

UK establishes voting rights treaty with Poland

The UK and Poland have signed a treaty that secures the right of British and Polish citizens to stand and vote in local elections in each other's countries following the UK's exit from the EU. This ensures that British people living in Poland and Polish citizens living in the UK have the right to choose who represents them in local government in the country where they reside.

The treaty was signed by the UK's Ambassador to Poland, Jonathan Knott and the Polish Secretary of State for Legal and Treaty Affairs, Piotr Wawrzyk, today (Friday 29 May) in Warsaw.

Foreign Office Minister for the European Neighbourhood, Wendy Morton, said:

We have protected the rights of nearly a million British and Polish citizens who live and work in each other's countries. This treaty underlines our countries' shared commitment to democracy and is a testament to the close ties between the UK and Poland, and our people. These ties have never been more important, as our countries work in partnership to overcome the global challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

British Ambassador to Poland, Jonathan Knott said:

We have been determined that the difficult working environments we are all operating in due to the coronavirus pandemic should be no barrier to ensuring the rights of UK nationals living in Poland to elect their local representatives for many years to come, rights that will also be protected for Polish nationals living in the UK. I'm delighted we have reached this agreement – a sign of the depth of our bilateral relationship and the respect our countries have for each other.

Secretary of State for Legal and Treaty Affairs at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Piotr Wawrzyk, said:

Today's ceremony of the signing of the Polish-British agreement on the electoral rights in the local elections in Poland and the United Kingdom bears a special, symbolic character. It is a proof that ties between Poland and the United Kingdom remain strong and resistant, also in the adverse circumstances of the global pandemic. Our relations have never been closer than they are today. Poland and Britain co-operate closely in many important areas, we

are linked by many formats of bilateral co-operation, the most important of which being the annual Intergovernmental Consultations. The agreement signed today proves that both countries want to maintain the closest relations possible, also following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

This document, however, has – first and foremost – a human and civic dimension. It strengthens the ties between our countries by building a sense of the Polish-British community on the local level, both here in Poland, and in Britain. The effect of our joint efforts is confirmation of the full electoral rights at the local level for Poles living in the United Kingdom, as well as for the British people who chose Poland as their home.

I am convinced that the agreement will serve to further strengthen our strategic relations, which will continue to grow also after the end of the transitional period.

Poland's Ambassador to the UK, Arkady Rzegocki said:

On behalf of Poles living and working in the United Kingdom, I would like to express great satisfaction at the fact that they will be able to continue to take an active part in the political life of their local communities. The ability for Poles to choose their representatives in local authorities, but also to apply for the positions of councillors and mayors, is of great significance not only for increasing the visibility of our compatriots in the United Kingdom – who have lived here for generations and have contributed significantly to the British cultural, economic and social life – but it also gives practical tools to implement their important demands.

This is another proof of how the Polish government is determined that the rights of Poles are not weakened after the UK exits the EU.

Poland is the fourth country to sign a voting rights treaty with the UK, following treaties signed with Spain, Portugal and Luxembourg last year.