

Stutt ávarp utanríkisráðherra

Town Hall fundur sendiráðs Bretlands fyrir Breta búsetta á Íslandi

Fimmtudaginn 8. mars 2018 kl 17.00

Veröld, húsi Vigdísar við Háskóla Íslands

Ambassador Nevin,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to have been invited to open this Town hall meeting organised by my friend Michael Nevin, the UK Ambassador here in Reykjavík, and his excellent staff at the British Embassy in Iceland. And it is a privilege to meet so many of you Brits who have decided to come to Iceland to work and live. We appreciate your choice immensely. You enrich our society, you strengthen our economy, and, I would like to reassure you today that you will also help shape our future.

You are here at the Town Hall event to discuss the immediate future and the way in which future relations between our two countries, and the relations between the UK and the European Union, will affect you and your families. This is understandable. The Brexit negotiations are progressing and reaching a critical stage. But if we look beyond the daily headlines we see a deep-rooted and wide-ranging political will towards making sure that citizens and their rights are not put in jeopardy. This has been expressed on both sides of the channel and that is of course also our policy and I am absolutely confident that a solution will be found to allow Brits living in Iceland to stay here and vice versa.

Iceland, as a member of the EEA has a large stake in the ongoing Brexit-process. Our Foreign Service – and indeed officials from all Ministries and Government

bodies many of whom are present here today – are working tirelessly to guard our interests. Although we do not sit at the negotiation table in Brussels or London we are in very close dialogue with the various departments in London on Brexit issues in general and Citizens rights in particular. To us, Brexit is a priority area and our position is that although there are certain institutional and legal challenges in the process, we see the opportunities and we wish to cultivate these opportunities in close cooperation with the UK, our most important European trading partner.

Through the EEA, thousands of Icelandic nationals have found employment or completed their education in the UK and at the same time many UK citizens have done the same in Iceland. The EEA has also provided new opportunities for our universities and cultural institutions, which are active participants in EU programs. It goes without saying that these arrangements cannot be jeopardized and our officials now have the task of finding technical and legal solutions. This task is important. Brexit is fast approaching but the wheels are in motion and everyone is in agreement of that we must protect the status of citizens exercising their free movement rights.

There is a clear political will for this on all sides. Right now, discussions are ongoing between the UK and the EEA-EFTA States Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein on the matter and our officials met recently in London. At the meeting the parties affirmed their desire to secure the status and protect the rights of UK nationals living in Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein and nationals of those countries living in the UK. As noted, I am certain that a solution will be found and if you have questions on these matters I am sure that our very capable officials present here today will be able to provide you with answers.

Dear friends - as I have said to various British officials lately, we are not only your best friends, right now we are probably your only friends! I wish you a very good event and congratulations again to the organisers for this meeting.