

Foreign Secretary statement in Estonia: 11 March 2021

It is an enormous pleasure to be here to mark a century of diplomatic relations with Estonia.

I want to thank President Kaljulaid and Foreign Minister Liimets for their hospitality, and for the very valuable discussions we have had today.

I was also pleased to join the meeting of Baltic Foreign Ministers yesterday evening.

As I'm here, I'm reminded of the history that we have together.

In 1921, the UK was among the very first countries to recognise Estonia's independence, establish diplomatic relations, and cement a friendship born from our Navy's support in the 1918-20 War of Independence.

The British servicemen who gave their lives in that struggle are still commemorated in the Church of the Holy Ghost here in Tallinn.

It's very important that we remember our history, but of course our relationship is not just about a rich history.

It is also about our values, our commitment to work together multilaterally, and ultimately a brighter future not just a proud past.

While the UK has now left the EU, our commitment to our European friends and our neighbours is undiminished.

In fact I would go further, I would say that we have an opportunity to be even better allies, friends and partners and with no country is that commitment stronger than with our friends in Estonia.

Perhaps the best evidence of this is our enduring commitment to European defence and security.

We feel very much that Estonian security is our security, we are committed to that.

The 850 British troops stationed here in Estonia are testament to that commitment and they are not going anywhere.

We will continue to stand with you and all of our partners to tackle Russia's malign activity in the region.

You can count on British solidarity with that.

As we look ahead, there are many ways in which we want to deepen and broaden our co-operation. We had excellent discussions about that, as I did with your

president as well.

Estonia and the UK are at the forefront of the international effort to tackle the biggest challenges in Europe and globally, such as climate change and the global recovery from COVID-19. And frankly the assault on open societies, that we're not just seeing in Belarus and Russia but around the world.

With our Estonian friends we are united and in lockstep in beating the drum for liberal free trade, human rights, democracy and open societies.

Using our common membership of the UN Security Council we are working together to champion gender equality and in particular girls' education.

We can see from the C19 pandemic that the challenge globally of making sure young girls don't find themselves falling out of school and not getting back into school is even stronger and the case for supporting girls' in education and the global recovery is stronger still. Another excellent area for us to cooperate on.

And we are collaborating closely on defending media freedom in Belarus and elsewhere.

We look forward to the Global Conference on Media Freedom in Tallinn later this year. It's a really important event and I can't think of a better place to host the event than Estonia.

The Statement of Intent that Minister Liimets and I have signed today signals mutual desire to continue to build this close collaboration across all of these areas, to strengthen our friendship even further in the future. We shouldn't be backward looking but forward looking and really ambitious on that front.

We truly value the relationship we have developed over the last hundred years.

And we look forward to nurturing it further over the next 100 years.

Thank you very much for your warm welcome.