

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW, 23RD SEPTEMBER 2018

DOMINIC RAAB MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

AM: As we've just been hearing, there's a blame game going on about who was responsible for the political car crash in Salzburg. But can the new Brexit secretary, Dominic Raab, claim he had nothing to do with British mistakes? Well, let's find out. He joins me now from Westminster. Dominic Raab, welcome. Now, you blamed the EU for what happened in Salzburg, but isn't the truth that this was a catastrophic failure of British intelligence and diplomacy, and indeed politics as well?

DR: Well, actually if you look at the readout, and the media has covered various different aspects of it, it's clear a change was made very late on by the EU in their response. But to be honest with you, away from the melodrama of Salzburg, I think what we need to do is hold our nerve, keep our cool, continue to negotiate in good faith, and really press the EU to be clearer on what their objections are. I'm not talking about the dogmatic rebuff of the economic partnership proposals, we need some clearer understanding of what the criticism is, because we've tried to calibrate our proposals in a way that suits their concerns and their interests, and at the same time there aren't any other credible alternatives on the table from them, or anyone else for that matter.

AM: But this is very confusing, Dominic Raab, because for months and months now they have been saying we won't accept cherry picking under any circumstances and we need a new solution to the Irish border, and that's why this broke down. They've been telling us all along, and they only did at Salzburg what they said they were going to do all along. Why were we surprised?

DR: Well, Andrew, that's just not factually correct. If you look at Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union just days ago, a week ago, he said that the Chequers proposals on the economic partnership would be the first step towards the negotiated relationship. But look, this is a bump in the road. We'll hold our nerve, we'll keep our cool and we'll keep negotiating in good faith. I think we need to keep these negotiations going. What we're not going to be is dictated to. And the UK is one of the biggest economies in Europe if not in the world. We've come up with a serious set of proposals, 100 pages long, our White Paper, covering everything from trade to security. We're not just going to flit from plan to plan like some sort of diplomatic butterfly, we're going to be resolute about this and really press the EU to treat us with some respect. And also on the substance to engage properly. And at the same time we've always said our top priority, our overriding priority is a negotiated outcome. But we'll continue planning for no deal in case our ambition isn't matched, and we've got some more technical notices coming out on Monday.

AM: Lots to talk about there. If you go back to the next summit in November with a tweaked version of Chequers and you get the same kind of response, does the Prime Minister then have to walk out?

DR: Well, the next landmark or milestone, if you like, will be the October Council, and I'm not going to predict in advance what will happen there. But I'm confident that if the ambition, the pragmatism we've shown on all of the detail, on the substance, a set of proposals that gives effect to the referendum, that's faithful to the will of the British people, but also looks at what matters and what the EU is concerned about, if that ambition and pragmatism is matched we get a deal. But if we just get this sort of 'computer says no' response from the EU we're not going to make progress. So as the Prime Minister has said, we need some give, some flex and some give and take, if you like, from the EU,

and I'm confident that as the fallout from Salzburg ebbs we'll make further progress.

AM: All right. There's a lot of your colleagues on your wing of the party who want a free trade deal. People talk about Canada and so on, but basically they want a free trade deal and they think that that's what's going to come out of this in the end. The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, wouldn't rule this out. Can you rule that out as a possibility this morning?

DR: Well, we all want a free trade deal. The question is the terms. And if what you're referring to is the Zeta-plus, or plus, plus arrangement which has been bandied around, I think people need to read the small print. Not just of our proposals but the EU's proposals. Because what they're suggesting is not just a free trade deal but for us to stay locked in, or for Northern Ireland specifically to stay locked in to the Customs Union. Now, that would be a clear carve-up of the United Kingdom.

AM: No, I think this is different.

DR: Well, no, sorry, but it isn't in terms of what the EU is proposing. So if people want to suggest all sorts of other –

AM: I'm sorry to interrupt.

DR: Please.

AM: Your colleagues tomorrow are going to produce their answers on the Irish border. Given that they feel that they've got answers, I ask you again is a Canadian-style free trade idea completely out of the ball game as far as you're concerned? Is it off the court?

DR: It's off the table in the terms that the EU would even plausibly at this stage at least accept. Because it involves, what they're suggesting is that we would stay in a backstop arrangement for Northern Ireland which would leave a part of the United Kingdom subject to a wholly different economic regime. That can't be right. So we'll continue to negotiate in good faith. And I'm always listening to new proposals and new ideas and

actually amidst all of the drama of Salzburg we have made good progress on a whole range of issues. But what we need to do is make sure that we're not signing up to anything that threatens the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and you'd expect any government to agree to that, and indeed-

AM: And so –

DR: Go on.

AM: Okay. So we might, as the Prime Minister suggested be heading towards, as a result of it we might be heading towards no deal. The Prime Minister talked about it. We now know a bit more about what no deal might mean, according to government sources. I mean, the Chancellor, Phillip Hammond, has talked about an extra £80 billion a year in borrowing as a result of no deal. The IMF says, 'dire consequences.' Ralf Speth, Chief Executive of Jaguar Land Rover, who knows his own business and employs 40,000 people has talked about tens of thousands of job losses. And the National Police Coordination Centre is talking about 'widespread protests, disorder and unprecedented and overwhelming disruption.' When during the referendum campaign were we warned by people like you that this might be where we were facing now – what we're facing now?

DR: I don't accept some of those more hair-raising doomsday scenarios. But what we did get during the referendum was Project Fear mark –

AM: The Chancellor of the Exchequer.

DR: Well, hold on. What we did get during the referendum, Project Fear mark one, and the British public didn't buy it. Now, it's certainly correct to say, first of all, two things. That we want our top priority, our overriding priority is a negotiated outcome. And I've made clear we'll hold on and we'll keep our cool. We'll keep the negotiated track and do your level best to get the best deal. Equally, the head of the WTO has said no deal wouldn't be the end of the world. It wouldn't be a walk in the park, there are risks, but we're well placed now with other plans to manage those

risks. What we're not going to be, Andrew, is dictated-to in the negotiations.

AM: Okay. I understand that. But the other thing about no deal is that it doesn't solve the Irish border problem. We're on WTO rules at that point and that requires a border. But the Prime Minister has promised there won't be an Irish border. So how can we have no deal? That would break her own promise.

DR: No, we've made it very clear we would not have any extra infrastructure at the border. I think it's true to say that the Irish government have made the same commitment, and I find it very difficult to believe that somehow in the spirit of European unity, given all the other separatist pressures across the continent, that the EU would insist on Ireland doing that.

AM: Okay. We're in uncharted territory now. There's a lot of talk this morning about an autumn general election as one possible route out of this. Can you rule that out?

DR: It's for the birds. It's not going to happen. Downing Street have made –

AM: It's not going to happen, alright.

DR: They've made very clear that that's not –

AM: Let me ask – not going to happen. Let me ask you about something that Emmanuel Macron said. I was asking you about the tone of the original Brexit campaign and people like yourself on the Leave side who suggested to us this was going to be a walk in the park, it was going to be a very easy negotiation. We now know better. Never talked about the possible consequences of no deal. We now know better. Emmanuel Macron called the leaders of the Leave campaign, and you were one of them, liars. How do you respond to the French President?

DR: Well, I think that's not the kind of language of either statesmanship or friendship, particularly at a summit. If someone wants to point out something that I've said which is a lie, feel free to do so, but I don't accept that. One thing that I would say,

though, is that the EU has a habit of spurning democratic votes, whether in referendums in this country – and they're trying to do that to some degree or across the rest of the EU. And one of the things that really does give rise to extremism and fringe politics and the anti-elitism which we're seeing fuelling populist movements across continental Europe, is this idea that when the people have their say they're sent back to the drawing board because the elite in Europe don't like the answer.

AM: Dominic Raab, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

(ends)