

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

## Press contacts

### Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson

+32 2 281 51 50

+32 476 85 05 43

Go raibh maith agat, Taoiseach. I heard that the last days were particularly difficult in Ireland because of the severe weather, particularly for people in the countryside. But let me reassure you that I have not come here to chill the air, but rather to warm it up. I may be from the East, but I am *not* a Beast.

I have come to Dublin to consult with the Taoiseach and discuss Ireland's concerns on several important issues ahead of the European Council in two weeks. The European Union is a family of free nations, linked by values. For sure, we may not always be in agreement on everything. But in times of trouble, families come together and stand with each other. For the EU27, this is especially true when we talk about Brexit.

In December, also with the active participation of the Taoiseach, we addressed the most difficult issues resulting from the UK's departure in 2019. Without the progress achieved in December, moving to the second phase of negotiations would not have been possible. But we also have to be clear that any backsliding on the commitments made so far would create a risk to further progress in Brexit negotiations. This applies also to the question of avoiding a hard border.

When I was in London last week, I heard very critical comments by Prime Minister May, and others, about the way the Irish border issue was presented in the draft Withdrawal Agreement.

We know today that the UK government rejects: "a customs and regulatory border down the Irish Sea"; the EU Single Market and the customs union. While we must respect this position, we also expect the UK to propose a specific and realistic solution to avoid a hard border. As long as the UK doesn't present such a solution, it is very difficult to imagine substantive progress in Brexit negotiations. If in London someone assumes that the negotiations will deal with other issues first, before moving to the Irish issue, my response would be: Ireland first.

Next month marks the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, ratified

by large majorities North and South of the border. We must recognise the democratic decision taken by Britain to leave the EU in 2016, just as we must recognise the democratic decision made on the island of Ireland in 1998 with all its consequences. The risk of destabilising the fragile peace process must be avoided at all costs. So we will be firm on this.

Yesterday in Luxembourg, I presented my draft guidelines to shape our future relationship with the UK after Brexit. Also yesterday, the UK Chancellor made a speech, in the City of London, arguing for a bespoke deal or an ambitious FTA covering financial services. So let me refer to this issue of such great interest to London.

In the FTA we can offer trade in goods, with the aim of covering all sectors, subject to zero tariffs and no quantitative restrictions. But services are not about tariffs. Services are about common rules, common supervision, and common enforcement. To ensure a level playing field. To ensure the integrity of the Single Market. And ultimately also to ensure financial stability. This is why we cannot offer the same in services as we can offer in goods. And it's also why FTAs don't have detailed rules for financial services. We should all be clear that also when it comes to financial services, life will be different after Brexit.

I also heard the Chancellor's words about financial services being "very much in the mutual interest" of the UK and EU. I fully respect the Chancellor's competence in defining what's in the UK's interest. I would, however, ask to allow us to define what's in the EU's interest.

Finally, let me add that during my visit in Luxembourg yesterday, I experienced what European solidarity with Ireland means. As you know, every country has its own problems resulting from Brexit. So does Luxembourg. But one of the first issues raised by Prime Minister Bettel in our conversation, was the issue of our common position regarding Ireland. Since my last visit here in Dublin, I have spoken to virtually every EU leader, and every one of them – without exception – declared, just like Prime Minister Bettel did yesterday, that among their priorities are: protecting the peace process, and avoiding a hard border. The EU stands by Ireland. This is a matter between the EU27 and UK, not Ireland and the UK. Thank you.

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## **EU and Ukrainian local governments establish partnerships to support decentralisation reform**

**The European Union increased its support for local and regional authorities**

**in Ukraine on 8 March, with the launch of five partnerships between Ukrainian and EU regions and cities. The relationships will see Estonian, German, Hungarian, Lithuanian and Polish communities share their experience in areas identified as priorities by their Ukrainian partners – drawing up economic-development plans, supporting rural areas, helping small and medium-sized enterprises, boosting tourism, and increasing transparency.**

The initiative is part of a broader effort by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to support the decentralisation of power in Ukraine, a process that began in April 2014 and that has seen a consolidation of local governments, an increase in their funding and the transfer of greater powers to them.

The partnerships will see local officials and experts visit each other's communities to identify objectives, analyse challenges, and implement plans over the course of the next three years or more. Four of the five EU communities involved have representatives in the European Committee of the Regions. Financial support comes from the European Commission, with GIZ, the German development agency, providing day-to-day technical support.

**Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, the President of the CoR, said: "Local and regional governments are working together to encourage decentralisation and increase capacity-building by providing practical support to communities in Ukraine. These partnerships will help Ukrainian communities emulate the progress of EU towns and regions that have prospered from greater control over local services. Strengthening relations and sharing good policy is in the interests of local communities and will ensure a securer, more prosperous European neighbourhood."

**Sergey Chernov**, Chairman of Kharkiv Regional Council and President of the Ukrainian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, said: "These partnerships are a very welcome initiative that will help the decentralisation process. Ukrainian communities are gaining more power and funding, but local politicians need very specific support as they learn how to use that power to the best effect for their communities. This is also a show of solidarity by communities – in eastern Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland – **that have made a similar journey away from very centralised state management.**"

The city of Rakvere in Estonia will work with Vesele in southern Ukraine on energy efficiency and sustainable local development, while the Wielkopolska region has teamed up with Kharkiv region in north-eastern Ukraine to assist rural development. Shyroke in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in eastern Ukraine will be teamed with Barleben from Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, while the western Ukrainian region of Khmelnytskyi has asked Szabolcs Szatmár Bereg County in Hungary to help develop green rural tourism. Zarasai municipality in Lithuania will share its experience of improving transparency and involving local citizens in decision-making processes with Chemerivtsi, a town in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains.

On the same day, representatives from the Ukrainian regions also attended a meeting in Brussels of the Ukraine task-force created by the CoR, at which

the keynote speech was given by **Vyacheslav Nehoda**, Ukraine's First Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Building and Housing. Other speakers included **Marc Cools**, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, **Tibor Szanyi** MEP, deputy chair of the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee, and senior EU officials – including **Peter Wagner**, Head of the European Commission's Support Group for Ukraine, and **Dirk Schuebel**, head of the Eastern Partnership division in the European External Action Service.

#### Notes to the editor:

- The European Commission is providing funding through its [U-LEAD programme](#). GIZ, the German development agency, is running the programme on behalf of the EU. **Bastian Veigel**, GIZ Programme Director of U-LEAD, spoke at the launch of the initiative in Brussels on 8 March.
- The European Committee of the Regions created a Ukraine task-force in 2015. Ukrainian local and regional authorities are also represented in [CORLEAP](#), the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership, which was established by the CoR in 2011 to foster contact and collaboration between EU cities and regions and peers in the six members of the EU's Eastern Partnership: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.
- In 2016, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched peer-to-peer [partnerships with Libyan cities](#), including Tripoli, Benghazi, Ghariyan, Tobruk, Sabha, Sirte, Zintan and Zliten. Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign-policy chief, has described the CoR's cooperation with Libyan cities as an example of "city diplomacy at its best", arguing that "municipalities can play a central role in the reconstruction of Libya, and we need [the CoR] to keep engaging with them".
- The [Mayors for Economic Growth](#) initiative was launched by the European Union in 2017. It offers technical support to local governments in the Eastern Partnership countries – Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – that wish to develop economic-development plans. The objective is to help municipalities catalyse economic growth at the local level. The CoR has urged local governments in the [Eastern Partnership](#) to take the opportunity to access EU expertise and to develop peer-to-peer relationships.

#### Contact:

Andrew Gardner

Tel. +32 473 843 981

## Farm fined after worker struck and injured by bull

A dairy farm has been fined after a farm worker was struck by a bull and suffered a serious leg injury.

Kidderminster Magistrates Court heard how, on 23 August 2016, the 28-year-old T N Beeston and Son employee entered the shed in which the cows were kept to clear it out when he was struck by a dairy bull at Moreton Hall Farm. The worker, who arrived to work at the farm a year beforehand, suffered a serious leg injury which required an operation.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the mature dairy bull was housed with cows in a cubicle shed which farm workers had to enter three times a day to clear out, while the bull was loose in the same enclosure.

The investigation found that a suitable bull pen, with means of restraint, was not provided on the farm to ensure workers did not have to enter an area occupied by the bull. Mature dairy bulls are large animals and can be unpredictable and aggressive. The farm's risk assessment identified a risk from the unrestrained bull but failed to identify adequate controls, even though there were clear signs that the bull was getting more difficult to handle.

T N Beeston and Son, of Moreton Hall Farm, Morton Say, Market Drayton pleaded guilty to breaching section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £16,000 and ordered to pay costs of £3,079

HSE inspector Wendy Campbell said after the hearing, "Farmers have a responsibility to assess risks from their cattle and provide suitable housing and handling facilities to ensure that bulls are excluded from areas where they or their employees work. Farm workers should never enter an enclosure when a bull is loose."

### **Notes to Editors:**

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at:

[legislation.gov.uk/](http://legislation.gov.uk/)

3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.

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## **Marking the enormous contribution made by women in Scotland**

How we commemorate our history is enormously important – it shapes how we understand our society, and is a vital part of our thriving tourism industry.

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## **Press release: Skip-It Torbay to pay thousands for skipping on asbestos removal**

A South Devon waste processing company has been ordered to pay £16,404 in fines and costs for failing to remove thousands of tonnes of hazardous waste from two sites in Torbay.

The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

Armabridge Ltd, trading as Skip-It Torbay, operates from a waste transfer station at Barton Hill Way, Torquay. In June 2015 an Environment Agency officer discovered asbestos contamination in a pile of approximately 3,200 tonnes of residual waste at the site. In March 2016, following a lack of progress in dealing with the waste, the Environment Agency served an enforcement notice on the company to formalise the removal of the asbestos-affected material.

The company appealed against the enforcement notice, but the appeal was later dismissed by a planning inspector, who in January 2017 upheld the enforcement

notice and gave the company 3 months to comply with its requirements.

In May 2017 an environment officer returned to the site and saw the pile of waste was still present. No significant progress had been made to remove it and as a result the company had breached its enforcement notice.

In January 2016, Armabridge Ltd was prosecuted for illegally depositing approximately 2,000 tonnes of asbestos contaminated waste at a second site, Kerswell Gardens, Torquay. In February 2017, following a lack of progress in clearing the waste, the Environment Agency served an enforcement notice requiring that the waste be removed.

In July 2017 an Environment Agency officer returned to the Kerswell Gardens site and found the hazardous waste was still present and that the enforcement notice had been breached.

Jacob Hess, for the Environment Agency, said:

This case emphasises the importance of robust waste acceptance procedures. Failure to segregate wastes appropriately can lead to complex and costly remediation at a later date.

We have recently run a campaign with local roofing businesses and waste operators to raise awareness of asbestos containing materials and how to correctly dispose of them.

Armabridge Ltd was fined a total of £13,334 and ordered to pay £3,070 costs by Plymouth magistrates after pleading guilty to 2 offences of failing to comply with enforcement notices relating to Barton Hill Way and Kerswell Gardens, Torquay contrary to Regulation 38(3) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010. The company has been given until 30 September 2018 to safely dispose of waste from both sites.