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**Statement by the Taoiseach  
on Brexit Talks Progress**

I want to make a brief statement on developments today in the Brexit talks.

The Cabinet met this morning to discuss progress on Brexit, and in particular on the issues of direct relevance to Ireland.

That followed a period of very intense negotiations between the British Government and the EU Taskforce, with the substantial involvement of the Irish Government.

It was supplemented by intensive contacts between the Irish and British Governments over the past days.

Those talks have made substantial progress on a number of important issues:

1. A shared commitment that the achievements, benefits and commitments of the peace process will remain of paramount importance
2. A shared commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, in all its parts
3. Protecting North/South co-operation
4. The continuation of the Common Travel Area, so that there will be no change to the rights of British and Irish citizens to travel, live, work, access healthcare, education, housing and welfare in each other countries, as though they were citizens of both
5. Respect for Ireland's continued membership of the European Union, including the Internal Market and the Customs Union
6. The rights of Irish citizens in Northern Ireland, who will continue to be EU citizens after Brexit.
7. The continuation of EU Peace and INTERREG funding
8. The protection of the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement on Rights, Safeguards and Equality

The most difficult issue we faced was to obtain a cast-iron agreement and a written guarantee that there will not be a hard border on this island after Brexit.

This is not a new issue.

Nor has it been given greater prominence in recent weeks, as some people have

suggested.

It has been to the absolute forefront of Ireland's concerns since before the referendum.

I want to offer reassurance that there is no hidden agenda here.

Our only guiding light is the Good Friday Agreement, which clearly states that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland cannot be changed without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. That is fundamental to our position.

We do not want a border in the Irish Sea, any more than we want a border between Newry and Dundalk or Letterkenny and Derry.

Following the Government meeting this morning, the Irish negotiating team received confirmation from the British Government and the Barnier Task Force that the UK had agreed a text on the border that met our concerns.

This text would form part of the broader EU-UK agreement on Phase 1 and would allow us to proceed to Phase 2.

I was then contacted by the President of the European Commission., President Juncker, and the President of the European Council, President Tusk, and I confirmed to them both Ireland's agreement to that text.

I am surprised and disappointed that the British Government now appears not to be in a position to conclude what was agreed earlier today.

I accept that the Prime Minister has requested more time.

I know that she faces many challenges and I acknowledge that she is negotiating in good faith.

But my position and that of the Irish government is unequivocal.

And it is supported by all of the parties in Dáil Éireann, and I believe by a majority of people on these islands.

Ireland wants to proceed to Phase 2. It is in our interest.

However, we cannot agree to do this, unless we have firm guarantees that there will not be hard border in Ireland under any circumstances.

I have spoken to President Juncker in the last hour and he has confirmed that Ireland's position remains Europe's position. I still hope this matter will be concluded in the coming days.

ENDS