

Remarks by President Donald Tusk following the Tripartite Social Summit

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Good afternoon. Let me start by thanking the Social Partners for today's good and constructive discussions. This Social Summit takes place at a critical time for the Brexit talks. Unfortunately, the report on the state of the negotiations that I got from Michel Barnier today, as well as yesterday's debate in the House of Commons, give me no grounds for optimism before tomorrow's European Council on Brexit. And as I see it, the only source of hope for a deal, for now, is the goodwill and determination on both sides. However, for a breakthrough to take place, besides goodwill, we need new facts. Tomorrow, I am going to ask Prime Minister May whether she has concrete proposals on how to break the impasse. Only such proposals can determine if a breakthrough is possible.

While working on a Brexit deal, we also need to make sure, that we are prepared in case an agreement is not possible, or in case it is rejected. Therefore, tomorrow, leaders will discuss how to step up our preparations for a no-deal scenario. But, as I have already stressed: "the fact that we are preparing for a no-deal scenario must not, under any circumstances, lead us away from making every effort to reach the best agreement possible, for all sides."

Among other things, the European Council will also debate internal security. The latest cyber attack against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague, at a time when it was investigating the Salisbury poisoning, shows what new threats we are facing. Therefore, I will propose actions to the leaders that will strengthen our resilience and resolve. It is time the EU got ready for all possible cyber security risks.

The economy is another area where the EU wants to be more resilient. Good progress in reinforcing the Economic and Monetary Union by December is still possible. Even if the tensions among members of the euro area are greater today than they were in June. Therefore, the Euro Summit will discuss how to ensure that we have further progress in reforming the EMU by the end of the year.

For many of the issues discussed during the Social Summit – including migration and security, investments, EMU, digital innovation – the EU budget is key. As Social Partners noted today, the EU budget is also our best lever

for promoting social and economic convergence. That is a very important reason why the ongoing MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) discussions must accelerate. And that is why I will give special prominence to the MFF at the December European Council.

Before concluding, I want to recall that today is the first anniversary of the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia. Since then, other journalists have been murdered, also in Europe. And today we are all troubled by reports of the killing of the Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi. And I am absolutely convinced that without a free press, our societies will not be free. This is why I call for a full investigation to establish what happened, and to hold those responsible to account. The violence against journalists has to stop. Thank you.

Questions and answers at the press conference following the Tripartite Social Summit

President Tusk you have called for concrete proposals from Theresa May, proposals on what? If those proposals aren't forthcoming, what will happen? Lastly, is there going to be a summit in November or not?

The problem is clear: it is the Irish question and the problem with the borders between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the so called backstop. It looks like a new version of the Gordian knot. Unfortunately, I can not see a new version of Alexander the Great, it is not so easy to find such kind of creative leader. It's for the leaders to decide if we need an extraordinary summit in November or not. Logistically we are ready but we need also the feeling that we are at least close to a positive breakthrough. What we need today, is to finalise our negotiations. The clock is ticking and I hope that tomorrow, Theresa May will present something creative enough to solve this impasse.

Is it a no deal Brexit now your number one assumption? Is that the most likely scenario in your eyes?

It is a question about our responsibility and not our predictions or our plan. A no deal scenario is more likely than ever before but it does not mean that it becomes our political priority, but quite the opposite. Because the situation is tricky as it is today, we need to prepare for this black scenario. I still believe, it is not only hope but also a rational assessment, that we can find a better solution than a no deal scenario.

Do you think it is realistic to make progress on the Eurozone reform when the Italian government is challenging European rules, European institutions, the markets. Do you fear a new euro crisis because of Italy?

I hope positive progress is still possible. This is why I decided to organize this Euro summit. We have to be realistic and frank. I am aware that the atmosphere is more tricky than it was in June but I think we can use time before December to clarify the positions of some Member States. Our goal remains to have visible progress in December. What we need today is a respectful dialogue between the Commission and Italy.

President Tusk, you want Theresa May to come up with concrete solutions. Is the EU going to think creatively about how to break this impasse too? You mentioned Alexander the Great, Alexander is also the first name of Boris Johnson. Is he a figure that the EU is looking at to rescue this negotiations? Are you even thinking about the next government after Theresa May's?

To compare Boris Johnson to Alexander the Great is a sort of exaggeration I think, but of course this is my private opinion. Both sides are responsible for this still possible breakthrough. When it comes to this very context, the backstop, we need something fresh in our discussions and to be very clear, because I have heard some comments, sometimes very dramatic comments, one of the authors is also Boris Johnson, that the EU wants to annex economically Northern Ireland and also to split the UK. Of course this is not true. Objectively this is a very difficult and complicated issue. The question of the Irish border is an unfortunate natural and automatic result of the Brexit decision. This is why we need something very creative to protect at the same time our values, the single market and to fully respect the UK and its sovereignty. For me it is clear, the goal must be clear for all of us, but for this we need maybe a new way of thinking because objectively this is something really difficult.

[Video of the full questions and answer session – part 1](#)

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