



**PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release: Thursday 18 July**

## **Senior figures say UK must act as a bridge for trade between Europe and the Commonwealth**

On Wednesday 17 July, senior figures united in a call for the UK to better facilitate trade between Europe and the Commonwealth.

Speaking at a conference held at Europe House and organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society, representatives from across politics, business and civil society met to discuss how Britain can make the best of both worlds.

Lord Howell, former Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said “today, trade follows not the flag, but layer upon layer of soft diplomacy” as he urged audience members to realise the potential of the Commonwealth’s emerging markets.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind, former Foreign Secretary, told the audience that in understanding the relationship between the two organisations: “we must begin from the starting point that the EU and Commonwealth are utterly different creatures...the Commonwealth acts by consensus and the EU increasingly acts by qualified majority voting”.

H.E. Garvin Nicholas, High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago in the UK, told the audience that the state of trade between the Caribbean and the EU leaves a lot to be desired and that the UK must now step up to take a more active role in this relationship.

The Royal Commonwealth Society held the conference in order to facilitate constructive dialogue on the future of the EU, the UK’s role within it and the potential for trade with the Commonwealth. At the conference, the UK was called upon, alongside Malta and Cyprus, to act as a more effective bridge, navigating barriers and acting as an ambassador for trade between the two associations.

Mike Lake, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society, said: “It is not Europe or the Commonwealth, one or the other, but this notion that there is an opportunity and mutual interest in establishing a more dynamic and practical relationship between Europe and the countries of the Commonwealth, with the UK sitting in a pivotal role between them.”

### **Notes to Editors**

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**The Royal Commonwealth Society** is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth. Founded in 1868, it conducts a range of events, research and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. The RCS has some 4,000 members in the UK and a presence in over 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies. The RCS is a registered charity in England and Wales. (226748).

[www.thercs.org](http://www.thercs.org)

This conference was sponsored by the European Commission and examined both trade and identity, panellists included:

**Peter Kellner**, President of YouGov; **Lord Howell**, former Minister of State in the FCO; **HE Mr Garvin Nicholas**, High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago; **Michael Sippitt**, Chairman of Clarkslegal LLP; **Sunder Katwala**, Director of British Future; **Will Straw**, Associate Director at IPPR; **Vijay Krishnarayan**, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation; and **Sir Malcolm Rifkind**, Former Foreign Secretary.

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