

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar

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As you know, I always try to present the EU's position honestly, and without beating about the bush. Telling the truth, even if difficult and unpleasant, is the best way of showing respect for partners. That's how it was in Salzburg, and that's also how we will work in the coming days.

First of all, we want to focus on practical and realistic ways of minimising the damage caused by Brexit, on both sides of the channel. Emotional arguments that stress the issue of dignity sound attractive, but they do not facilitate agreement. Let us remember that every actor in this process has their dignity, and confrontation in this field will not lead to anything good.

Second, the task of the EU's negotiators is to defend the interests of the European Union as a whole, and of all the 27 member states. We very much regret that the UK has decided to leave, and we hope for the best relationship in future, but no-one can expect that, because of Brexit, the EU will give up its fundamental values and key interests. Let me make this clear: the EU wants a relationship with the UK that is as close and special as possible. From the very beginning, the EU offer has been not just a Canada deal, but a Canada+++ deal. Much further-reaching on trade, on internal security and on foreign policy cooperation. This is a true measure of respect. And this offer remains in place. The EU is serious about getting the best possible deal. Even though we haven't changed our minds that the consequences of Brexit will be negative, for both sides.

Third, in respecting our partners, we expect the same in return. Comparing the European Union to the Soviet Union is as unwise as it is insulting. The Soviet Union was about prisons and gulags, borders and walls, violence against citizens and neighbours. The European Union is about freedom and human rights, prosperity and peace, life without fear, it is about democracy and pluralism; a continent without internal borders or walls. As the President of the European Council and someone who spent half of my life in the Soviet Bloc, I know what I'm talking about. The Soviet spirit is still alive, as demonstrated by the attack in Salisbury. You will know best where to find this spirit. Rather not in Brussels. And I am sure you will also

remember who was the first to declare full solidarity with the UK at that critical moment. Unfortunately, that was not a unique incident. Today, the Dutch and UK governments informed about a cyber attack against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the Hague, which was carried out by Kremlin intelligence services. On behalf of the EU, I want to fully condemn this attack and express our complete solidarity with those affected. I will put the issue of cyber security on the agenda of the next European Council.

Today, after my long discussion with my guest, the Taoiseach, I want to say that the EU is united behind Ireland and the need to preserve the Northern Ireland peace process. Despite the UK government's rejection of the original EU backstop proposal, we will not give up seeking a workable solution that fully respects the Good Friday Agreement as well as the integrity of the Single Market and the Customs Union.

Unacceptable remarks that raise the temperature will achieve nothing except wasting more time. What needs to be done is maximum progress by the October European Council. I was party leader myself, for fifteen years, and I know what the rules of party politics are. But now, once the Tory party conference is over, we should get down to business. Thank you.

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