Brussels, 15 December 2016
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Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government of 27 Member States,
as well as the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission
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We, the Heads of State or Government of 27 Member States, as well as the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, determined to see the Union succeed, stand ready to start negotiations with the UK as soon as the UK has notified under article 50. We welcome the intention of the UK to do so before the end of March 2017, so that we can begin to tackle the uncertainties arising from the prospect of the UK's withdrawal.

We stand firmly behind our statement of 29 June 2016 in its entirety and will continue to adhere to the principles laid down therein. We reiterate that any agreement will have to be based on a balance of rights and obligations, and that access to the Single Market requires acceptance of all four freedoms.

We intend to conduct the withdrawal negotiations in a spirit of trust and unity among us. To this end, we endorse the procedural arrangements set out in annex for these negotiations.

1. The first step following the notification by the United Kingdom will be the adoption by the European Council of guidelines that will define the framework for negotiations under Article 50 TEU and set out the overall positions and principles that the EU will pursue throughout the negotiation. The European Council will remain permanently seized of the matter, and will update these guidelines in the course of the negotiations as necessary.

2. After the adoption of the guidelines, the European Council will invite the General Affairs Council to proceed swiftly with the adoption of the decision authorising the opening of the negotiations, following a recommendation by the European Commission, and to deal with the subsequent steps in the process. The Council will also adopt negotiating directives on substance as well as on the detailed arrangements governing the relationship between the Council and its preparatory bodies on the one hand and the Union negotiator on the other. These negotiating directives may be amended and supplemented as necessary throughout the negotiations, to reflect the European Council guidelines as they evolve.

3. The Council will be invited to nominate the European Commission as the Union negotiator. The Commission's nomination of Michel Barnier as chief negotiator is welcome. To ensure transparency and build trust, the Union negotiator's team will be ready to integrate a representative of the rotating Presidency of the Council. Representatives of the President of the European Council will be present and participate, in a supporting role, in all negotiation sessions, alongside the European Commission representatives. The Union negotiator will systematically report to the European Council, the Council and its preparatory bodies.

4. Between the meetings of the European Council, the Council and Coreper, assisted by a dedicated Working Party with a permanent chair, will ensure that the negotiations are conducted in line with the European Council guidelines and the Council negotiating directives, and provide guidance to the Union negotiator.

5. The members of the European Council, the Council and its preparatory bodies representing the United Kingdom will not participate in the discussions or in the decisions concerning it.

6. Representatives of the 27 Heads of State or Government (Sherpas/Permanent Representatives) will be involved in the preparation of the European Council as necessary. Representatives of the European Parliament will be invited at such preparatory meetings.

7. The Union negotiator will be invited to keep the European Parliament closely and regularly informed throughout the negotiation. The Presidency of the Council will be prepared to inform and exchange views with the European Parliament before and after each meeting of the General Affairs Council. The President of the European Parliament will be invited to be heard at the beginning of meetings of the European Council.