

# Speech: The UK post-Brexit: a stronger and even closer ally to Latvia

There is a well known saying in Latvia, 'Veca mīlestība nerūs' – old love does not rust.

And it is with a very similar sentiment that the UK is approaching the upcoming negotiations with the European Union. We are seeking a new, strong partnership with our closest neighbours in Europe.

For the UK and Latvia, we hope that that our new partnership will be deeper than just our individual relationships with the European Union. Our histories do, of course, pre-date the establishment of the EU.

Our shared history can be seen in your capital city – transformed by its former mayor and British emigrant, George Armistead.

It can also be seen at Oxford University where the legacy of the great Riga-born philosopher and historian, Sir Isaiah Berlin, lives on.

I'm proud too of the fact that the United Kingdom was the first country to de facto recognise Latvia's independence almost a century ago – a week before Latvian independence was declared. And deeply honoured that you annually commemorate our Royal Navy's important contribution to defending your independence in 1919, when the British cruiser HMS Dragon helped the Latvian Army to protect Riga from West Russian Volunteer Army.

We are natural allies for a number of reasons.

We are both strong supporters of global free trade and have a trusted relationship when it comes to questions of security and defence.

So the message I bring with me to Latvia today is a simple one – the UK and Latvia will continue to be reliable partners, willing allies and close friends.

I know there are many here who were disappointed with the outcome of the UK's referendum vote, which I understand.

But today I'm meeting with your Prime Minister and your Foreign Minister to make clear that we can use the UK's departure from the EU to deepen and reinvigorate our partnership.

For while we may be leaving the institutions of the EU, we are not leaving Europe.

What we are seeking is a smooth and orderly exit from the EU and a strong new partnership.

And I'm confident that if we approach negotiations in a spirit of goodwill,

we can deliver a positive outcome that works for the mutual benefit of all.

Because it is absolutely in the UK's interests that the EU succeeds and prospers politically, economically and socially.

For our bilateral relationship, there are three areas where our mutual interests converge.

Firstly, Latvians living in the UK contribute a great deal to the fabric of our society and we'll continue to welcome the brightest and the best to the UK.

I want to emphasise that Latvians' existing rights to reside in the UK are not affected by the EU referendum vote, so there is no reason for any Latvian national who is legally living in the UK and obeying the laws of the country to feel insecure.

And the British government has been clear – we want to get a deal done 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 a priority once formal negotiations begin.

Secondly, maintaining security and defence in Europe will continue to be uppermost in our minds. So we'll stand by our NATO commitments to spend 2% of GDP on defence and help protect the interests of our allies and friends.

Finally, trade between our countries is significant, totalling well over a billion pounds last year and covering a range of sectors, including timber, machinery and financial services.

And we are trading more, not less, with trade between the UK and Latvia growing by around a fifth last year.

So we will continue to buy Latvian goods and services, sell you ours and trade with you as freely as possible. That is exactly why we are pursuing a new free trade agreement that will be to our mutual benefit.

Britain's decision to leave the European Union wasn't about us closing ourselves off from the world. Instead it was about us opening ourselves up to the rest of the world.

We'll remain an outward-looking country that aims to be an even closer ally to Latvia.

Because just as our histories have been closely intertwined, so will we both positively shape the direction our countries take in future.

Latvia and the UK will remain close partners. My message to you is that our important relationship will not diminish after our exit. Indeed, it will grow stronger still.