

Trump blasts ‘very unfair’ EU over trade



© Fabrice COFFRINI / AFP | US President Donald Trump looks on before delivering a speech during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting on January 26, 2018 in Davos, eastern Switzerland.

The European Union trades with America “very unfairly”, President Donald Trump said in an interview aired Sunday, warning that his many problems with Brussels “may morph into something very big”.

“The European Union has treated the United States very unfairly when it came to trade,” Trump told Britain’s ITV channel in the interview conducted Thursday.

“I’ve had a lot of problems with (the) European Union, and it may morph into something very big from that standpoint — from a trade standpoint.”

Trump delivered the warning during a wide-ranging interview on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he took his “America First” agenda to the global business elite.

In a speech Friday he told the forum that his mantra “does not mean America alone” and hinted that the US could rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a deal he withdrew from a year ago.

But earlier this month the Trump Administration imposed steep tariffs on imported washing machines and solar panels, and his interview comments may cause alarm in European capitals over future trade relations with the US.

Last year it vowed to impose nearly 300 percent punitive tariffs on airplanes manufactured by Canada’s Bombardier.

A bipartisan US trade panel blocked that decision on Friday but the dispute, which has inflamed relations with Ottawa — and to a lesser degree Britain, where Bombardier has a large workforce — could be a harbinger for the EU.

“We cannot get our product in. It’s very, very tough. And yet, they send their product to us — no taxes, very little taxes. It’s very unfair,” Trump added.

“They’re not the only one, by the way, and I could name many countries and places that do (the same).

“But the European Union has been very, very unfair to the United States. And I think it will turn out to be very much to their detriment.”

‘I certainly apologise’

In other remarks aired Sunday, Trump appeared to slight British Prime Minister Theresa May’s handling of fraught Brexit negotiations, declaring that he would have “negotiated it differently”.

“I would have had a different attitude,” he said of the talks, which have followed Britain’s June 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU, and will continue through to its planned departure in March 2019.

“I think I would have said that the European Union is not cracked up to what it’s supposed to be. And I would have taken a tougher stand in getting out,” Trump added.

But May will welcome his prediction — reinforced by US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin in Davos — that the US could swiftly strike a post-Brexit trade deal with London.

“We are going to make a deal with (the) UK that’ll be great,” he said, noting constraints imposed by the Brexit process.

“When that restriction is up we’re going to be your great trading partner.”

The US president also apologised for the first time for retweeting a British far-right group’s videos apparently showing Islamist violence.

“If you’re telling me they’re horrible racist people, I would certainly apologise if you’d like me to do that,” he said.

Trump confirmed he will visit Britain later this year, where he believes he is “very popular”.

The president said he does not care about those opposed to his British visit, who include London mayor Sadiq Khan and the opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, amid predictions of large protests.

“I think a lot of people in your country like what I stand for, they respect what I stand for,” he told his interviewer Piers Morgan.

Asked if he had received an invitation to the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle later this year, Trump replied “not that I know of”.

“I really want them to be happy. They look like a lovely couple,” he said, when pressed on disparaging comments Markle previously made about the president.

Not a feminist

During the interview — billed as the first of his presidency with a non-US international broadcaster — Trump was asked if he identifies as a feminist.

“No, I wouldn’t say I’m a feminist,” he replied.

“I mean, I think that would be, maybe, going too far. I’m for women, I’m for men, I’m for everyone.”

Trump also signalled he would be willing to recommit the US to the Paris climate accord, but only if the treaty undergoes major change.

“The Paris accord, for us, would have been a disaster,” he said in the interview Sunday.

“If they made a good deal... there’s always a chance we’d get back.”

(AFP)

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