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All the sports action: Inside

Age Concern celebrate in real style



Age Concern held their annual Christmas Party in Genova yesterday which proved to be a massive success. Full Report will appear in Tuesday's newspaper.

Sacked Catalan leader challenges EU to respect election outcome

Brussels.—Catalonia's former leader challenged Spain and the European Union to respect the result of Catalan regional elections in December, saying Madrid would have to end direct rule if separatists win.

Speaking from Belgium where he fled earlier this month, Carles Puigdemont said the vote was the most important in Catalonia's history.

"Will you accept the results of December 21 if the pro-independence camp wins?" he asked after supporters chanted "Puigdemont, our president" during a speech to unveil his list of candidates for the vote.

"Do you commit to ending (direct rule) if that is the result?" said Puigdemont, the public face of the move for independence who is wanted in Spain for rebellion and sedition.

After dissolving Catalonia's parliament and sacking the regional government in response to the region declaring itself independent



on 27 Oct., Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy said a new election would be held in Catalonia and called on Puigdemont to take part.

Pro-Catalonia independence parties are expected to win next month although they may fall short of a majority of seats in parliament needed to revive the secession campaign, polls show. "On December 21 we must

tell Madrid, the EU and the tripartite support for direct rule that democracy in Catalonia must not be undermined. Never again in Catalonia!" Puigdemont said from the town of Oostkamp near Bruges, part of Belgium's Flemish region that has its own separatist aspirations.

EU leaders are extremely wary of Catalonia's search for independence because it has stirred separatist feelings far beyond Spanish borders.

European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker this month in Madrid called on Europe to reject what he called separatist poison.

N.Ireland's DUP says will not accept different rules to rest of UK

London.—The Northern Irish party propping up Britain's minority government will not support any Brexit deal that sees the province operate under different regulations to the rest of the United Kingdom, its leader said yesterday.

The border between EU-

member Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will be the UK's only land frontier with the bloc after its departure, is one of three issues Brussels wants broadly solved over the next 10 days before it decides whether to move the talks onto a second phase about trade. The Irish government wants

Britain to spell out in writing how it intends to make good on its commitment that the 500-km (310 mile) border will remain as seamless post-Brexit as it is today before it will sign off on the first phase of talks.

Dublin and EU officials say the best way to avoid a "hard border" is to keep

regulations the same north and south but the pro-Brexit Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which holds the balance of power in London, said it will not stand for Northern Ireland to operate differently from the rest of the UK.

"We will not support any arrangements that create

barriers to trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom or any suggestion that Northern Ireland, unlike the rest of the UK, will have to mirror European regulations," Arlene Foster said in the text of a speech to be delivered at her party's annual conference.

"The economic reality is that our most important trading relationship is with the rest of the United Kingdom and we will do nothing that puts that at risk in any way." Foster said she wanted a "sensible Brexit" that recognises the reality of the British province's geography and history.