

Anne-Marie Trevelyan delivers speech on free trade at Centre for Policy Studies

Thank you, Robert and the CPS for all the great work that you're doing, both at the Centre for Policy Studies, and as a member of the Strategic Trade Advisory Group in DIT.

It's 31 years, ladies and gentlemen, since Margaret Thatcher left office, which makes me realise just how old I am. However, her 11 years as Prime Minister have significantly shaped the United Kingdom that we all know and love today.

That Iron Lady, that great lady, redefined Britain, launching an economic revival that transformed our country's standing in the world.

Built on not standing still and not accepting the status quo.

Through free trade, free enterprise, and international cooperation.

Like at the 1985 Bonn Summit, where Thatcher and other G7 leaders ushered in a new era of trade liberalisation and free market capitalism by agreeing that – and I quote – “Protectionism does not solve problems, it creates them.”

And her leadership was the catalyst for a remarkable period of UK and indeed global growth.

She energised our country and ensured we were once again competitive on the world stage.

And indeed today, we are presented with many of the same challenges that faced Mrs Thatcher.

Protectionism – undermining global trade and growth.

The spectre of inflation hanging over the global economy, at least in part driven by disruption to supply chains.

Uncertainty about the future of the global economy – caused by those long-term impacts of the pandemic, geopolitical shifts, and the rapidly growing Indo-Pacific markets.

As well as a global trading system in need of reform, and renewal of free and fair trade values, in the midst of climate change.

So to face up to these challenges we need to channel Margaret Thatcher's optimism, her dynamism, and her clarity of purpose.

So today, I would like to set out to you how we are going to chart a new

course now that we are once again a truly independent trading nation, and use our newfound freedom to once again become global champions of free and fair trade.

So we will forge stronger trading relationships with like-minded countries to liberalise trade and open market, put rocket boosters under our exports, and break down the barriers to market access.

These wins don't often make the headlines but they do create billions of pounds in new exports every year.

So giving the right support to businesses of all sizes, championing their unashamedly brilliant goods and services.

And banging that drum around the world to remind investors that there has never been a better time to invest in the UK.

First and foremost, our vision for the UK's future as an independent trading nation means recognising just how much we have to offer the world.

As the previous Minister for Energy responsible for delivering the Net Zero Strategy, I am passionate and indeed deeply embedded in the detail about how our domestic economy can become genuinely clean and green. Our army of green innovators are now also set to deliver as much as £170 billion of export sales by 2030 with each one accelerating the global green transition.

Lady Thatcher set us on this course by putting the threats from climate change on the political map, both at home and around the world.

And the UK has just hosted COP26, where critical decisions were agreed for the world to get ahead of climate threats – and UK leadership out in front must and will continue.

And it is in the spirit of Thatcher's words, back in 1989, that 'those countries who are industrialised must contribute more to help those who are not', that our entrepreneurs today export their pioneering green goods and services around the world.

From Alexander Dennis who are exporting electric buses, to Crep Protect who export their innovative products to 52 different markets around the globe.

The UK today is also, of course, a services and digital technology superpower. We are the world's second largest services exporter, and the fifth biggest exporter of digital tech services.

As well of course as the world-leading financial services hub here in the City of London, up and down the country we are home to global titans of professional services and creative industries.

Meanwhile, our superb shipbuilding, maritime equipment, technology, and manufacturing sectors underpin our trade in everything from cars to cyber, and pharmaceuticals to professional services.

Our task is to capitalise on these amazing strengths – setting the frameworks for Great British Business to thrive from Washington DC to Wellington.

This in turn will create jobs, opportunities, and prosperity across every part of our United Kingdom, whilst championing the causes of free markets, free enterprise, and free trade.

And we do this for a reason.

Free trade is the engine that drives growth and prosperity.

Raising the quality of life for all our citizens by providing consumers with lower prices and greater choice.

That is why we are determined that Global Britain, the home of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, remains an unapologetic champion of free trade and enterprise.

Unleashing Britain's potential to power our economic recovery, making our businesses more dynamic, and levelling up our country as we build back better from Covid-19.

And opposing calls for isolationism and protectionism – not by making ourselves strategically dependent on fair-weather friends, but by standing tall with like-minded partners to champion free and fair trade for all.

Working to strengthen and reform the WTO and make global trading rules fit for the 21st century. Rules that promote our high standards and allow our businesses to compete fairly in the global market.

And using our influence and shaping international trade to reflect our core values including freedom, fairness, sovereignty, the rule of law, and environmentalism, across the world.

And ensuring that we do not yield to those who argue that we should put barriers up.

Meaning that British firms would lose contracts overseas, higher prices in the shops – and depriving developing countries of vital growth.

To trade freely, we must also trade fairly. – To protect our open international order, we must stand against unfair competition and those who seek to undermine our enterprise.

So we will proactively address risks to our national security, economic resilience. We will defend our values. And we will challenge tackling the market-distorting practices that put our businesses at an unfair disadvantage.

We are not alone. Our G7 allies share this vision, and I will be forthrightly making our case at next week's WTO Ministerial Conference.

Because our vision is much more than simply defending Britain's proud free trading history.

It is rooted in a recognition of the seismic shifts happening across the global economy today – focusing not on the next quarter or year, but the decades to come.

As my department's Global Trade Outlook highlighted, the global centre of economic gravity will continue shifting eastwards, with the seven largest emerging economies projected to surpass the economic size of the G7 during the 2030s.

And between 2019 and 2050, more than half of global growth is expected to come from the Indo-Pacific.

Within that, South Asia will grow particularly quickly. And India is projected to be the world's third largest economy by 2050.

India is, of course, one of our most significant export markets, and I look forward to launching our trade talks soon with them.

And the global economy is also becoming more services orientated, as rising incomes in emerging markets shift those spending patterns.

There could be almost 2 billion more middle class consumers on the planet by 2050, and around three quarters of these increases will be in the Indo-Pacific region.

And these are trends we therefore cannot afford to ignore.

So a long-term vision for trade means adapting to this changing reality – and reaching out to seize opportunities in the emerging, high-value markets where demand for our world-class goods and services is high.

This means focusing our efforts on those parts of the world that can supercharge UK trade in the industries of the future like digital, services and tech.

Not retrenching and retreating into protectionism, but reaching out to trade with the world's fastest-growing markets, whilst ensuring Britain's status as a global exporter, centre for foreign investment, and champion of international trade remains firm.

So far we have agreed trade deals with 70 countries plus the EU – trade worth a whopping £766 billion every year.

And so now we are working flat out to forge ambitious deals with like-minded and strategic partners around the world, that will put the UK at the centre of a network of modern Free Trade Agreements spanning the Americas and the Pacific.

We are in negotiations to accede to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, one of the world's largest free trade areas, composed of 11 Pacific nations with dynamic economies from Chile to Malaysia, Vietnam to Peru. Boasting a combined GDP of more than £8 trillion in 2020.

And we have launched our consultation with a view to commencing negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council states in the months ahead.

All these deals will create countless new opportunities for our exporters and deliver better choice and value for consumers.

Supporting UK business is central for me. So, wherever in the world they arise, we will tackle the market access barriers that our businesses face, enabling them to trade and invest freely.

Closer to home, if we are to truly embrace the new opportunities we are creating, we must empower our brilliant entrepreneurs to look forwards, outwards and to the future. As we did last week, hosting the inaugural International Trade Week which was supporting and encouraging businesses to export and sell to the world, and showcasing the long-term support that is available to help them do so.

Leveraging our Tradeshow programme to bring that support to every corner of the UK, therefore making it easier for businesses to trade by investing in tools like the Single Trade Window – a one stop shop for all data from traders into Government.

And putting a new emphasis on spreading support across the UK through our world-leading export credit agency, UK Export Finance.

And last week we launched our ambitious and refreshed Export Strategy.

As a key feature of this, the Export Support Service will extend its reach with hubs across all four nations of the UK to assist businesses trading with the EU and around the world.

Our strategy is driven by the mission to reach exports of a trillion pounds in goods and services per year by 2030. This is indeed an ambitious goal, but I do believe that by working closely with business, and providing the support they need, we can achieve it.

We must also maintain trust in free and fair trade. And we will do this by equipping our businesses with the tools they need to tackle unfair and pernicious trading practices.

The independent Trade Remedies Authority was established to allow businesses to seek redress against dumping, subsidisation, and unfair surges of imports. And this will provide stability and predictability for exporters and investors alike.

Our vision for the future also means maximising foreign direct investment, just as Margaret Thatcher did. Now, as then, it generates so much prosperity in the UK and deepens our links with allies across the world, leading to higher wages, stimulating business efficiency, and boosting productivity: exactly what we need to lead the global recovery.

That is why our new Office for Investment is harnessing the expertise of our Government, its global network, and the private sector to provide a

'concierge service'. Giving renewed focus and structure to our offer for top tier investors around the world.

Mrs Thatcher brought Nissan to the North-East at a time when they were the world's most innovative car manufacturers.

And the Office for Investment has been working to ensure they continue to be a key player the region, where they will continue to innovate and produce a new generation of all-electric vehicles...

This is just one great example which demonstrates the Office's immense potential as a vehicle for delivering growth, levelling up and propelling us to net zero.

We also have huge plans for green investment. These were front and centre at COP26, and at our recent Global Investment Summit. Almost £10 billion was invested in green projects that will reduce emissions, create thousands of jobs, and spur our mission to level up the entire country.

So I hope this gives you a brief outline of the UK's ambitious vision for trade.

Some critics have questioned whether we have the strategy to get there.

As if there should be some weighty tome sat, I don't know, sat unaltered on a dusty shelf somewhere.

I'm afraid I fundamentally reject that approach.

Because our strategy is clear, dynamic, and built on strong foundations.

It is based on the principle of free, fair, rules-based international trade, the flexibility and dynamism afforded by our newfound status as an independent trading nation, and reaching out to seize the opportunities of a shifting centre of gravity in the global economy. Opportunities we are uniquely well placed to grasp.

It is a strategy not looking just at the next headline, the next quarter, or the next year, but realising those opportunities ahead in the decades to come.

It will make exporting easier for businesses, drive inward investment, and bring prosperity to every region and nation of our country.

Now, just as in Mrs Thatcher's time, there are the naysayers and the doom mongers.

Who claim that we are 'Little Britain' – too slow, too weak, too inexperienced.

But – with the greatest respect to Matt Lucas – we are not Little Britain, and we never were. We are Global Britain.

For the first time in almost fifty years, we are no longer waiting on the EU's Computer Says No bureaucracy, where trade talks drag on and on.

We are an independent trading nation, able to reach out on our own, securing great deals and empowering businesses to seize those opportunities of the future and create high-paying, highly-skilled jobs.

And to forge an open, enterprising economy which enables us to build back better from the pandemic, levelling up the whole of the UK.

With the energy, innovation, and engagement of businesses, communities and this ambitious strategy, we will unleash our nation's brilliant potential and write a new chapter in our proud trading history.

Proudly championing all that is Made in the UK, Sold to the World, I hope that Margaret Thatcher, who put Global Britain back on the map, would be proud of our vision and our action plan to keep it there.

Thank you.