

News story: David Davis visits Baltic leaders to discuss future relations

A global Britain is determined to maintain its historic relations with Europe after leaving the European Union, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, said during meetings this week with Baltic leaders.

During the two day visit, from 20-21 February 2017, the Secretary of State met heads of government and other leading representatives from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia to discuss joint opportunities and priorities ahead of the exit negotiations.

The Secretary of State underlined in all three countries the government's desire to see the European Union succeed politically and economically after the UK's exit.

He also made clear its determination to secure the rights, both of UK citizens currently living in Baltic countries, and their citizens living in the UK as quickly as possible.

He also emphasised the UK's ongoing commitment to its bilateral relationship with the Baltic states and towards mutual interests such as trade, justice, defence and security.

The Secretary of State confirmed that Britain will continue to play a leading role in European security and that the government wants Britain's future relationship with the European Union to include practical arrangements on matters of law enforcement, the sharing of intelligence material with the country's European Union allies and defence cooperation.

The UK currently has the second biggest defence budget in NATO at £178 billion and is one of five countries, including Estonia, meeting the NATO 2% spending target. It is providing one of four battalions to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States and Poland, with 800 troops being sent to Estonia this year.

Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, said:

The UK is leaving the European Union, not Europe. We are looking to maintain our close ties with the Baltic states and all our European allies, and will continue to commit to mutual interests such as trade, justice, defence and security.

The UK has led European action on keeping our continent safe – whether implementing sanctions against Russia following its aggressive action in Ukraine or securing Europe's external border. Such partnership continues to be of vital importance, particularly in the face of growing concern about the threat to security across

the continent.

Speech: Funding for smart parking and traffic management schemes

Good morning everyone.

I'd like to start by thanking Councillor David Harvey for the introduction and opportunity for me to speak today.

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to see for myself, the potential benefit for motorists – and to the wider economy – of this excellent smart parking project, which has attracted £200,000 government grant funding, and which the Department for Transport is taking forward in partnership with Westminster City Council and other key stakeholders.

This work further demonstrates this government's commitment to working alongside industry to promote technology and innovation, and to maintain the UK's position at the forefront of the digital revolution.

And on that, I am also pleased to announce today that we are funding [19 smart traffic management schemes](#) including smart parking demonstrator schemes in Coventry, Luton, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire – as well as a partnership project between Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster, which looks to improve electric vehicle parking by combining parking sensors with electric vehicle charging points to give drivers real-time information on available spaces where they can recharge.

The way we travel continues to change, and technology has a valuable role to play through co-operative intelligent transport systems.

By enabling communication between vehicles, traffic signals, roadside sensors – as well as with other vehicles – the resulting information can bring increasing benefits, both to road operators, in terms of improved network management, and to road users, through the information they need, in real-time, to make the most of their journey.

Cities face a common challenge of accommodating significant rising demand for transport over the next 20 years, boosted by continued population growth, while meeting challenging carbon reduction targets and delivering customer expectations of transport that is safer, cleaner and greener, less congested and more reliable.

Technology and information have huge potential to generate innovative solutions in these urban areas, and deliver more joined up and seamless

multi-modal solutions which make better use of customer time.

Effective use of technology is crucial to delivering this, but this is not an end in itself – and it needs to be used to address specific policy challenges. This project is an excellent example of just that.

While there is no definitive evidence on the percentage, at any one time, of traffic circling while looking for a parking space, the knock on effects on congestion and emissions are obvious, not to mention the added stress this can cause. We've all been there.

Improving the parking experience can help to improve public acceptance of, and compliance with, parking restrictions that are so necessary to keep traffic flowing.

Having real-time mapping to direct us to an available parking space within a mobile app, that allows 'one-click' electronic payment, that activates when we arrive, and stops when we leave, could not have been imagined not so long ago.

And I am pleased to have seen the project go further by extending this case to taxi drivers, who face the similar problem of finding available taxi ranks. It follows that a smarter distribution of available taxis can only benefit pedestrians looking for a taxi.

Although 'big data' is the lifeblood of digital traffic management solutions, data gathering is, in itself, of little use. What matters is how this data is interpreted and used to gain a better understanding of travel patterns and behaviours.

I am therefore delighted to be able to present a prize this morning to the winners of Westminster's Parking Hackathon which took place last week. This event has already yielded valuable lessons to enable a better understanding of parking use which will further inform policy on parking.

With the high level of parking demand on their road network, I commend Westminster City Council for rising to the challenge and placing itself at the forefront of parking technology in the UK.

I wish you a successful session this afternoon, sharing this good work with local authorities from around the country, and I wish you continued success with this project.

I've seen today that technology really does have the potential to 'make parking better'.

Thank you.

It is crucial that the Government urgently improve departmental monitoring and evaluation measures – Jon Trickett

Jon

Trickett MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office, responding to a Regulatory Policy Committee report criticising the quality of departments' impact assessments of policy decisions, said:

"Years of Tory cuts are clearly taking their toll on civil servants who face increased workloads, tight resources and worsening conditions.

"It is utterly unacceptable that departments are diverting resources away from providing rigorous impact assessment of their decisions – what some might call 'idiot-proofing' the civil service from Tory policy.

"Ministers could be leading us up the garden path and the departments themselves would be none the wiser.

"It is crucial that the Government urgently improve departmental monitoring and evaluation measures."

Speech: Building a strong new partnership with Lithuania

In the coming weeks and months, Britain will embark upon the negotiations to build a strong new partnership with the European Union.

For the UK and Lithuania, that new partnership will extend beyond our individual relationships with the European Union as a whole; you as members, and us as strong external partners.

Because our two countries share many principles: on defence and security, on

trade and the economy – we are working together. In the past year alone we have collaborated closely on issues from mutual development of our financial technology sectors to the training of our military.

Last year, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death was commemorated across Lithuania, from schools in Klaipeda to the national parliament, as part of our shared European culture. All of these joint endeavours have been based on our strong mutual values and vision for the future.

So as I travel to Lithuania today, on my first visit to the country as the UK Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, I want to stress our determination to enter an even closer and more fruitful period in our relations.

We are firmly committed to strengthening the ties between our two countries because, while we are leaving the EU, we are emphatically not turning our backs on our friends and allies across Europe.

As part of that we will continue to be a keen partner to Lithuania. We will go on co-operating extensively on defence, security and foreign policy. We will collaborate on culture and education. We will work with Lithuania on economic issues and we will pursue an ambitious future trade agreement that is in the interest of the UK, Lithuania and the whole of the European Union.

For the UK wants the EU and each of its member states to prosper politically, economically and socially. The new partnership we will seek as we leave can, I believe, help to that end.

On security, Lithuania and the UK share a particularly close and important relationship.

The UK has led European action on keeping our continent safe – whether implementing sanctions against Russia following its aggressive action in Ukraine or securing Europe's external border.

Such partnership continues to be of vital importance, particularly in the face of growing concern about the threat to security across the continent. And that is why we will continue to work closely with your armed forces on land, sea and air, with hundreds of UK troops training and exercising in Lithuania.

As key members of NATO, we both know the importance of collaboration on defence and security. For the UK, our commitment to defend the interests of the western world remains absolute. For you, having the full force of NATO right behind you is of huge value. Solidarity is crucial and the UK will continue to stand by all its allies – including Lithuania.

As Britain leaves the EU, we will seek to enhance the trading links that we currently have with member states and the British Prime Minister has been clear that the UK will be pursuing a comprehensive trade agreement with the EU.

For Lithuania, the UK is its fifth largest trading partner in goods and its eighth in services. So it's in no one's interest to see new barriers to

trade. Instead, we see opportunities in building on our existing trading ties with Lithuania.

But we are not just allies and friends because of our cultural connections, military commitments and trading links. Our relationship goes far beyond that, with the firm friendship that exists between our people.

Hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians have made Britain their home. Your people are our healthcare workers, our financiers and even the conductor of our world class Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

I understand that the thousands of Lithuanians currently living in the UK want certainty about their rights once the UK leaves the EU. And, while Lithuanians' existing rights are not affected, the British government wants to get a deal done to secure long term rights 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 an absolute priority once formal negotiations begin.

It is only fair that those who have built lives for themselves abroad, who are contributing to foreign economies and giving back to overseas communities, have their rights and status guaranteed rapidly.

And the approach that we take on this issue – one of reasoned goodwill to secure mutual benefits – is the one that we will adopt throughout the negotiation process.

Because the UK is not stepping back from its role in the world – it is stepping up.

[CPC meeting discusses draft government work report](#)

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on Tuesday chaired a meeting on the draft government work report.

The meeting, attended by members of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, discussed the draft report, which is scheduled to be submitted to the upcoming fifth session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC).

Tuesday's meeting also reviewed a special report on inspections of central Party and governmental authorities, and another document on a Party education campaign.

At the meeting, China's top leadership pledged to stick to the basic tone of "seeking progress while maintaining stability" in 2017, aiming for more progress from supply-side structural reform.

The meeting highlighted the significance of 2017 as the 19th CPC National Congress will convene.

Acknowledging that China has scored a strong start for the 2016-2020 period, the meeting called for further efforts to balance multiple economic tasks in 2017, including stabilizing growth, advancing reforms, pushing restructuring, improving people's livelihood and preventing risks.

At the macro level, China will continue to implement proactive fiscal policies and prudent monetary policies, according to a document released after the meeting.

Reforms in key areas will be deepened, while the role of innovation will be boosted to facilitate economic upgrading, said the document.

China will also intensify efforts to tap the potential of domestic demand and strengthen internal growth momentum.

Other tasks include pushing supply-side structural reform in the agriculture sector, widening opening-up, promoting green development and improving government services for people's well-being.

The meeting came ahead of China's annual two sessions in March, during which lawmakers and political advisors will gather in Beijing to discuss the social and economic policies for the year.

Since the CPC's 18th National Congress, anti-graft teams have carried out 11 rounds of inspections across all provincial-level governments, central authorities, key state-owned enterprises and central financial institutions, according to the document.

The inspections, which focused on the adherence to the Party's leadership, comprehensive and strict governance of the Party and observation of the Party's Constitution and rules, have been effective political "microscopes" and "searchlights," the document stated.

The document said that central Party and governmental authorities play an important role in the Party and the state and they must uphold the authority of the CPC Central Committee and its centralized and unified leadership.

It stressed that all problems detected in the inspections should be properly addressed.

The document said that the Party education campaign – which focuses on the study of the Party Constitution and rules, as well as the speeches made by Xi, and calls for being qualified Party members – plays an important role in Party building and governance.

Deeming it an effective tool in Party building, the document said the

education campaign had helped shape the approach to governance of the Party under a new situation.

It said the education campaign should be regular and institutionalized, as this would help members understand the essence of Xi's speeches, ensure Party members unite closer around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, and scoring new achievements in socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The document called on Party organizations at all levels to make the education campaign a strategic and basic project.

It stressed that ideological education must be prioritized and efforts should be made to educate and guide Party members, especially leading officials.

Leading officials should set a good example in the campaign, the document said, adding that evaluations of the education campaign should be carried out annually.