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Doorstep by President von der Leyen following her meeting with a group of British European Commission staff including remarks on the draft negotiating directives adopted today

Brussels, 3 February 2020

I am just coming from a meeting with the UK staff of the European Commission. We had a very good continental breakfast. They are very dedicated people, great staff, very keen to work for the European Commission. My basic message to them was: Let us not look back, let us move forward now. There is a new chapter we are opening and let us be progressive with that.

Today, as you know, the European Commission will propose to the Council the draft negotiating directives concerning our future partnership with the United Kingdom. If we are looking at these topics, one thing is for sure. We know that there is a very close cooperation that we aim at with the United Kingdom. There will be no surprises. We outlined with the United Kingdom already the future parameters we will have in our negotiations in the Withdrawal Agreement. There we are very clear: The draft directives show also that we are very ready to be very ambitious and to negotiate a new partnership unprecedented in scope.

The draft directives cover a whole range of topics, from trade to mobility, to energy, from law enforcement to judicial cooperation, from foreign policy to security and defence. It shows that there are a lot of files to work on. The most ambitious model that could be there is membership – and this is not relevant right now. There are other models out there. You know we have free trade agreements with Singapore, with Norway, with Canada, with Australia, with Japan. Important is that all the models are an offer and every model comes with a right balance of rights and obligations. They are always together, rights and obligations in each model. There is no such thing like a free ride to the Single Market, it is always rights and obligations in a good balance.

In any negotiations, both sides will do what is best for them. The European Union will protect of course the interests of our citizens and of the European companies. The Commission will continue to work hand-in-hand with the European Parliament and the Council, and we will stay successfully united, as we have done over the last three and a half years. We know time is short and the road is long, so we kick off the negotiations today.

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