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THE PRIME MINISTER

19 March 2018

Dear Donald

I am pleased to see today's announcement of the progress our negotiators have made. I write to confirm my support for it and that the UK Government stands behind it. The agreement the negotiators have reached on the detailed legal framework for the implementation period, citizens' rights, the financial settlement, and other aspects of our orderly withdrawal from the European Union, is further proof that, with political will and collaboration, we can find answers to difficult issues together. I hope the European Council will welcome those agreements, give the process further impetus, and allow businesses, individuals and public services on both sides to plan with certainty.

I am also pleased that the European Council looks set to adopt open, ambitious guidelines on what the EU at 27 wants from its relationship with the UK. My ambition for the scope and depth of that relationship was set out in my speeches at the Munich Security Conference on 17 February and at the Mansion House on 2 March. In those speeches, I acknowledged that what lay ahead was a negotiation, and therefore neither side was likely to get exactly what it wanted. But I am encouraged that there is considerable alignment between your sense of the European Council's ambition and my own expectations. I look forward to our teams getting into these issues in earnest as soon as possible after the Council, so that we can reach agreement rapidly on our future partnership.

There are, of course, issues that today's substantial progress on the codification of the draft Withdrawal Agreement does not yet fully resolve. I want to reinforce my commitment to the Joint Report in its entirety, including reaffirming the UK Government's view that the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 1998 must be protected in all its parts. The commitments in the Joint Report on which more work is needed include our guarantee of avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and to preserving North-South cooperation as set out in the Joint Report. The Report also provides clear recognition for Northern Ireland's constitutional status, the principle of consent, and protecting Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market. Whilst I have made my position clear on aspects

of the approach taken in the draft Protocol published by the European Commission a fortnight ago, there are other aspects of it with which we do agree, and I remain fully committed to the whole agreement reached in December. We welcome the provisions in the draft Protocol on protecting the Common Travel Area and the rights of individuals in particular. There is agreement between our negotiating teams that the issues covered by the draft reflect those that must be addressed in order to meet our shared objectives. This is an important step, and I am pleased that our teams have now agreed and published an intensive work programme with a view to working through this shared list of topics to derive workable solutions. As I said in my speech at the Mansion House: we chose to leave, we have a responsibility to help find a solution.

The UK remains committed to engaging in detail on all the scenarios agreed in the Joint Report and the planned programme of discussions will help achieve this. I continue to believe, as I set out at the Mansion House, that we can achieve a close partnership that provides for such a deep trading relationship between the UK and the EU that specific measures in relation to Northern Ireland are not required. This would be in the best interests of Northern Ireland and, of course, of Ireland. If our future partnership cannot completely resolve the issues in such a way as to meet our commitment on the border, I will want to explore additional specific solutions that can address those unique circumstances. I am committed to agreeing in the Withdrawal Agreement operational legal text for at least the so-called 'backstop option' set out in the Joint Report, in parallel with discussions of these other scenarios.

I therefore hope that the European Council will, when it meets in Article 50 formation later this week, be able to welcome the agreement we have reached on the framework for the implementation period, citizens' rights, the financial settlement and other aspects of our orderly withdrawal, and set the tone for an ambitious and close partnership for the future.

Yours sincerely
David M.