

Statement by President Juncker on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union at the European Parliament's plenary session

President Tajani,

Honourable Members of this House,

The developments in Westminster over the past days have convinced me of what I already knew. The best way forward is the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. It has already been agreed by the Government of the United Kingdom, endorsed by this House as well as by the European Council.

In its decision 10 days ago, the European Council paved the way for an extension of the Article 50 negotiation period until the 22 May – on the condition the Withdrawal Agreement was approved by the House of Commons by 29 March. This was not the case.

In light of Prime Minister May's statement last night, I believe we now have a few more days. If the United Kingdom is in a position to approve the Withdrawal Agreement with a sustainable majority by 12 April, the European Union should be prepared to accept a delay until 22 May.

But 12 April is the ultimate deadline for the approval of the Withdrawal Agreement by the House of Commons. If it has not done so by then, no further short extension will be possible. After 12 April, we risk jeopardising the European Parliament elections, and so threaten the functioning of the European Union.

The Withdrawal Agreement is and has always been a compromise. A fair compromise in which both sides obtained some but not all of what they sought. It is the kind of compromise through which the European Union was built. The kind of compromise that enables the European project to advance. The kind of compromise we need at the moment.

Much of the debate in the House of Commons has related to the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom. The European Union stands ready to add flexibility to the Political Declaration, to pave the way for a close economic partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the future.

We stand ready to refer to a range of options, from a free trade agreement, to customs arrangements, to a Customs Union all the way to the European Economic Area. The openness we have shown from the start could be laid out, in purest clarity.

On the EU side, we stand ready to launch the talks and negotiations on the

future partnership as soon as the Withdrawal Agreement is signed. Before the ink is dry. The Commission's negotiating team is in place. Michel Barnier, our Chief Negotiator, is ready. I would expect the same level of readiness on the United Kingdom side.

Whether this happens or not depends on the United Kingdom. The European Council gave the United Kingdom the time and the space to decide.

Yet I believe that a "no deal" at midnight on the 12 April is now a very likely scenario. It is not the outcome I want. But it is an outcome for which I have made sure the European Union is ready.

We have been preparing since December 2017. We have always known that the logic of Article 50 makes a "no-deal" the default outcome. We have long been aware of the balance of power in the House of Commons.

In that time, the Commission has published 91 preparedness notices, 32 non-legislative acts, 19 legislative proposals and 3 Communications. We have visited all 27 Member States to support their preparations. We have held 72 seminars with the Member States.

The measures we and the Member States have taken will mitigate the worst impact of a "no-deal" scenario. The protection offered is real. The measures will make sure that EU and UK citizens can continue to live and work where they are at the moment. They make sure that planes can take off and land. We have adapted our financial instrument to make it possible to help fishing communities. We have identified the ways in which law enforcement cooperation can continue. We have taken steps to mitigate disruption on our financial markets.

The measures we have taken are time-limited and unilateral. They provide a cushion for key EU interests at least until the end of the year. But disruption will be inevitable for citizens, for businesses and for almost every sector.

The United Kingdom will be affected more than the European Union because there is *no such thing as a "managed or negotiated no-deal"* and there is no such thing as a *"no-deal transition"*.

And whatever happens, the United Kingdom will still be expected to address the three main separation issues.

- Citizens' rights would still need to be upheld and protected.
- The United Kingdom would still have to honour its financial commitments made as a Member State.
- And thirdly, a solution would still need to be found on the island of Ireland that preserves peace and the internal market. The United Kingdom must fully respect the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement.

"No-deal" does not mean no commitments. And these three issues will not go away. They will be a strict condition to rebuild trust and to start talking on the way forward.

At the European Council next week, we will listen to Prime Minister May's intentions and decide how to proceed. The principles that will guide my actions are clear. I will work until the last moment to avoid a "no-deal" outcome.

The only ones who would benefit from such disruption are the opponents of the global rules-based order. The only ones who would cheer are the populists and the nationalists. The only ones who would celebrate are those who want both the European Union and the United Kingdom to be weak.

The European Union will not kick any Member State out. I will personally do everything I can to prevent a disorderly Brexit and I expect political leaders across the EU27 and in the United Kingdom to do the same.

Thank you.