**Varadkar Spotlight Interview**

Excerpts

I wouldn’t say I keep a megaphone handy, my instinct as a politician is always to say what I think, sometimes that gets me into trouble but it’s my nature to say this. To say what I believe to be true to say what I think and level with people.

Maybe sometimes people misinterpret that as megaphone diplomacy.

It’s being straight with people

We have an agreed constitutional settlement in Ireland: the Good Friday Agreement, we want the assembly back we want the North South Ministerial council happening.

I don’t really want to contemplate the alternatives

I couldn’t support a return to direct rule

The role that we want to have is one of partnership

Meet across the table of the North-South ministerial council and engage with our counterparts in that way

We’ve a situation here in Derry where cancer patients from Donegal receive their treatment here.

We can by working together put things in Derry for example that would otherwise be in Dublin or Belfast

I think in the constitutional set-up that exists in the United Kingdom with devolved administrations I think it would be wise for prime minister may to listen to those devolved administrations.

At time when critical decisions are going to be made in Brussels, in Westminster that will affect people in Northern Ireland

It’s still not clear what the United Kingdom actually wants in terms of a new relationship on the one hand it seems that the United Kingdom wants to have a close trading relationship with Europe

Just like it has now but it also seems to want something different

It’s very hard for us as European prime ministers really to understand.

I t certainly can’t be having all the benefits of Eu membership but none of the responsibilities and none of the costs. If you join the club you obey the rules and you pay the membership fee.

You can’t have the benefits if you won’t obey the rules and you won’t pay the fee.

It’s quite a difficult negotiation

People who want to leave the EU don’t seem to agree among themselves

The only people in the room are the prime ministers

We’ll have our regular meeting

It’s strange on two levels, it’s interesting for the prime minister of Ireland – a small country - sitting around the table with the leaders of France and Germany making decisions that will affect the United Kingdom. For many centuries it was the other way around. They made decisions that affected us

So that’s a little bit ironic

It’s also something that I find deeply regrettable because no matter what happens with Brexit and no matter what form it takes the United Kingdom will be no longer around the table.

Policies that affect Europe

Rules around trade that like it or not the UK will still have to follow

Will be made in their absence

Obviously any agreement will have to be agreed by the EU and we are a union of 500 million people, one of the biggest economies in the world we are negotiating from a position of strength

I would never like to be in a position where we’d have to use our veto

What we’ve tried to do what we’ve succeeded in doing is to make sure Irish positions are a part of the European negotiating position.

It’s very difficult to figure out hypothetical scenarios

We want to move on to

‘having it both ways isn’t possible’

It’s not something I can do anything about

It is a minority government

There clearly are tensions within the government

Doesn’t help anyone

First of all we’re still good friends whatever happens I want ireland and the united kingdom to be very close, both economically and politically

A European Union without Britain is going to be a very different place

On so many issues particularly economic issues, tax issues, Britain and Ireland are like-minded and very much aligned.

We’re going to have to build up new alliances

We’re working to help bombardier

We’re using our contacts in the United states

We’re very much on your side on that.

Regarding Brexit it should give people pause for thought. The United Kingdom and Northern Ireland as part of the European Union is strong we’re a big economy we’re 500 million people and if we do get into a trade conflict with America we’re in a much stronger position than the UK is on its own.

Negotiating trade deals is very difficult

If the UK needs to now go off and negotiate a trade deal with the United States just look at what they’re doing at the moment in relation to Bombardier.

They’;re a huge country they’re a very strong economic power

The UK negotiating trade deals on its own will be in quite a weak position.

When I’m at the European Council it’s something I am going to talk to President Juncker about.

And seek the support of the European Union for Bombardier

We should be on your side in this regard

The right to be Irish citizens and by virtue of that to be citizens of the European union.

Of course that’s going to be a big advantage for people in Northern Ireland.

Nothing is guaranteed until everything is guaranteed

But very confident

Something I’m very committed to

That’s one of the many complications that we’ll have to work out

Citizen rights don’t necessarily go that far

We wouldn’t be planning to change that the costs would be phenomenal

We’re willing to put money behind things that will bring the two parts of the island closer together. The A5 for example a project that I’m very much committed to.

I’m not sure I’d be paying for anyone’s operations in Estonia

What I want is there to be no new barrier to trade

The best way to achieve that is the United Kingdom staying in the Customs Union

What they say they want is a customs partnership or a customs union partnership but they haven’t quite detailed what that means

Free trade: North and South East and West with no new barriers

Otherwise it would inolve at the very least bureaucracy – filling in forms.

We need much more clarity and a greater understanding as to what Brexit really means

People in the UK by a small margin voted to leave the European Union, did they vote to leave the customs union as well, did they vote to leave the single market

Some people on the Brexit side want to leave absolutely everything to do with Europe, I think that would be regrettable

When I travel across Europe when I’m in Berlin when I’m in Brussels when I’m meeting Macron Merkel

"There is a willingness to be flexible, to bend the rules for Northern Ireland,"

"real understanding that Northern Ireland is unique. That this is a special place. That the peace is still fragile, and the peace is still young".

"And because of that there will be enormous flexibility shown towards Northern Ireland. Whereas a hard line may be taken in negotiations with Britain and with London.

There is a real willingness across Europe to be flexible and creative when it comes to Northern Ireland

To create a unique solution for Northern Ireland if that’s required

"threat to the constitutional settlement, or to the Union". It isn’t

There is a willingness to be flexible, to bend the rules for Northern Ireland

They’re anti-European they’re now making our that they’re pro-European or Euro-critical

They campaigned against every single European referendum, including the ones to join the single market and the euro

We’re a very pro-business party, they’re not

We believe in reducing taxes, they don’t

I think that’s impossible to predict at this stage

We don’t really know what the shape of Brexit is going to mean

I’m very committed to the agreement that we have, which is the Good Friday Agreement

Which essentially is about power-sharing here in Northern Ireland, the North and South working together and us working in a bigger context with Britain as well

It was approved by people here (70% of people, 95% in the republic).

It’s a good settlement and we should try and make it work

I wouldn’t like us to get to the point whereby we are changing the constitutional position here in Northern Ireland on a 50% plus one basis”.

“One of the best things about the Good Friday Agreement is that it did get very strong cross-Border support, that’s why there was a 70 per cent vote for it. I don’t think that there would be a 70 per cent vote for a united Ireland in the morning, for example, or anything remotely to that. And I really think we should focus on making the agreement that we have work.

The European Union without Britain is going to be a very different place. On so many issues, particularly economic issues.

Enormous progress in the past couple of decades, increased prosperity on both sides of the border. Potentially those things are in jeopardy

At that point Prime Minister May is asked to leave the room

people should not see it as a

He emphasised the threat to prosperity in NI and the Republic "if the wrong decisions are made" on Brexit.