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***Plenary debate on Preparation of the European Council meeting of 17 and 18
October 2019***

9th October 2019, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium

Madam President, I understand that the political situation in the UK is, to say the least, challenging. However, it must be clear that the proposal that came from the United Kingdom, long awaited by the EU, that might lead to an orderly Brexit, has not met our expectations. We hoped to see a legally operational alternative to the backstop that would deliver on all its objectives. As Michel Barnier has rightly said, the proposal raises fundamental concerns. Here in this House, we will not accept a return to a hard border on the island of Ireland. We will not accept distortions to the all—island economy. We will not accept risks to the integrity of the single market and we cannot, either, accept replacing the legally operational backstop with a vision of a solution that might or might not come at the end of the transition period.

We regret the lack of transparency at this stage of the negotiations on the British side in a moment when the third Brexit deadline is around the corner. The negotiating team has shown an enormous amount of flexibility over the last few years and is prepared to work around the clock to find a deal, so there is still a chance, but a significant movement from our British friends is needed. But I'm not convinced anymore, as many of us here are not, that the UK Government wants a deal.

Let me finish by underlining that this unprecedented political process of Brexit continues to have a massive negative impact on citizens' lives and, in this context, let

me say that negotiating the future relationship should not be allowed to start before citizens' rights are legally guaranteed.