

Press statement: CLECAT disappointed by further doubt about Brexit

CLECAT, the European association for Freight Forwarding, Logistics and Customs services, is disappointed with the outcome of the vote in the UK Parliament last night against the Withdrawal Agreement which leaves the industry in further doubt about Brexit.

Meanwhile, the logistics sector - including logistics service providers and customs agents - is continuing to prepare for a situation whereby the UK will leave the EU without a transition period. Dominique Willems, senior manager of CLECAT said: *'Our members are already used to handling trade with third countries. In most cases they already have the competence, experience, permits (including for example AEO) and IT systems in place to deal with such circumstances. The challenges that remain are the amount of human resources needed and the preparedness of importers, exporters and other stakeholders in the logistic chain, which have limited experience in trading with third countries.'*

He continued: *'Over the past year, and especially over the last couple of months, various measures were already taken to soften the blow of a no-deal Brexit by both government authorities and the private sector stakeholders. Customs authorities in countries such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands and UK have recruited and educated additional employees. Various stakeholders such as port operators, transporters and freight forwarders have started good cooperation initiatives to ensure that, for example, any delays at ferry terminals can be minimalised or at least managed in the best possible way. Despite the preparedness of the logistics service providers, CLECAT still considers that a no-deal Brexit on 29 March should be prevented at all cost. Regardless of any preparatory efforts, such a situation will almost certainly lead to disruption, delays and extra costs in trade, and it will thus surely damage the economies of both the UK and EU.'*

On 19 December, the EU Commission proposed further steps towards implementing its Contingency Action Plan to mitigate some of the most significant damage that would arise from a no-deal Brexit scenario, including measures relating to road haulage permits (ECMT), air freight and several specific customs aspects. In cooperation with Member States and private sector representatives, the Commission is continuing these efforts.

Last night, British Parliament Members rejected Prime Minister May's Brexit deal, casting the UK's path out of the European Union with further doubt. The deal must be ratified by the UK and European parliaments before it can come into force on 29 March 2019. Without a withdrawal agreement, the UK will become a "third country" to the EU as of that date, meaning that there will be no transition period or any other specific arrangements that could ease the exit of the UK from the EU. However, just 10 weeks before that date, it remains unclear whether the no-deal Brexit will actually happen as various scenarios are possible like a delay of the UK's exit, possible amendments to the Withdrawal Agreement or even no Brexit at all.