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**„The importance of the proper implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland under the Withdrawal Agreement”**

**Joint Meeting of the INTA Monitoring Group on the United Kingdom and AFCO Monitoring Group on the Implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement**

**European Parliament, Brussels (online), 8 December 2021**

In our meeting today, we will discuss the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland under the Withdrawal Agreement, almost two years after the entry into force of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. As Parliament has made it consistently clear, for us the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is essential as it was designed to uphold the Good Friday Agreement.

All of you remember that avoiding a hard border and protecting the Good Friday Agreement was on the top of our political agenda throughout the negotiations.

Since January this year, we have been in the phase of implementation and enforcement of the two agreements: the Withdrawal agreement with the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. And we all know that this has been a bumpy road.

The implementation of the Protocol has dominated. For the EU side, this has been an effort to achieve the commitments from the UK partner, to which both sides agreed in the course of negotiations, to the last comma and word.

There has been a huge effort from the European Commission side to fully exploit flexibilities within the framework of the Protocol, without the need of renegotiating the Protocol. On this issue the position of the European Union has been clear and firm. In October, the European Commission has proposed four non-papers addressing: customs issues, sanitary and phytosanitary issues, the governance role of the institutional stakeholders in the NI and the delivery of medicines where the transition period expires at the end of the year. In the European Parliament we consider all of them important, and in particular the last one.

Both technical and political talks continue. However, the British side has put on the table the threat of triggering article 16 of the Protocol.

My understanding and a relatively good news is that over the last two weeks we can see a come back to a constructive discussion. We do not see, though, Friday's political summaries after technical talks which. I gut imply that there is not sufficient progress to report publicly. This might suggest that the end of the year will not bring the solutions to the issues currently negotiated. I do not expect to see them on the European Council agenda either.

It does not come as surprise taking into account the distance in approaches at the beginning of these talks. More time is needed to agree on solutions and see that commitments on the British side, in particular the EU access to data and operationalization of the border control points are indeed realized.

We expect to see a clear move forward at the beginning of 2022 allowing to decide that continuing talks makes sense.

The bad news is that the article 16 threat remains on the table.