

Speech: Building a strong new partnership with Lithuania

In the coming weeks and months, Britain will embark upon the negotiations to build a strong new partnership with the European Union.

For the UK and Lithuania, that new partnership will extend beyond our individual relationships with the European Union as a whole; you as members, and us as strong external partners.

Because our two countries share many principles: on defence and security, on trade and the economy – we are working together. In the past year alone we have collaborated closely on issues from mutual development of our financial technology sectors to the training of our military.

Last year, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death was commemorated across Lithuania, from schools in Klaipeda to the national parliament, as part of our shared European culture. All of these joint endeavours have been based on our strong mutual values and vision for the future.

So as I travel to Lithuania today, on my first visit to the country as the UK Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, I want to stress our determination to enter an even closer and more fruitful period in our relations.

We are firmly committed to strengthening the ties between our two countries because, while we are leaving the EU, we are emphatically not turning our backs on our friends and allies across Europe.

As part of that we will continue to be a keen partner to Lithuania. We will go on co-operating extensively on defence, security and foreign policy. We will collaborate on culture and education. We will work with Lithuania on economic issues and we will pursue an ambitious future trade agreement that is in the interest of the UK, Lithuania and the whole of the European Union.

For the UK wants the EU and each of its member states to prosper politically, economically and socially. The new partnership we will seek as we leave can, I believe, help to that end.

On security, Lithuania and the UK share a particularly close and important relationship.

The UK has led European action on keeping our continent safe – whether implementing sanctions against Russia following its aggressive action in Ukraine or securing Europe's external border.

Such partnership continues to be of vital importance, particularly in the face of growing concern about the threat to security across the continent. And that is why we will continue to work closely with your armed forces on land, sea and air, with hundreds of UK troops training and exercising in Lithuania.

As key members of NATO, we both know the importance of collaboration on defence and security. For the UK, our commitment to defend the interests of the western world remains absolute. For you, having the full force of NATO right behind you is of huge value. Solidarity is crucial and the UK will continue to stand by all its allies – including Lithuania.

As Britain leaves the EU, we will seek to enhance the trading links that we currently have with member states and the British Prime Minister has been clear that the UK will be pursuing a comprehensive trade agreement with the EU.

For Lithuania, the UK is its fifth largest trading partner in goods and its eighth in services. So it's in no one's interest to see new barriers to trade. Instead, we see opportunities in building on our existing trading ties with Lithuania.

But we are not just allies and friends because of our cultural connections, military commitments and trading links. Our relationship goes far beyond that, with the firm friendship that exists between our people.

Hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians have made Britain their home. Your people are our healthcare workers, our financiers and even the conductor of our world class Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

I understand that the thousands of Lithuanians currently living in the UK want certainty about their rights once the UK leaves the EU. And, while Lithuanians' existing rights are not affected, the British government wants to get a deal done to secure long term rights quickly that protects the rights of all EU citizens living in the UK, and British citizens living in the EU.

Indeed, we would have liked to have come to such an agreement already and have been clear it will be an absolute priority once formal negotiations begin.

It is only fair that those who have built lives for themselves abroad, who are contributing to foreign economies and giving back to overseas communities, have their rights and status guaranteed rapidly.

And the approach that we take on this issue – one of reasoned goodwill to secure mutual benefits – is the one that we will adopt throughout the negotiation process.

Because the UK is not stepping back from its role in the world – it is stepping up.

News story: Launch UK brings together UK commercial space sector

Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson and Minister for Aviation Lord Ahmad spoke alongside the UK Space Agency CEO Katherine Courtney at the Launch UK conference at the Royal Aeronautical Society on 21 February.

A key strand of the government's Industrial Strategy is for the UK to hold a greater share of the commercial spaceflight market, worth an estimated £25 billion over the next 20 years, by developing competitive, commercial and safe spaceflight proposals for UK-based satellite launch services and sub-orbital flights.

The conference brought together potential UK spaceports and spaceflight vehicle operators – the component parts of the consortia that are working to provide commercial launch services from the UK.

The UK Space Agency has made grants worth £10 million available to help develop the capability for spaceflight. The consortia are being invited to provide their business cases for funding to develop key technologies or infrastructure in the UK.

The conference took place as new legislation – the Spaceflight Bill – was delivered to the House of Commons and the House of Lords today to facilitate and regulate commercial spaceflight.

Universities and Science Minister Jo Johnson said:

“We really do stand at the dawn of a very exciting era. This is a big and incredibly exhilarating moment for this country.

“The traditional space sector is changing and the way we access space is changing too, which is why this is a truly important moment for us. It's vital that we don't miss the exciting opportunities that are now ahead of us.”

Minister for Aviation Lord Ahmad said:

“We are boldly legislating where no British government has legislated before.

“It's clear we are galvanised and ready to grasp this huge opportunity for our country. We want to move quickly but we also want to get it right too.

“It's our ambition as a government, as a collective industry, as a country that the UK is the best place in Europe for space flight operations.”

Seven potential regional spaceports gave presentations and a panel of industry experts discussed innovations in commercial spaceflight, looking ahead to 2025, while there was also an opportunity for networking.

Katherine Courtney, CEO UK Space Agency, said:

“With our partners across government we continue to create a supportive environment for commercial innovation and cutting edge science.

“Together, we are working to embrace the emerging small satellite launch market to capture a share of the £25bn global opportunity. I’m confident that 2020 will see the first launches from British soil, and we’re working hard to make that a reality.”

[Press release: Shoreham flood scheme enters next phase](#)

A major flood defence scheme that will significantly reduce flood risk to over 2,300 properties in Shoreham and East Lancing has taken a step towards completion this week, with piling works at 2 of the project’s 10 phases now finished.

The huge jack-up barge, that has been working to install one of the new tidal flood defence piled walls in the town centre since November, will leave the site next week having completed its phase of the work.

Of the planned 10 construction phases, 3 have been worked on since the project started in October 2016, and work so far has been progressing well. The scheme will significantly improve the current ageing flood defences, and when the whole project is complete, in 2018, it will reduce the tidal flood risk to thousands of homes and a significant number of commercial properties in the area. It will also protect important local infrastructure such as the road network, railway line and Shoreham Airport.

Russell Long, Flood Team Leader at the Environment Agency, said:

Work on the scheme is progressing well, and further phases of work are set to begin later in the year. We are aware of the impact that the development of these schemes can have on local communities, and we thank the residents of Shoreham for their understanding during the works.

The Adur Ferry Bridge will need to be closed for a few hours when the jack-up barge leaves Shoreham next week (week commencing 27 February), and shuttle buses will be provided during this time. Exact timings of this operation will depend on weather and site conditions, and we will do all we can to keep the community informed of our plans. I’d encourage residents to monitor [@EnvAgencySE](#) on Twitter, go to www.shorehamadurtidalwalls.co.uk, or

visit the project's visitor centre to find out more.

The Shoreham scheme's dedicated project visitor centre is located at Beach Green Car Park, Shoreham-by-Sea, and is open between midday and 5pm on weekdays.

For further information, you can view the webpage [Shoreham Adur Tidal Walls Scheme](#) or you can call 03708 506506. You can also request information by email at shorehamwestbank@ea.gov.uk or by writing to

SSD Enquiries
Environment Agency
Guildbourne House
Chatsworth Road
Worthing
BN11 1LD

Notes:

The visitor centre may be closed during scheduled visits from schools and interest groups.

For all media enquiries please call 0800 141 2743.

[Press release: New business champions to support rights of disabled consumers](#)

Eleven new sector champions, who will help to tackle the issues disabled people face as consumers, have been announced by the Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health today (21 February 2017).

The champions, who represent a range of different sectors and businesses, from gaming to retail, will use their influential status as leaders in their industries to promote the benefits of being inclusive to disabled people.

There are currently more than 11 million disabled people in the UK and the spending power of their households – 'the purple pound' – is almost £250 billion. But many businesses are missing out on this potential customer base by having everyday products and services which aren't available to disabled people – who, as a result, are regularly excluded from experiences and opportunities that many others take for granted.

The sector champions will amplify the voices of disabled customers and employees within their own industries, increasing accountability and challenging inequality. They will also be able to highlight specific changes and improvements that will make a difference to the millions of people who often miss out.

The Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health, Penny Mordaunt, said:

As a public advocate for accessibility, these champions will help businesses realise the value of disabled consumers and the importance of catering to every customer's needs.

These industries must become fully inclusive. Not being able to access the high street, products and services, transport or simply to access a loo jars with our national values: it must change.

The new sector champions will drive improvements to the accessibility and quality of services and facilities in their sector, helping to showcase best practice and show other businesses the merit of making disabled customers a priority.

The sector champions are:

- Helen Drury, Corporate Responsibility Manager at Intu (retail)
- Suzanne Bull MBE, CEO of Attitude is Everything (music)
- Huw Edwards, Public Affairs Director at UKActive (leisure)
- Chris Veitch, Co-founder of Access New Business (tourism)
- Robin Sheppard, Chairman of Bespoke Hotels (hotels)
- Dan Brooke, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer at Channel 4 (media)
- Sam Phillips, CMO at Omnicom Media Group (advertising)
- Michael Connolly, Regional Training and Standards Manager at OCS ltd (transport – airports)
- Jane Cole, Managing Director at Blackpool Transport Services (transport – buses)
- Trudie Hills, Disability Manager, Lloyds Bank (banking)
- Dr Jo Twist OBE, CEO of UKIE (gaming)

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5123

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21 Feb 2017



Finance secretary Derek Mackay has performed another budget u-turn as he seeks to address Scotland's business rates crisis.

Addressing Holyrood today, he said up to £40 million had been discovered within a budget that had previously been "maxed out".

It means some sectors in certain areas of the country will have their increases capped at 12.5 per cent, although many others will still have to endure the crippling increases.

Mr Mackay eventually conceded to MSPs that the cap would only be in place for one year, a move described as a "sticking plaster approach" by the Scottish Conservatives.

It's another surprise discovery of cash by the finance secretary, after he found more than £180 million to appease the Greens in budget negotiations earlier this month.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"For weeks the SNP has been ignoring this issue, claiming it had no control over this process.

"In the typical style of this SNP government, it fell asleep at the wheel and only woke up when it crashed into the wall.

"We've heard on more than one occasion that this budget has been maxed out, yet once again Mr Mackay has been able to find a bit more money down the back of the couch.

"It's a desperate eleventh-hour move which will do very little to ease concerns within Scotland's business community, given that it is for one year only."

Finance secretary Derek Mackay only made the statement to the Scottish Parliament after demands by the Scottish Conservatives:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/mackay-to-face-holyrood-on-business-rates-crisis/>