

Speech: We support EU's trade negotiations as well as our own

I was intrigued to read in a number of papers on Tuesday, that the EU's new trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand are apparently a set-back for the UK. Far from it, we welcomed them.

Australia and New Zealand are important trading partners for Britain, with trade worth £16 billion a year. It's no coincidence that 2 of the earliest announcements the new Department for International Trade made in 2016 were to establish new trade dialogues with both countries.

So trade discussions with both countries are already well underway; our trade dialogues with [Australia](#) and [New Zealand](#) met as recently as last month when UK officials traveled to Wellington and Canberra. It is correct to say that we cannot formally negotiate any future trade agreements until we have left the EU, but as we have agreed with the EU itself; we can begin formal negotiations once we leave next year.

Our trade dialogues will ensure they start from a strong position, having already laid the groundwork and built a shared understanding of each other's trade policy. They will also build on our historic links and mutual investment in each other's economies, worth £53 billion in 2016.

But while we have ambitious plans for our own trade with Australia and New Zealand, that doesn't mean we don't support the EU's ambitions.

In fact, I was at the EU trade ministers meeting in Brussels this week which agreed to start EU negotiations with both countries. I welcomed them, and the UK pledged to involve itself constructively in them, reigniting our unique bilateral relationships.

Just as the UK was one of the leading voices in the EU supporting new trade agreements with countries like Canada, so we remain the EU's biggest free trade advocate, before and after we leave.

Trade is not a zero-sum game. The EU securing new trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand is good news for the UK, as it increases the free flow of trade around the world, which supports consumers and businesses in all countries.

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom welcomed the EU negotiations "between likeminded partners" which "sends a strong signal at a time where many are taking the easy road of protectionism."

I completely agree. As International Trade Secretary Liam Fox, and I, have made clear on our meetings with governments around the world, and at the World Trade Organisation itself, the UK will lead the global call for free trade. That means us also working with like-minded partners including the EU, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

Both countries recognise the huge value that free trade brings to prosperity and growth. New Zealand is the only country to successfully conclude free trade agreements with China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. An impressive record, which is why we hired their top trade official, Crawford Falconer, as our own Chief Trade Negotiations Adviser.

I look forward to a day when the EU, UK, Australia and New Zealand all enjoy the benefits of open and free trade with one another.

As a member state, we support the EU commencing its negotiations. But just like in cricket, it isn't necessary to be the team that bats first.