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***Plenary debate on "Withdrawal Agreement of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community"***

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I speak as the EPP representative in the Brexit Steering Group but also as the former Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, who had, over those Brexit years, nearly 500 meetings with all those potentially affected by Brexit. From the very beginning of the Brexit negotiations, the EU side has aimed at an orderly withdrawal, based on an agreement. This is the only thing we could do to give legal certainty to the process. And we have achieved this goal. I hope most of us will endorse the consent to the Council decision on the conclusion of the agreement on the Withdrawal to avoid Brexit. From the very beginning of this process we have been also clear that the UK withdrawal is not a final destination. Now, we should aim at a close, comprehensive agreement on the future relationship, preferably in the form of an association agreement, embracing both close economic partnership and security. We know that the UK political choice has been "taking the control back". So yes, we are aware that if UK aims at divergence from European norms and standards, it can put at risk even a bare bone FTA. That is why a well-tailored agreement on level playing field will be crucial. But there is ahead of us as the EP also the task to have a watchful eye on the implementation and enforcement of the Withdrawal Agreement. Of particular importance for us will be the oversight of the implementation of citizens' rights and of the Irish Protocol. To conclude, let me call on the Commission to respect the commitment of its former President to involve the European

Parliament in the work of the Joint Committee. And let me reach out to Robert Burns and say "for auld land syne".