

A reliable partner

By **H.E. ROBERTO R. ROY**

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ROBERTO R. ROY has been Panama's Minister of Canal Affairs since 2012. He has an extensive record of Public Service, as a member of the Panama Canal Authority Board of Directors from 1998-2007; Executive Secretary of the Metro de Panamá from 2009-2015 and President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Metro de Panamá, S.A. since January 2015. Among his many contributions to Panama are the recommended improvements to the waterway, leading to the Panama Canal Expansion Program.

Above: Panamax approaching – electric locomotives pull ships through the locks

Traditionally, the visit of a head of state represents an opportunity for assessing strategic objectives and partnerships. As such, President Varela's visit to the United Kingdom is an opportunity for celebrating and improving the links between our economies and our peoples. Panama is not only a friendly partner across the Atlantic, but a nation committed to enhancing world trade and with a great maritime tradition. This extends to opportunities for the tourism industry thanks to our diverse landscapes and strategic location, to an increasingly appealing hub for investors from around the globe. The open Panamanian economy is flexible and investor friendly.

Our most notable contribution to world trade, the Panama Canal, best illustrates Panama's promising trade and investment environment. Since the start of its operations in 1914 to its present day and recent expansion, the Canal has served the world's trade flows with more than a million transits, billions of tons, and great quality service for the supply-chain and logistics industry, closing distances between partners in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

The new expanded Canal brings new business lines through Panama, as for example LNG carriers and containerhips with over 14,000 Teus, triple the previous old canal sizes.

Panama has also boosted its trade practices through international and regional agreements. Since we became part of the WTO in 1997, we have entered into 17 regional trade agreements with different states, as well as with the European Union. Panama also became part of the EU-Central America Association Agreement, improving trade relations across our hemispheres. Additionally, the Panama Colón Free Zone offers incentives and country advantages such as duty free privileges, access to over 2500 established enterprises and operating multinationals that offer their services 24 hours a day to members of the Zone.

The UK is no stranger to all this. In 2017, the UK counted 173 transits through the Canal. U.K exports are on the rise, including beverages (Scotch Whisky), organic chemicals, medical and pharmaceutical products, machinery and transport equipment. In terms of investment the UK was Panama's fourth largest investor, contributing US\$2.6 billion in 2016. Various



UK firms have also taken advantage of Panama's prosperous investment landscape, namely: Aggreko, Biwater, Cable and Wireless, Diageo, GlaxoSmithKline, SabMiller, Solar Century and Unilever.

We are two long standing partners and advocates of free trade. Panama remains committed to this relationship, acknowledging the UK's influence and global leadership.

Looking beyond Europe, both China and the United Arab Emirates are prime examples of how distant economies can improve economic ties. Pending the results of an ongoing feasibility study, Chinese investment could help in the improvement of Panama's regional connections with the development of a rail line between Panama and Costa Rica, and a possible free trade agreement.

At the same time, growing relations with the United Arab Emirates are a second indicator of Panama's growing image in the world as a reliable partner in Latin America. The recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the UAE will allow the establishment of a Chamber of Commerce from Dubai in Panama. Echoing President Varela's invitation at the 2nd Global Business Forum in Dubai earlier this year, we strive to become your logistical hub for Latin America.