



Press statement by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič following the second meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee

Brussels, 12 June 2020

Good afternoon everyone!

I am happy to report back to you today after our second meeting of the Joint Committee on the implementation and application of the Withdrawal Agreement.

On the EU's side, I was joined by Michel Barnier, the European Commission's Chief Negotiator, as well as 15 Member States representatives. And I would like to thank sincerely Michael Gove and his team for their constructive attitude today.

I have to underline that the meeting took place in a very good atmosphere and I am glad that at the end of our discussion we also arrived at some positive results, which I believe would pave the way forward for the proper implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

It was important for all of us that this second meeting at political level took place in June.

It testifies to our joint commitment to the proper implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and to the important link with the negotiations on our future relationship.

The full and timely implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement is an essential basis for building confidence and mutual trust between the EU and the UK.

As Michel Barnier has repeatedly underlined, that is why the negotiations on our future relationship are also contingent on the faithful implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement – as set out in the EU's negotiation mandate.

This meeting was the occasion to jointly take stock of the progress made since the last meeting of the Joint Committee at the end of March. And of course, to identify remaining difficulties that need to be resolved.

Since the last meeting of the Joint Committee, we have launched the work of five of the six Specialised Committees foreseen under the Withdrawal Agreement on:

- Citizens' rights;
- The Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland;
- Financial provisions;
- *The Protocol on Gibraltar;*
- *And the Protocol on the Sovereign Base Areas of the UK in Cyprus.*

However, with some six months to go before the end of the transition period, we still have lots of work to do.

This is true for all work-streams, but in particular with regard to the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland.

The window of opportunity to put in place the operational measures needed to ensure that the Protocol can function as intended on 1 January 2021 is rapidly closing.

Last month, the UK government published a Command Paper setting out its approach for fulfilling its obligations under the Protocol.

- The publication of this paper was welcomed by the EU side as an important step in reflecting the commitment of the UK authorities in the implementation of this Protocol.
- However, this paper does not provide sufficient operational details.
- We need to move from aspiration to operation – and fast.

As of 1 January 2021, the UK will have to meet all the requirements of the Protocol, rigorously and effectively.

- That includes putting in place all the necessary checks and controls for goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain.
- That includes applying EU rules on customs and sanitary and phytosanitary protection.
- And that also includes – according to Article 12 of the Protocol – enabling the EU to effectively exercise its right to be present during any activities of the UK authorities related to, amongst other things, the implementation and application of the customs provisions of the Protocol. The UK should facilitate such a presence and provide EU representatives with the information requested.

Only a sound and effective implementation of all these legal obligations can:

- Ensure continued peace and stability between all communities on the island of Ireland;
- Uphold the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions;
- While also preserving the EU Single Market.

I made these points to Minister Gove very clearly.

In addition to the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland, we also continued our exchanges on citizens' rights. This is a key priority for both sides.

Regarding EU citizens residing in the UK:

- We are pleased that 3.1 million EU citizens have already been granted residence status in the UK.
- At the same time, we are carefully monitoring the situation of more vulnerable citizens that have difficulties applying digitally.
- And it is also important that EU citizens residing in the UK have access to social benefits in these difficult times, in line with the relevant EU rules. These are rules that still apply to the UK.

As for UK nationals residing in the EU, the Commission is very attentive to this issue:

- We have already published guidelines to support all 27 Member States to live up to their commitments of the Withdrawal Agreement.
- In the 13 Member States that – like the UK – have chosen what is called a “constitutive system”, we are working to ensure that procedures for applying for a residence status are simple, easily accessible, and clearly communicated.

- In the 14 Member States that have chosen what is called a “declaratory system”, UK nationals will receive a physical document enabling them to prove their status.

The Commission will continue to follow the matter of citizens' rights very closely.

The meeting today was also the occasion to adopt the Joint Committee's first formal decision, pertaining to the technical correction of a certain number of minor deficiencies and omissions in the Withdrawal Agreement.

Finally, Michael Gove confirmed to me that the UK will not consider an extension of the transition period.

From our side, I have taken note of the position of the UK on this issue and have stated – as President von der Leyen has already done – that the EU remains open to such an extension.

In this context, with Chancellor Gove we both agreed on accelerating the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and to accelerate our work. We also agreed that the Joint Committee should meet again in early September. By this date, we also concluded that the Specialised Committees, including the one on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, will meet in the coming weeks.

To conclude, I would like to thank Chancellor Gove and both teams for today's discussion, for the very cordial atmosphere, and for what I believe is a pragmatic agreement on how we are going to work in the next weeks and months.

Thank you.

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