

Introduction:

At midnight today, after 47 years of membership, the UK will withdraw from the European Union. This is a profound watershed moment for all of us, the 27 member states of the EU, and also for Germany. However, Germany would like to remain a close partner and friend of the UK because we share common values. Moreover, the 27 EU member states will do everything in their power to ensure that Europe continues to develop successfully. An attractive, strong Europe is also a good partner for the UK.

Question: What does the withdrawal mean in concrete terms?

Fortunately, we have managed to pass a withdrawal agreement with the UK. In particular, the rights of citizens from the EU member states to live in the UK as well as those of UK citizens living in an EU member state are enshrined in this agreement. These rights are permanent and offer a good level of protection. A transition period also applies until the end of this year. During this time, nothing will change for people who want to stay in or travel to the UK. Likewise, nothing will change for companies producing goods and employing workers in the UK. It remains to be seen what happens after this transition period. The transition period may be extended once, although this must be communicated by 1 July of this year. This means that we will now have to engage in most intensive negotiations with the British on our future relations in the area of trade and business. This will be the dominant issue this year.

Question: What happens now?

Intensive negotiations are now required. These will be conducted on our behalf by the European Commission once again, notably by Michel Barnier. After all, as member states, we want to ensure that we stand as one in our dealings with the UK. These negotiations will certainly not be easy. They will, in essence, be trade negotiations in which it is ascertained how we do business with one another in the future. There are examples for us to follow here in the form of international trade agreements. And the onus will be on the UK to demonstrate how it wants to shape its relations with the EU. We have the integrated single market with its fundamental freedoms. And, of course, the more the UK moves away from the conditions of the single market, the greater the changes in our future relations will be. The EU is entering these negotiations in good faith, but it is also standing up for its own interests. The UK will do likewise. And then I hope that we will, as soon as possible, be able to conclude a good and long-term agreement with the UK after the country's withdrawal that governs our relations in a comprehensive way.