



Press statement by Vice-President Šefčovič following the fifth ordinary meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee

Brussels, 17 December 2020

We have just concluded our fifth ordinary EU-UK Joint Committee meeting on the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement – co-chaired with Chancellor Michael Gove, by means of videoconference. Today marks an important milestone. We have endorsed formal decisions and other practical solutions, ensuring that the Withdrawal Agreement is operational in time, as of 1 January 2021. This means that we have delivered on our overarching objective – to protect the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland, and maintain peace, stability and prosperity there. This was essential, given the limited time left until the transition period ends at the end of this year. Therefore, I want to thank Chancellor Gove for his personal dedication and solution-driven approach that helped us to reach this important milestone. At the same time, I appreciate the swift approval of the decisions by our Member States. This is also a testament to our shared commitment to the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement.

Throughout this year, we have indeed worked tirelessly to ensure that both the letter and the spirit of the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, are respected and translated into viable solutions. These now provide businesses and people in Northern Ireland with necessary clarity and stability, while we uphold the integrity of our Single Market. Let me highlight the EU's two main priorities: First, robust working arrangements for the EU's presence in Northern Ireland so that our representatives can effectively carry out their tasks on the ground. In particular, I welcome that the UK has agreed to provide adequate equipment and facilities, as well as continuous, real-time access to their relevant IT systems and databases, both on the ground and remotely. The second priority, which I strongly welcome, is that the UK has committed to withdraw all contentious parts of its Internal Market Bill, and refrain from introducing any similar parts in its Taxation Bill. Given these reassurances, we were able to find workable solutions for a number of areas, such as the supply of medicines. These solutions will be of a temporary nature and with strict conditions attached.

We are also making sure that the rights of our citizens and UK nationals are protected. Going in detail, we have today endorsed the second Joint Report on Residence Rights and agreed on its publication. In a transparent manner, it provides an update on national residence schemes in the EU and the UK. And it also outlines outreach and assistance measures to support EU citizens and UK nationals, including vulnerable groups, and to inform important stakeholders, such as employers. I want to stress that we take legal certainty for all people concerned very seriously. To demonstrate, just one figure – more than 90% of UK nationals residing in the EU can already apply for a new residence status in our Member States. The UK has also provided reassurances as to its settlement system for EU citizens. We will continue to work with the Member States and monitor this issue closely.

Let me conclude by underlining that I am committed to continue paying full attention to the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement in 2021, with a focus on how our mutually agreed solutions work on the ground. To that effect, with Chancellor Gove, we have agreed today that the Joint Committee will continue to meet at least quarterly during the upcoming year.

Thank you.