

Speech: Liam Fox celebrates trading relationship between the UK and Spain

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Lord Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Our surroundings here at Mansion House, where we are so kindly hosted by the Lord Mayor, are a reminder of the long history of trade that this country has enjoyed.

We are at the heart of the City of London Corporation, an authority that was founded to protect the skilled labour and trading freedoms that made London, for centuries, the commercial capital of the world.

Although the City of London Corporation may have almost a thousand years of history behind it, the Spanish have been here for far longer.

Since Roman times, trade has flourished between the Iberian Peninsula and the British Isles. The legions may be long gone, but many of the products they imported from Iberia into Britannia would be familiar to us today – wine, olive oil, clothes.

In the fifteenth Century King Edward IV, recognising the quality and demand for Spanish goods in these islands, signed a charter allowing the Basques to sell their wares freely throughout England. Soon after, an early piece of free trading history was made, when the city of Guernica reciprocated the arrangement.

Mutual investment, too, has long flourished between Spain and Britain. The British may be famous for their love of Spanish sherry, but where would that industry be without familiar names like Osborne, or Harvey?

Such examples may seem to us like ancient history, but they are a reflection of a commercial relationship that continues unabated.

Today, the bilateral trade between Spain and the UK stands at some £40 billion.

Spain is the UK's ninth largest export market, receiving more of our goods and services than Brazil and India combined.

Over 700 UK companies have invested in Spain, and their operations have created over a quarter of a million jobs across Spain, from Santander to Cadiz.

Here in the UK, Spanish trade and investment has reached the lives of millions of people. In fact, anyone who has ever flown into London will have almost certainly landed at a Spanish-owned airport, then taken a Spanish-built train into the City along Spanish-laid rails, all powered by electricity generated by Spanish-owned offshore power!

Of course, the real foundation of the Spain-UK partnership is the personal connection of our people.

Over 11,000 Spanish students study at UK universities. 300,000 British citizens live and work in the Spain. Every year, there are 30 million air passenger journeys between our 2 countries – more than between the United States and Canada.

It is a remarkably fruitful relationship.

We are here today not only to celebrate our past, and to congratulate ourselves on the strength of our current relationship, but also to look to the future.

The United Kingdom is opening a new chapter in its history, and the values that we share, politically, economically and socially, will ensure that our relationship continues to flourish.

At its heart is the continued faith that companies, like those represented here today, continue to show in the Spanish and British economies.

The UK has for several years been the most popular destination in Europe for Spanish overseas investment, but in 2015 we overtook the United States, and now attract more investment from Spain than any other country on Earth.

Companies from across Spain are flocking to the UK, keen to tap into our world-class research and development sector, our financial services industry, or simply take advantage of our unrivalled access to world markets.

In all corners of the United Kingdom, Spanish companies are investing to take advantage of access to skilled local workforces and local markets.

As Secretary of State for International Trade, the UK's global economic department, I am delighted that Spanish investors are recognising all that Britain has to offer them.

Spanish rolling stock manufacturer CAF has today announced that it is to start building trains and trams at a new factory in South Wales. The company will invest £30 million in the plant near Newport, creating 300 jobs and giving an important boost to UK manufacturing and the Welsh economy.

Global leader in assisted fertility IVI is investing £15 million as they expand their offer across the UK, creating jobs and tapping into our world-class research capabilities.

Construction firm Sacyr have released the news that they are establishing their European headquarters in London, and my own Department for International Trade is supporting Gonvarri Steel Services in their construction of a new £26 million site in the West Midlands.

And of course, we cannot mention Spanish investment without acknowledging the on-going expansion of London Luton Airport by Spanish operator AENA, who is investing over £100 million in a major redevelopment which is expected to

create over 10,000 jobs.

For all our long history together, the commercial relationship between Spain and the UK has never been more valuable, and as the economic recovery continues to boost businesses across our 2 countries, it is a partnership that can only grow more productive.

We are here today to celebrate the ties between our 2 nations, and to forge the personal and professional relationships upon which we will build still greater success.

Together, we can help to build a safe, secure and prosperous future, for Britain, Spain, and the world.

Thank you.