necessary legal guarantee to protect peace and to ensure there will be no return to a hard border on the island of Ireland, while protecting the integrity of our Single Market and the Customs Union.

The Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop, is a balanced compromise, representing a good outcome for citizens and businesses on all sides, including in Northern Ireland.

The backstop is not a bilateral issue, but a European one. Ireland's border is also the border of the European Union and its market is part of the Single Market. We will stay united on this matter.

We will continue to seek agreement on the orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom but we will also step up our preparation for a no-deal scenario. In this context, programmes that provide support for cross-border peace and reconciliation in the border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland will be continued and strengthened. The Commission stands ready to support Ireland in finding solutions answering the specific challenges that Ireland and Irish citizens, farmers and businesses will face. We will work closely together to this end over the coming weeks.

We will continue to remind the Government of the United Kingdom of its responsibilities under the Good Friday Agreement, with or without a deal.