

Letter from German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer to European Commissioners with the “intention to comment on the strategy of negotiations between the Commission and the UK”.

Seehofer expresses support for the UK police and secret services continuing to enjoy full access to EU databases after Brexit. He stresses that “Full security cooperation with the UK even after Brexit is therefore essential”.

The Ministry of the Interior had originally refused to publish the letter. Following a request on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act, [the German letter was published](#) by the website Frag den Staat [“ask the state”].

The text of the letter, [that stirred lots of controversy even in the German government](#), is as follows:

“Dear Vice-President,

The negotiations over the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union have entered a decisive phase. While key obstacles such as the Northern Ireland issue and the role of the European Court of Justice still need to be overcome before an exit agreement can be concluded, talks about the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK have begun.

In its guidelines of March 2018, the European Council already set out some requirements for this framework which the draft guidelines for the European Council that will take place at the end of this month also refer to.

These guidelines stress that the EU is interested in a close partnership with the UK in all policy areas, including internal security. By referring to the UK as a third country in future relationships with the EU, however, the tone of the guidelines and the stance taken by the Commission in the negotiations, suggest that the withdrawal will necessarily entail a reduced status compared to EU membership and thus reduced cooperation within the framework of a common EU security policy.

It is not my intention to comment on the strategy of negotiations between the Commission and the UK. In my capacity as the German interior minister, however, I make so bold as to emphasize that the security of citizens must have the highest priority also in the European Union. This must not be put at stake.

Full cooperation with the UK even after Brexit is therefore essential. As a trusted partner with whom we share common values, the UK plays a crucial role in the fight against terrorism and organized crime. We should not content ourselves with less cooperation.

It is obvious that the UK will no longer be a member of the Union after its withdrawal, but this must not lead to less security for our citizens. For the EU, the importance of security information systems such as SIS II, PNR, Europol and ECRIS should not be underestimated. These systems allow police and security agencies to check data rapidly and directly; traditional third-country cooperation is no equivalent substitute. I

am therefore convinced that in order to ensure a high level of security in Europe also in the future, we need a full security partnership with the UK which encompasses the entire EU security architecture.

Otherwise, without a new basis for a security partnership, we in Germany would have to erase all UK data from our databases. Once made, such a decision is basically irreversible.

In 2016, the CSIRT network was set up in accordance with the NIS Directive to facilitate the rapid, effective operational cooperation of member states. If the UK is no longer institutionally integrated, pan-European operational cooperation will be jeopardized in the long run.

Therefore, our common objective – ensuring the security of citizens in Europe – should take precedence over all other aspects in exit negotiations. Weakening the European security architecture would affect all Union citizens and their fundamental need for security. The ever-present threat of cross-border terrorism demonstrates the need for unlimited cooperation in the future.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

Horst Seehofer

Unofficial translation by the German Bundestag