

News story: Foreign Secretary meeting with Irish Foreign Minister

The Foreign Secretary and the Irish Foreign Minister discussed the importance of maintaining our regular engagement through, and beyond, the UK's exit from the EU, recognising that the unique UK-Ireland relationship is epitomised by our historic ties, family bonds and people-to-people links.

On foreign policy cooperation, the Foreign Ministers agreed that close cooperation between the UK and Ireland on mutual international objectives, including on the Middle East Peace Process, was vital.

The two Ministers also expressed their mutual desire to reach a deal on the UK's exit from the EU that works for everyone, as well as a shared commitment to avoiding a hard border.

Further information

Speech: The 'firm friendship' between the UK and Spain

Your Excellency Ambassador Bastarreche, Mr President San Basilio; distinguished and honourable friends; please allow me to thank the Spanish Chamber of Commerce for their kind invitation to attend this annual gala.

It's an honour and privilege to be here and to address you all.

I was invited to give a speech on a topic of my choosing; which was fantastically exciting. But my office insisted that, given I am a Minister for International Trade and, given I would be speaking to such an esteemed audience, I should perhaps narrow my focus a little.

So my speech on the Great Fire of London which started just a stone's throw from here and ravaged the original version of this beautiful building, the Skinners Hall, will have to wait for another day...

Nevertheless, the commercial relationship between the UK and Spain is something I am more than happy to discuss. And today is an opportune moment to do so.

Today we can look back on a year when the historic visit of King Felipe and Queen Letizia demonstrated the strength of our longstanding bilateral relationship.

Indeed, the UK and Spain share diplomatic ties going back 500 years, and commercial ties which go back even further. Even Shakespeare made reference to the joys of Spanish sherry and Canary wine. It is certainly a proud history on which to build.

Even more tantalising than sherry or wine is the vitality of our trading relationship today, and the opportunities we can see for tomorrow.

That is why as well as being able to celebrate the past, tonight is an opportunity to look to the future, and the chance we have not just to sustain, but strengthen our bonds of friendship.

Spain is the UK's seventh largest trading partner, with UK exports to Spain in 2016 amounting to an impressive £14.6 billion. Furthermore, figures show that UK exports of goods to Spain increased by more than 15% in the year to November 2017, compared to the same period a year ago.

The statistics on our investment in one another's economies are even more impressive.

Spanish investment in the UK was £30.3 billion in 2016, with Spanish firms investing in our transport infrastructure, in clean energy, telecoms, automotive manufacturing and financial services. Spanish banks have the largest presence of all foreign banks in the UK, larger than Germany or the USA; indeed Santander alone employs around 20,000 people in Britain.

Meanwhile, UK investment in Spain was £56 billion in 2016, 24% higher than in 2015. Globally renowned British brands are flourishing with the likes of Rolls Royce, GSK, Diageo, BUPA and BP, helping to generate many jobs in Spain.

And yet, there is potential to do much more.

When Prime Minister Rajoy visited the UK in December he wrote of his ambitions for our relationship, stating:

The aim will be to build a strategic alliance to respond to the common challenges and goals of the 21st century. Britain can count on Spain's loyal and sincere friendship. We want the best for the UK because it is simply another way of wishing the same for Spain.

I believe that fulfilling that potential should be the ambition of all of us here this evening.

This will not be without challenges. I appreciate that many of you will likely have concerns about the UK's exit from the European Union and our future relationship with our European partners.

But I can stress to you this evening, as I have done on many occasions, the UK's vote to leave the EU was not a decision to turn our back on our friends in Europe, it was a vote to build a more global Britain alongside, and in

partnership with, a strong Europe.

The referendum was not driven by isolationism, nor is it an excuse for Britain to abdicate from its international responsibilities.

We are not rejecting our European friends and allies or disowning any of the good that the European Union has done. Rather, we are looking to strengthen our ties with those nations, which will drive economic growth in the 21st Century.

There can be no doubt that the UK and Spain are united in our ambition for a brighter, more prosperous world for both our peoples. Through our common outlook and shared values, we share a firm friendship that will only grow as we redefine our relationship with the European Union in the coming years.

We will approach our future discussions with the EU with determination and creativity. We are working to secure the best and most ambitious agreement that will benefit us, but also, importantly, that will benefit our European partners.

As the Prime Minister has said, to hope for anything but success for our neighbours would be truly perverse. It would be an inconceivable act of self-harm.

And of course, we cannot overlook the continued importance of the UK to the European Union.

Overnight, on 29th March 2019, the United Kingdom will immediately become the EU's second-largest and most important external trading partner; a vast, £600 billion export market, rivalled only by the United States in the depth and breadth of our commercial connections to the continent.

The EU is rightly seeking free trade agreements with the likes of the Mercosur nations, Australia and New Zealand (which we, like Spain, overwhelmingly support). But it would be absurd for the EU not to seek a comprehensive free trade agreement with almost its largest trading partner, only 30 kilometres from the coast of France – the United Kingdom.

As we look to develop this new partnership, we start from the unique position of regulatory alignment, trust in one another's institutions and a shared spirit of cooperation. We should, therefore, be optimistic, and ambitious, about what we can achieve.

That is why the UK government is listening to business. We are keen to understand commercial concerns and make sure we address them where we can, giving them the certainty they need to invest and grow.

For example just this week the Secretaries of State in HM Treasury, BEIS and DExEU issued a joint letter to businesses setting out our ambitions for an implementation period, to help businesses adapt and prepare for the UK's exit from the EU.

Equally, I am sure my Spanish counterparts and governments throughout the

EU27 are keen to understand business concerns and how the EU's future trading relationship with the UK will affect commercial interests.

I would urge all businesses to use this opportunity to advocate an open, frictionless trading relationship; building on our firm partnership to prioritise investment, growth and job creation.

We are setting out to build this new relationship at a time when we are facing the voices of economic nationalism and anti-globalisation. Growing protectionism in the world is of great concern to us all.

Free trade has transformed the world for the better; opening up new markets, providing access to millions of potential new customers, and allowing businesses to benefit from the exchange of ideas, expertise, talent and technology, across borders.

It is critical that the UK and Spain continue to collaborate as global advocates of free trade, for example in our shared support for the EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement.

I sincerely hope that we continue to work together, to champion the cause of free trade, both while the UK remains a member of the EU and after our departure.

I would like to close this evening, firstly, with a commitment.

A commitment that this government will forge ahead, creating the conditions for your businesses to grow and succeed, confident that your investment is underpinned by sound institutions, the rule of law, proportionate regulation and open markets.

And secondly, with an ask. An ask that you continue to innovate; to invest; to identify and capitalise on opportunities, and to create jobs and prosperity for all of our citizens.

I look forward to working with you all, to build on the solid foundation of our unique and historic relationship and to realise our mutual aspirations for a more prosperous future in both of our great nations.

Muchos gracias.

[News story: Guidance on 2018 bass fishing published](#)

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) [has published guidance](#) on bass fishing in 2018 for fishermen in England. This follows publication of [Council Regulation 2018/120](#) within the Official Journal of the European Union.

The MMO implements fisheries regulations set by the EU and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The European Commission has determined that bass stocks remain under pressure despite the measures taken in previous years. It has placed further restrictions on the commercial and recreational fishing sectors in order to address this.

The regulations apply to all vessels. [The MMO guidance](#) sets out how these regulations will be implemented in the seas around England where it has a fisheries management and enforcement remit. Each UK devolved administration will consider whether it publishes guidance for the implementation of the regulations for the fishing vessels it licenses.

Recreational fishing for bass

For recreational fishers, any bass caught during 2018 must be returned immediately. This applies if you are fishing from a boat or from the shore. The MMO will continue to work with the Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities in enabling and ensuring compliance with this control measure.

Commercial fishing for bass

Throughout 2018 commercial bass fishing from shore is prohibited. In addition, the guidance sets out the areas where commercial fishermen must not catch, retain, transship or land bass. Commercial fishing for bass in any restricted area is prohibited during February and March 2018.

Measures to conserve sea bass stocks were implemented by the MMO in 2017 by issuing bass fishing authorisations to eligible vessels; those that could demonstrate bass fishing within a defined reference period. During early 2018 the MMO will issue authorisations to all vessel owners that received one in 2017. In addition we will be running a representation process for those individuals who did not submit and have their case considered in 2017. Complaints about bass authorisations will be considered by the MMO.

Monitoring and enforcement

The MMO regularly monitors data on fishing activity, including bass catch levels, to ensure enforcement is targeted accordingly. It pursues reported breaches in the appropriate way, using a range of sanctions ranging from verbal or written advice through to prosecution in the most serious of cases.

Earlier in January 2018 the MMO [advised fishermen](#) that 2017 restrictions were to remain in place until this 2018 regulation was published.

[Press release: Share your views on plans for the A417 Missing Link](#)

On 15 February 2018 Highways England will launch a consultation on options to upgrade a three-mile stretch of the A417 near Birdlip in Gloucestershire.

Known locally as the 'missing link', this stretch of single carriageway road between the Brockworth bypass and Cowley roundabout restricts the flow of traffic on a key route which is otherwise dual carriageway. Upgrading this section to dual carriageway will help unlock Gloucestershire's potential for growth and secure opportunities for housing and jobs, as well as improving life in local communities.

The A417 passes through the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and so any solution will be designed sensitively to meet the special character of the landscape, environment and history.

The improvement is being made possible by the Government's £15bn investment in motorways and major A roads and will be delivered by Highways England.

Project manager Mike Goddard said:

Our plans will deliver reliable journey times between the Thames Valley and West Midlands, offer a safer journey for drivers and protect the special character of the landscape.

Upgrading this route has been a key focus for the community and we would encourage as many people as possible to share their views on the different options to help us shape the best possible outcome.

Highways England is holding a public consultation between 15 February 2018 and 29 March 2018. Once the consultation officially launches, full details of the options for consideration and feedback forms will be available online via the [scheme website](#), along with dates and venues public information exhibitions.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Getting ready for the Customs Declaration Service](#)

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will begin a phased launch of the Customs Declaration Service (CDS) in August 2018. CDS will replace the existing Customs Handling of Import and Export Freight (CHIEF) system, with all declarations taking place on CDS from early 2019.

CHIEF currently processes declarations to facilitate the international movement of goods between the UK and non-EU countries. CHIEF will continue to run for a time to aid the transition to CDS.

Why CDS is replacing CHIEF

CHIEF is one of the world's largest and most sophisticated electronic services for managing customs declaration processes, but it's nearly 25 years old and can't be easily adapted to new requirements.

The decision to replace CHIEF with CDS was made before the EU referendum, however CDS will be scaled to handle any potential increases in the volume of declarations that may result from the UK's exit from the EU.

How this will affect importers and exporters

If a trader imports or exports goods outside the EU, they or their agent will be currently using CHIEF to:

- process declarations for goods entering and leaving the UK or EU through ports and airports
- calculate and pay the correct duty and taxes
- complete customs information electronically

They will still be able to do these things on CDS, but there will be differences:

- they will need to sign into CDS on GOV.UK through a Government Gateway account
- CDS will offer several new and existing services in one place – for example, traders will be able to view previous import and export data on pre-defined reports, check the tariff, apply for new authorisations and simplifications, and check their duty deferment statement
- online help will include self-service tools, guides and checklists

Some additional information will be required for declarations in order to align with the World Customs Organisation Kyoto Convention, currently being implemented in the UK through the Union Customs Code (UCC):

- an audit trail of previous document IDs
- additional party types, such as the buyer and seller
- possible additional commercial references or tracking numbers
- levelling – change between ‘Header’ and ‘Item’ for some data items

To align UK customs data with international standards, there will also be changes to:

- location of goods identification (based on UNLOCODE)
- the warehouse type code list
- item tax lines, including method of payment codes
- unit of quantity codes (ISO)
- the way customs procedures are quoted
- the number of items on a declaration – CDS will allow a maximum of 999 items on a customs declaration instead of the current 99 items on CHIEF

An updated tariff manual will be available in April 2018.

Alerting importers and exporters about using CDS

HMRC is currently building and testing CDS with industry, software providers and Community System Providers (CSPs). CSPs operate computerised inventory systems that control the physical movement of import and export freight at UK ports and airports.

CDS will be phased in between August and early 2019, with CHIEF continuing to run during this time to aid the transition. Importers, exporters or their agents will be informed by their software provider when they need to provide the additional information in order to start making declarations on CDS.

To keep informed about CDS, please send your name and email address to communications.cds@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk to register for email updates.

The updates will provide regular information on CDS and any preparations you may need to make ahead of CDS going live.

There will also be regular updates about CDS on GOV.UK and through trade associations.