



European Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The UK-EU reset

Tuesday 1 July 2025

3.30 pm

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Members present: Lord Ricketts (The Chair); Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Ashton of Upholland; Lord Frost; Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town; Lord Jackson of Peterborough; Baroness Ludford; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Suttie; Duke of Wellington; Lord Whitty.

Evidence Session No. 16

Heard in Public

Questions 175 – 190

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds, Paymaster-General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations), Cabinet Office; Stephen Doughty, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, FCDO; Hermione Gough, EU Director, Cabinet Office; Victoria Billing OBE, Director Europe, FCDO.

Examination of witnesses

Nick Thomas-Symonds, Stephen Doughty, Hermione Gough and Victoria Billing.

Q175 **The Chair:** Welcome to the European Affairs Committee of the House of Lords for the final evidence session of our inquiry into the UK-EU relationship, how far it has gone and where it is going. To wrap it up, we are delighted to have two Ministers to give evidence to us today: Nick Thomas-Symonds, who is the Paymaster-General and Minister for the Cabinet Office, and Stephen Doughty, who is the Minister for Europe and other areas in the FCDO. Accompanying them are Hermione Gough from the Cabinet Office and Victoria Billing from the FCDO. All are very welcome. Thank you very much for your time; it is much appreciated.

We all have questions for you, as you can imagine, but I might start with a broader one to set the context for this session and then our report. In terms of the Government's strategic objective in this rapprochement with the EU, if you succeeded in getting everything that was set out in the 19 May statement, would that be it? Would that then be a steady state with the EU, or would you have ambitions to go further and deeper in the future? A brief overview of that would be very helpful to get us kicked off.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: First, Lord Ricketts, it is a pleasure to appear before your committee again; I think the last time I appeared before this committee was in December. I am delighted to do so and look forward to the discussion and the questions today.

In terms of the summit, and as we now move into what I call the implementation phase, I will just make a couple of distinctions. We have used the term "reset" between the EU and the UK before. I am sure Minister Doughty will be able to talk a bit more about that from a bilateral perspective in the course of the session. I regard the relationship as having been reset and put into a new constructive phase that is very much in our national interest.

We now move into the implementation phase for the new strategic partnership. I believe that would produce a stable situation that would be in the national interest, and for which the Government have a democratic mandate. The manifesto that we were elected on overwhelmingly last year set out the framework for the negotiation around not returning to the single market, customs union or freedom of movement, and things such as the SPS agreement that we would seek to negotiate. Implementing what has been agreed on 19 May would also be the fulfilment of the manifesto pledges, which I believe gives stability to the relationship. As I say, resetting the relationship and its tone is an objective that, through working together with colleagues in the Foreign Office and other departments, has been secured.

Stephen Doughty: Obviously, I concur with all that, but it is now about how we make the other parts work to reinforce the new reset relationship so that it delivers effectively at every level. You can look at it through the lens of many of the bilateral summits and treaty processes that are

coming up. We have an important UK-France summit shortly and a state visit. We have a UK-Poland treaty under way, which we hope will be agreed by the end of the year, and an imminent UK-Germany treaty. We have just had a very successful agreement in relation to Gibraltar.

Also, the day-to-day relationship, not only with the EU but with other key member states, has already transformed the way that we co-operate. As an example, just this morning, I co-ordinated a call with the EU, EU member states and non-member states on our response to the rapidly deteriorating situation in Georgia. This is delivering tangible outcomes in terms of how we work together. It has been a very positive experience over the past few months, particularly since the 19 May summit.

The Chair: We will unpick quite a lot of those issues. Lord Stirrup will start with security and defence.

Q176 **Lord Stirrup:** I will ask a two-part question. First, what difference will any UK participation in the Security Action for Europe initiative make to European defence capabilities in the round and to the UK defence industry? On the latter point, is it just about getting more work, or will it create intellectual property within this country? How do you envisage that progressing?

Secondly, on the security and defence partnership more widely, what practical difference will it make to European defence capabilities? It is clear that there are actions that will provide for much more frequent and regular dialogue, which of course is very welcome, but the test will be how much more European defence capability we actually have as a consequence. What are you looking for that to deliver?

Stephen Doughty: I will take the defence industrial piece first. Clearly, the security and defence partnership that we signed was a prerequisite to participation in what is known as SAFE, and the regulation was agreed afterwards. We welcome efforts to enhance European defence production, not only in and of itself but because of its contribution to NATO and to our collective security. As other Ministers across government have set out, we have a "NATO first" policy, which remains the bedrock of our security.

I see these all as interlocking strands in the same muscle: we build these different strands and the more we flex them, whether in defence industrial co-operation or in what we do together, the muscle becomes stronger. That is essential, as Lord Stirrup knows, in relation to the threats that we face, in the conventional and the hybrid sense, and otherwise. I will come on to particular parts of the SDP agreement and what that will lead to. It is a fact that British defence companies already work across Europe, so it is about enhancing those opportunities to ensure we do not fracture that defence industrial base and, as we have set in our own example with the strategic defence review, to ensure that we are able to generate the capabilities, both conventional and in terms of new technologies, that are needed to respond to the threats.

SAFE is a €150 billion programme. It could lead to significant opportunities for UK defence industries, which will generate more skilled, highly unionised jobs, which will be beneficial for all regions of the UK. You will have seen the important decisions we took in the SDSR, but we hope SAFE will complement that. We are one of the largest exporters of defence equipment in the world, as you know, and that potentially produces hugely beneficial opportunities. Getting agreement on this was a key part of what we set out to achieve on 19 May, but also what we hope to achieve going forward.

To clarify, to be eligible for SAFE, joint purchases have to involve at least two participating countries: one member state with SAFE funding and a second state. We look to be part of that process and very much hope it will deliver results across the board in terms of capability, jobs and defence investment here in the UK and beyond.

On the wider dialogue and what it can deliver, it is worth sharing again with the committee what was included. It will involve six-monthly foreign and security policy dialogues between the Foreign and Defence Secretaries and the high representative, which will steer and oversee the implementation. We will have an annual security and defence dialogue at official levels. We will have regular attendance, we hope, at the Foreign Affairs Council, and a standing invitation to participate in the biannual Schuman Security and Defence Forum.

We have four key, specific dialogues on Russia and Ukraine, the western Balkans, hybrid threats, and the Indo-Pacific, three of which will be held at ministerial level. We are already involved in detailed discussions with both Kaja Kallas and other officials across the EEAS on those areas, and on how we are going to work closely together to align efforts on some challenges. I gave the example just a moment ago of Georgia, which is slightly separate, but, on the western Balkans, we will host the Berlin process later this year, and we are already co-ordinating closely over the situation in Bosnia, the Kosovo-Serbia relationship and a number of other challenges in the region. This is already generating tangible joint working, and I am very positive about where that will lead.

Q177 Baroness Ashton of Upholland: A lot is often said about the EU's current institutional framework being impenetrable and difficult to navigate. I am particularly interested in the third country perspective. Do you think the way it is set up currently works well for the UK and the EU, in particular on security and defence but also more broadly? In other words, do you feel you are able to collaborate, contribute and be part of it, or are there things that you would like to see done better or changed? If so, what?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The EU's internal institutional arrangements are obviously a matter for it, the way the Government works together with the EU really is a cross-government effort. I have led EU-UK talks and negotiations from the Cabinet Office, but it is still a collaborative team effort across government. When particular issues arise—which might be from the Home Office or from the Department for Business and

Trade; it is not just Foreign Office issues—it certainly has not been an issue accessing appropriate commissioners and EU counterparts.

On your broader question as to whether things could be improved in particular areas, in particular in the foreign policy sphere, the security and defence partnership will improve the situation. Minister Doughty can speak more to the Foreign Office and how, in a de facto sense, it has been engaging in talks and discussions on what we would all accept is a very dangerous international picture, particularly in Europe, with the illegal invasion of Ukraine back in 2022. The security and defence partnership, which was signed on 19 May, will assist in structuring and regularising discussions.

Stephen Doughty: To give some more practical examples, we will look at increased secondments between senior officials, as well as enhanced joint training, better information sharing, and consular co-operation in areas where we need to support each other, particularly in crises in third countries. We will work closely on cyber disinformation and other hybrid threats. We will also look at a very wide range of other security challenges, such as space and protecting critical national infrastructure that is crucial to us all and to the European continent, whether that is undersea cabling or energy infrastructure. Our partnership is quite unique in that it goes beyond more traditional areas and new and emerging sectors to climate, irregular migration and health security. This is a deep, broad, ambitious partner, and they describe us, as Baroness Ashton will know, as an essential partner. That is a testament to the nature of the relationship as they see it going forward.

Q178 **Baroness Ludford:** On law enforcement and the common understanding—I am looking at Part 5—there is a lot of talk in paragraphs 49 onwards about aspirations: “scope for reinforcing co-operation”, finalising “pending arrangements” for co-operation, encouraging the development of co-operation, increasing operational co-operation, et cetera. Could you put some flesh on the bones and be more concrete about what it all amounts to? There is a reference to Title VII of Part 3, which is on surrender arrangements. Are there aspirations to get something closer to the European arrest warrant? There is a paragraph about obtaining data, particularly comms data. Will that get a bit closer to mutual recognition with what is called, in the jargon, a European investigation order, which is much speedier than traditional mutual legal assistance?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: It is not about the European arrest warrant; it is about the effectiveness of tackling serious and organised crime across the European continent. In a moment, I will come to specifics that we are now able to share. We can talk about people smuggling in the migration sphere, but if you seriously want to tackle any form of serious and organised crime that goes beyond borders, the reality is you must have law enforcement working beyond borders as well. We would love to have a continent where there is no place where criminals can hide, and that is what the working together and enhanced co-operation is all about.

You quite fairly asked me for specifics. We have agreed to explore sharing facial images and criminal conviction records on third-country nationals. That is a quite specific addition to what we have, but the common understanding and associated talks also reflect a recognition that, if we are to tackle irregular migration, it has to be on a continent-wide basis. There is also a commitment to work together on innovative solutions.

Over the last couple of years, I have visited Europol in The Hague, and our objective is to ensure that, where we can, we share information and expertise that assist us in tracking down criminals. That is clearly of mutual benefit to both the UK and the EU.

Baroness Ludford: You are preaching to the converted, it has to be said, but I am keen for you to be a little more concrete about how you are going to slim down the rather clunky arrangements we have under the TCA compared with what we had when we were in the EU, not least through surrender and getting evidence. Do you think it is possible or likely that we could get access to SIS II—the Schengen Information System database—at least for police data? We cannot do so for immigration data.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Obviously, we are not part of the Schengen area. SIS II is specifically for that.

Baroness Ludford: No, but we always had access to the police data.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: On your broader point, which is about the cumbersome nature of access to information, we want to speed up the exchange of data where we can. I know from back in the very distant past when I was a lawyer—I briefly practised criminal law—that the period immediately after crimes are committed tends to be the time when you can do extraordinarily useful work in tracking down the perpetrator, so that speed of data exchange is hugely important. The straight answer to your question is yes, of course: we are always looking and keeping under review how we can streamline the speed of data exchange.

Q179 **Baroness Suttie:** I would like to turn to the forthcoming negotiations with the EU. Do you expect there to be a timetable for delivering agreements on the various issues and the common understanding? Do you expect to negotiate and agree issues on an individual basis, or is it likely to be a question of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We will move forward as a package. Forgive me, Lord Ricketts, I do not have a timetable to give you today. I have to resort to the four words “as soon as possible”.

The Chair: I am familiar with those words.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am sure you are, and I am sure the committee is too. This is where we need to move to. That said, certain things have a particular urgency. It would not surprise you to hear that defence is one of them. At the 19 May summit, you will have seen

President von der Leyen and the Prime Minister talking about the urgency of the defence issues. We want to move forward with the package.

On your question around when things can be delivered, of course we want to be in a position to do that. Take the SPS agreement: it will not surprise the committee to hear that we want to see people receive the benefit of that as soon as possible. We have also agreed to annual summits between the UK and the EU, which will be milestones. There are things that will need to be done on either side. Clearly, the EU has its own internal procedures where it needs to agree mandates for particular things. That is a matter for the EU. For the SPS agreement specifically, there will need to be a piece of primary legislation, which will go through both Houses. There are things that need to happen on both sides but, broadly speaking, we would like to see the British public getting the benefits of this deal as soon as we can.

Baroness Suttie: Can I push you a little further on that? Would you expect the SPS agreement to be part of that package, or could it be negotiated separately?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: It will be negotiated across the board. It is obviously a different phase, but just as I led negotiations from the Cabinet Office politically, I will still be leading from the centre in terms of the implementation right across the different areas. As I say, there are particular things around defence that are urgent that Minister Doughty can speak to.

Stephen Doughty: The SAFE discussion is live and urgent, as Nick says. We are keen to conclude it as soon as possible. It is very necessary, given the challenges we face.

The Chair: It would be surprising if we were on the cusp of doing a SAFE deal and it was held hostage until we had settled a youth experience scheme or something like that, but we are not at risk of that.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: No.

Q180 **Lord Frost:** Minister, you referred just now to the democratic mandate in your manifesto to negotiate this reset deal. The manifesto, of course, refers to a veterinary agreement, which is different from what we ended up with, which is effectively being a non-voting member of the internal market for agri-foods. I am intrigued by how you are able to sustain the position that these agreements on SPS and electricity do not breach your single market red line, as in the manifesto.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I have the manifesto in front of me, Lord Frost; I brought it with me, as you would expect. I remember talking about this regularly on the television before the election. Although you and I of all people, Lord Frost, would understand the distinction, the truth is that "SPS" and "veterinary agreement" are used interchangeably. I frequently used SPS on the television before the election, so it was absolutely clear what was meant, but they are used interchangeably.

To your second point on the SPS agreement, it is correct to say that the position is that we would be able to contribute to the formulation of European laws. You are right that it is not, nor should it be, like being an EU member state, but we are making a sovereign decision to go into a position of common alignment. We are doing that because we believe it is in the national interest to do so. It is why you will have seen, I am sure, the remarkable level of business support for an SPS agreement. Supermarkets, retailers and many other sectors are speaking out in favour of it. Supermarkets talk about it bearing down on prices.

We have also been very particular about the role of the European Court of Justice. The dispute resolution mechanism works with a panel, which would refer questions solely about the interpretation of European law to the European Court of Justice, which then refers them back. However, it is not binding on the panel as to the overall decision in the dispute. When two high-alignment jurisdictions make a sovereign decision to go into common alignment you obviously want to minimise disputes, but the nature of trade—by the way, our trading relationship with the EU is so deep and so wide, it is about £800 billion a year—means these things will happen. It was also about making sure that we had that independent arbitration mechanism in place. If you are to enter into trade agreements with other countries, you will get those arbitration mechanisms, and so you should.

To the point you are drawing me on around the red lines, in the few weeks leading up to the summit, the operation of the post-Brexit independent trade policy was aptly demonstrated with the UK FTA with India, the economic deal with the United States, and then securing this deal with the European Union.

Lord Frost: I appreciate that, and you are right to say that we have taken a sovereign decision to go in, but I suppose you could say it is a sovereign decision to give up a bit of sovereignty. I am intrigued by the papers the Swiss have just released about their deal, which includes a food safety arrangement that is quite similar to what you have negotiated. It says it will remove non-tariff barriers, that there will be exemptions for animal welfare GMOs, and that the rules will be subject to dynamic adoption, but there will be arbitration with the Courts of Justice ruling exactly as you described. It says these arrangements allow Switzerland to participate “in the EU internal market”. Indeed, throughout the papers, and in fact in the very first words of the Swiss deal, it says, “These sectoral agreements allow Switzerland to participate in certain areas of the EU internal market”. Do you think the Swiss do not understand what they have agreed to, or do you think you have agreed something different from what the Swiss have agreed?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We have a different and bespoke arrangement. We do not have freedom of movement, for example, which is one of the four freedoms. I do not accept that the youth experience scheme is freedom of movement. In the past nine years, over the course of the debate, I have spoken many times to the Swiss ambassador and others

about their model. You are drawing me back to the days when we used to talk about Swiss, Norwegian and other models. The reality is that we have a bespoke model for the United Kingdom. It is distinct. I stand to be corrected, of course, but I think it is the best deal for any country that is not a member state and is outside EFTA. As a past negotiator, I am sure you will understand the challenge was to come back with something particularly suitable for the United Kingdom. That is exactly what we have done.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: You may very well be saved by Baroness Taylor of Stevenage.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I do not think I will need to be saved from you, Lord Jackson; I hope not anyway.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: Welcome, Ministers. Mr Thomas-Symonds, can I commend your excellent biography of Harold Wilson, which I have read?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Thank you. That is always a good start.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: That is the nice bit.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: It is ending, though.

Q181 **Lord Jackson of Peterborough:** I read your evidence to the committee on 10 December, and quite reasonably you said you could not go into further detail because it was pre the negotiations. You actually said, "I am not going to get into this, because, frankly, we have to start the negotiation to obtain the granular details", et cetera. But you will understand that, as the principal body in both Houses looking at scrutiny and oversight of European Union matters, we are testing the efficacy of the policy in the correct way.

On dynamic alignment, mention is made of a joint governance mechanism. What does this mean in practice? Do we have any idea how much the UK financial contribution will be? What does "decision-shaping" mean? In the agreement, we had reference to the opportunity for the UK to contribute to "decision-shaping" of EU law, to which it is obliged to dynamically align. Those are all areas which are rather opaque and unclear at the moment. Indeed, the brief, which is excellent if I may say, says, "The Government have not so far set out any detailed information on how it envisages that a system of dynamic alignment would work". Indeed, in his statement, the Prime Minister talked about a process in Parliament as to how the rules would be applied. It is very unclear and very difficult for us in this House and on this committee to judge the efficacy of what dynamic alignment means for business, commerce, government, and the people of this country.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will start with your first point. In the early months, we needed the new European Commission to be in place to have a partner to negotiate with. That was the issue there, which is why I took that position before the committee. I would still suggest that 10 months

after the election is not a bad period in which to have secured this new arrangement.

In terms of the cost, it is the cost of the administration of the SPS, but there are estimates as to the benefit of the SPS to the UK economy. We estimate the emissions trading system linkage plus the SPS to be worth up to £9 billion a year to the UK economy by 2040, but that is just a particular part of this arrangement.

I see decision-shaping as participation in particular meetings. Again, I am speaking before we have negotiated the legal text, exceptions and other things that will now need to take place. Some details will be for those negotiations, but the SPS will not happen without an enormous role for Parliament. A piece of primary legislation will go through and get the full scrutiny of both Houses. That mechanism will work in terms of the laws we pass through Parliament, and the SIs and so on that would be required.

The issues that you challenge me on, Lord Jackson—you are quite right to do so—are things that we will move to negotiate in the legal text with the EU. There will then be a piece of primary legislation in Parliament, so there will be detailed answers to those specific questions that you asked. Your colleagues in the Lords and in the Commons will be able to comment on, debate and scrutinise those issues fully before the SPS agreement comes into effect.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: I have a very brief follow-up. Accepting that the de facto jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice is not a red line surely has an impact on your other red lines. One has to look at what will come forward in respect of dynamic alignment to, say, the Commons; what ability will the Commons have to say, "Actually, this is not in the UK's best interest to dynamically align because we're not innovative, we're not doing research, and we're not developing a market-competitive position because we are following dynamic alignment"?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: In the first instance, there will be a negotiation for legal text. We will look for certain carve-outs and exceptions where we believe it is in our national interest. That is before you get to what the SPS agreement is in practice.

You made a comment about de facto jurisdiction, which it will not surprise you to know I disagree with, because the role of the European Court of Justice was very carefully limited and prescribed in this agreement. I wanted to make sure that the arbitration panel was independent. I observe that the arrangement is a feature of any free trade agreement you wish to enter into. To go back to Lord Frost's earlier question, we can now do this outside the European Union with that independent trade policy.

That is the point about disputes: if you make, as I suggest we have, a sovereign choice to go into a position of high alignment, you hope to minimise disputes but the reality is that, with such a deep and broad

trading relationship, there will be disputes; that is just the nature of how international trade is. I cannot envisage what they might be, but where there are disputes, as there are today under different trading arrangements we have, we would pursue the United Kingdom's interests fearlessly before that independent arbitration tribunal. I repeat: when you enter into FTAs or trading arrangements, both sides take a sovereign decision to be bound by an independent process to settle disputes.

Lord Whitty: If we go a bit further on dynamic alignment in the SPS, I may be slightly more sympathetic than Lord Jackson, but there are still obscurities to me.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: That is a very low base.

Q182 **Lord Whitty:** It is clear that industries on both sides appreciate the alignment in relation to exports and imports. That is an enormous benefit, but internal political pressures here, from agricultural interests, animal welfare or consumer protection, may well be different. Do the Government intend to allow for such specific exceptions? If so, how does that square with us trying to reach an agreement at all costs on the SPS?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The agreements are in our national interest. We pursue what the national interest is, whether it is what we agreed on 19 May or in this implementation phase. Again, carve-outs are not a controversial or unusual suggestion. That is precisely what we would expect to enter into now. We will pursue what we believe is in our national interest.

To your wider point around dealing with and listening to the sector, that is precisely what we will do. I would also observe that business and sectoral responses to the SPS are overwhelmingly positive and seen as simplifying trade very significantly. Take the export health certificate: it costs about £200 per consignment, not per truck, so you could literally have trade using trucks where thousands of pounds are taken off the cost of that particular trade. There is a real economic benefit and opportunity there, which is why it has been so widely welcomed.

Lord Whitty: I can see that in relation to trade explicitly, but you referred to carve-outs or exceptions. Is there anything within the area of SPS where you think we will have to include clear exceptions?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We will pursue carve-outs. In my work, both with the sector and other government departments, I will certainly look at what will be the most important for us to secure. There is not that much time left before recess, but I will do my best to deliver quickly. That is certainly work that will be ongoing.

Q183 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** I will turn to the potential implications of the fishing agreement, which the newspapers seem to think was the UK being caught on the hop. Last week, we took evidence from the fish takers and exporters, and we heard both the good and the more difficult about this. Do you have any concerns that access that has been agreed for EU fishing vessels might not only affect our fleet and the work they do

but hinder our other policy objectives—for example, those relating to the environment and energy?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The objectives were to secure a good deal for our fishers and, alongside that, to ensure that we upheld the highest standards in terms of stewardship of the marine environment. For example, this Government have been moving forward with the process of further designation for marine protected areas. We will continue to do that. We think that is hugely important in itself but also so that we can continue to be a world leader in terms of stewardship of the oceans.

On fishing specifically—I speak carefully; Lord Frost knows this very well—we were in a position where by next year, 2026, there would have been a shift from what was known as a five-year adjustment period with an additional 25% quota to annual negotiations. The multiyear arrangement, which I flagged in public before another Select Committee some months ago, gives stability. In that period, the SPS agreements are of benefit to our fishers. I am not sure whether Scottish salmon fishers, for example, were represented before this committee, but they have set out the particular benefits around various veterinary certificates not being required. There is the benefit of that additional, easier market access. We export just under 70%—around 67%—of our catch to the EU, so that is a significant benefit in terms of market access. To ensure that we can use this period of stability to the advantage of our fishers, we have pledged to invest £360 million over that period for the upgrading of the fleet and for investment in our coastal communities, so that we have that medium-term stability and better and easier market access.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: You referred to stability. Last week, two out of the three witnesses felt there would have had a better outcome for them if they were able to negotiate year by year, but I appreciate the Government have taken a different view.

You then referred to the coastal award of £360 million over a long period. The first time I heard the upgrading of the fleet mentioned was by you then; I had not spotted it in any of the documents, so I would be very pleased to hear a bit more about that, and about how the money will be used. When you gave evidence in the House of Commons, you made it clear that there would be co-operation with the fishing industry to see how the money could be worked out. It was certainly from the point of view of having a co-production. Can you tell me more about improving the fleet, which I can see would be of direct benefit to the fish takers, and where this money really goes to?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: To your point about process, it is hugely important that we hear the voice of our fishing fleet and fishing communities. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs leads on dealing with stakeholders in the fishing sector, but I also made a point of meeting organisations prior to the summit, as I am sure you can imagine, as I thought it was also important for me to hear from them. This can be summarised in terms of new technology, equipment to modernise the fleet, training, skills, work on revitalising coastal

communities to attract more tourism, and promotion of our seafood exports. There are certain types of shellfish—if I remember correctly it is those in class B waters—that it will be possible to export into the EU market which cannot at the moment. Promotion of our exports is really important but, to your central point on that investment, it is critical that we hear the priorities of our fishers and, indeed, our coastal communities.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Thank you for the extra information.

Q184 **Duke of Wellington:** Minister, when you last came to the committee a few months ago, I seem to remember that what was then called the youth mobility scheme and is now called the youth experience scheme did not seem to be a very high priority for the Government. I was very pleased to see it mentioned in the common understanding, and it now seems to be a higher priority—I hope I am right about that. If so, can you give us any indication of what sort of agreement you hope to negotiate in terms of the numbers and, of course, access to universities both ways?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: In answer to that final point, it has to be a reciprocal scheme. It is really important for young British people to be given the opportunity to experience travel and different cultures; that is a very positive thing. On the parameters of the scheme, I have talked about a scheme that is smart, controlled and balanced. That is important, and those are the principles that we have in the common understanding. As I indicated earlier, we will move forward into an implementation phase. I envisage the youth experience scheme working rather like the 13 schemes that we already have, that are—in so far as I see—working perfectly reasonably and giving perfectly good opportunities, both for young British people to go abroad and in terms of welcoming people here.

The parameters around those schemes are very important as well. They are specific in terms of numbers. There is no ability to bring dependents or access public funds, for example, but they are very particular, specific schemes that work very well for both sides. I would very much see our youth experience scheme in that light: one that is both about welcoming young people here who will make a contribution and giving really important opportunities for young British people.

Duke of Wellington: And on universities?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: On universities, we will look at working towards association with Erasmus+. Again, the view that we take is always around careful analysis of value for money; we would not make a general contribution into the EU budget. I have already mentioned on the SPS agreement the specific purpose of the cost of administration. The previous Government—by the way, I very much supported it from opposition, so it is not a criticism—re-acceded to the Horizon programme. They chose to pay in specifically for that purpose, and they were right to do so because that research collaboration is hugely important. So the

view we would take on Erasmus+ would be exactly that, looking at the value-for-money case moving forward.

We are also open to learning how existing schemes across the United Kingdom can work in tandem with any arrangements. In Wales, for example, where Minister Doughty and I are from, there is a very particular programme that it uses which is very successful, and we can learn lessons from it. So that is definitely the direction that we will look to move in, but as I say, we will carefully evaluate the value-for-money case.

Lord Frost: We are making good progress, so I have a quick follow-up on this. You referred to the 13 schemes we already have, and one feature of those schemes, of course, is that they all have a cap on numbers. I think you were choosing your words quite carefully, and you did not use the word “cap”, although you did say they were specific in terms of numbers. The agreement with the EU does not use “cap”, so I am just wondering whether you can envisage an agreement with the EU that does not have a cap?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I envisage it with a cap, Lord Frost, which is the same as the 13 schemes, each of which also has a cap.

Lord Frost: Will there be no Youth Experience Scheme if there is not a cap on numbers?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I expect there to be a cap on numbers—there is the word “cap”.

The Chair: I note the letter that you sent to Emily Thornberry’s committee a couple of weeks ago, and by the way did not copy to us.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I can only apologise, Lord Ricketts, if that has happened.

The Chair: Did you use “cap” in that letter?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Yes, absolutely, and just to Lord Frost’s challenge to me, which is a perfectly fair one, I have repeatedly used “cap”, to be fair.

Lord Frost: You have; I am sorry.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: It is a perfectly fair challenge from Lord Frost because of the earlier words I used. I have used “cap”; it is a capped scheme, and that is precisely what the other 13 are: they have a cap.

The Chair: There was quite widespread disappointment in the arts and culture sector that the 19 May summit did not make any further progress on touring artists, and in fact tended to put that in rather conditional, “As soon as possible” terms, but it did not sound like being very soon. Is there any prospect of making any faster progress on touring artists?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: On the touring artists issue, you will have seen that there is a reference to touring artists and cultural exchanges. That is certainly something we want to make progress on. One of the things I have said previously is that this is the first of a series of annual summits, and throughout that process you obviously hope to make further progress. Certainly, touring artists, which is another of the things mentioned in the manifesto, is certainly something we want to continue to make progress on.

The Chair: Lord Stirrup kindly chaired a session the committee had on financial services in my absence, and therefore may I turn to you, Lord Stirrup, for a question on that?

Q185 **Lord Stirrup:** Can I ask what benefits, if any, the services sector in general might expect to see flowing from the UK-EU reset and the summit agreement? Some of the evidence we took suggested that in the financial services sector, for example, expectations were pretty low. On the other hand, there was a widespread view that improvements in things such as data exchange flows, and professional mobility in particular, would be most welcome. Is there any prospect of movement on those sorts of issues, or is it all going to be too difficult?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: There are a number of points. First, if you look at the impact that the signing of the common understanding and the Security and Defence Partnership had on business confidence post 19 May, that was definitely positive. There is obviously a real sense of positivity and opportunity in the general opportunities that are here for the economy.

Specifically on services, we already have dedicated dialogues that exist on regulatory co-operation and indeed other matters. Specifically, there is the issue of mutual recognition of professional qualifications, which would obviously be of significant benefit to our services sector. Our economy is 80% or 81% services, so that would obviously make a very significant difference. Rather like the previous point from Lord Ricketts about touring artists, the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is something we want to continue to pursue and make progress on within this summit process. It really would make a significant difference to the services sector going forward.

There are also things around looking at temporary stays for businesspeople, for example, and trying to look at that process and make it easier, which is another thing that comes up very regularly when we speak to the services sector. So I suggest there are some distinct things that would be of benefit to that sector.

Lord Stirrup: You have mentioned quite often this afternoon that there has been a lot of talk about increased talks, discussions and dialogues. I am not decrying that because they are extremely important as a starting point, but they are only a starting point and not an end in themselves. I am not asking you to reveal your hand, but could you reassure us that you have, if you like, a list of objectives you are setting out to achieve

through these negotiations, and a system for tracking where you are with each of them and what you are achieving?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Absolutely; I believe in discussion with a purpose, and we have these new strategic dialogues. I have no intention of having talking shops for the sake of it—absolutely not. They are about achieving objectives. In services specifically, it is around mutual recognition of professional qualifications, which is in our manifesto, and for which we have a mandate to seek. The straight answer is yes, of course we want to achieve objectives through them.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: Just following up that point, there has been a lot of criticism that fisheries and the 12-year deal was not leveraged as well as it could have been in the negotiations. Am I taking it from your remarks to Lord Stirrup that mutual recognition of professional qualifications and touring artists is now a priority for the Government? You have alluded to the importance of the former for the wider economy, and it seems to me sensible.

We have given up quite a bit in terms of fisheries, and it is hard to see where we have a commensurate quid pro quo. I know work has already begun with architects, but it has not really developed further in terms of the legal profession, accountancy and management consultancy. Is that now a priority of this Government going forward in the negotiations?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: They have always been a priority from the general election because they were pledges in the general election manifesto to seek to secure. Obviously, Lord Jackson, we are going to disagree on the advantages of the outcome for fishers; you come from a very different perspective that I perfectly respect. It is not a matter of changing priorities; it is about continuing to pursue those things that were in our manifesto that we would seek to negotiate. They were both in the manifesto, and obviously we will continue to do that throughout the summit process.

The Chair: Members and witnesses have been so remarkably disciplined that, subject to votes, we should have a few minutes of extra time. If members have other pressing issues that they would like to pursue with Ministers, please give me a signal. Next, I am going to come to Baroness Hayter on the important issue of migration.

Q186 **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town:** Could you outline the progress in meeting the Government's objective of working closer with the EU to tackle irregular migration? Also—something that has happened more recently—could you say whether what we read is a one in, one out, and if that is the case, is that part of that development?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: There are two aspects in terms of the broader point about tackling irregular migration. First, there is the point of principle and a recognition in the common understanding that this is a continent-wide challenge that has to be dealt with—and it is. People who are smuggled by these vile people-smuggling gangs come on journeys of,

frankly, thousands of miles. I was in Bulgaria the week before last, which has a border with Turkey. I learned that although Bulgaria is a long way away from here, none the less it is one of the routes by which people eventually find their way into the English Channel. I was viewing some of the work that started under the previous Government and is continuing under this Government in terms of practical work on sharing equipment and expertise. I saw in action, as it were, that sharing of priority and trying to deal with that particular issue. I will turn to Stephen in a moment because he can talk as well about the bilateral space, and the point you are asking about the Home Office.

The second point to make is that the additional and quicker things, such as working together to share information, and particular tools—for example, I was talking about things like facial recognition earlier with Baroness Ludford—is important too. I will pass over to Stephen to talk a bit more about the work that he has been doing bilaterally.

Stephen Doughty: I just add that as well as the discussions with the EU directly—by the way, this is also referencing the security and defence partnership—we have been having extensive conversations with a number of EU member states, as well as non-EU member states, on this issue. It forms part of every single one of my bilateral engagements.

We have a new joint action plan with Germany, and we have new migration deals with Serbia, Kosovo, Slovenia and Slovakia. I was in Poland just the week before last, discussing a range of matters with its interior ministry, including the challenge to its frontier and how migration is being weaponised from outside, including across the Belarus border. I had previously visited some facilities in Lithuania as well to understand the technological aspects to how we are defeating those who are trying to cross the borders.

We are also showing leadership in terms of the co-ordination on this. We held the Organised Immigration Crime Summit in March, where the PM and Home Secretary hosted their global counterparts. France agreed to launch a special unit to prevent small boat launches; Germany agreed to strengthen its laws against those facilitating smuggling to the UK; we have a UK-Italy taskforce targeting smugglers' financial flows. The Prime Minister visited Albania when he was in the EPC, and of course, there were the agreements that we made at the summit that Nick has already referred to. So a wide range of complementary measures are being taken here, but it is about dealing with the whole journey and tackling those who are enabling.

On top of that, we are about to launch our new sanctions regime on irregular migration, which will target those who are involved in this trade. Again, we are working with our European counterparts on how they can perhaps replicate some of the measures within that, and work with us on information sharing, going back to those wider points we shared earlier on about who we target and the sort of nodes of this, whether those are the ones shipping and supplying the boats or facilitating the gangs. We have also been doing extensive work on serious and organised crime and

those links with people trafficking, which can be in a whole series of other areas, and of course how those different criminal networks interact with each other and facilitate.

Lastly, we also mentioned earlier that the UK will host the Berlin Process later on this year. Migration will form a key part of what we attempt to agree there, working with the western Balkans countries, particularly given the routes through the Balkans which can end in small boat crossings across the channel.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: With all the travel you are doing, I do not know whether you are going to see Wales at all.

Stephen Doughty: Actually, I make it back pretty much most weekends.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: This is absolutely not a criticism, but it sounds as if there is an awful lot of talking going on. My two questions really are, is it now even further than talking and you are actually seeing things happen already? The second question is, do you think all this stuff that you are now describing is because of our reset—our new approach? In other words, are most of the things that the two of you described new and as a result of this good will, or whatever you call it?

Stephen Doughty: I can genuinely say that it absolutely is. I would say a stark contrast between the previous Government and this Government is that we are not pursuing some ideological endeavour here. We are pursuing things that are in the national interest that deliver on growth, security, tackling irregular migration, energy co-operation and our shared foreign policy priorities. Everything that we are doing, whether that is in a bilateral relationship or what we are doing with the EU directly, is focused on those.

Just to take a different area: growth, for example. We have secured a £250 million investment into Rolls-Royce small modular nuclear reactors from Czechia, investment from the Polish InPost logistics company and the Rheinmetall deal in relation to defence industrial production. I visited the Spanish company Iberdrola, which is investing billions into the renewable energy sector in the UK, particularly in Scotland. So there are really tangible results from this. Myself, the Foreign Secretary, Mr Thomas-Symonds and others have been to pretty much the whole of Europe. I have visited about 20 countries myself just in the last year, and we got up to about 30. These new relationships, with a new atmosphere of trust, sharing of information and sharing of priorities, are genuinely delivering now across all those spheres, with more to come. That goes back to what Nick said right at the beginning, that this is now about taking it from reset to delivery. We are already delivering but there will be lots more to come.

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: I have a quick question on immigration. I am delighted to hear about your air miles. You did not

really answer the question about one in, one out, but someone might come back to that. What is the official reason that Ministers did not agree to support the nine other countries that were looking at derogations or reform of the European Convention on Human Rights? That is my first quick question, and the second one is, what happened in Albania? It seemed to be an intelligence failure where the Government were trying to seek a third party for referrals of asylum seekers, and it did not work out.

Stephen Doughty: We are co-operating very closely with Albania, and as I said, that is going to form a key part of our process at the Berlin Process. Forgive me, what was your previous question about the ECHR?

Lord Jackson of Peterborough: Different countries with different traditions that have not always been quite as hard line as others on immigration have decided that it is worth looking at reform of the ECHR and maybe derogation of some of its provisions. The UK has not been included in that, and I just wondered why that was.

Stephen Doughty: We are committed to the ECHR, but obviously I would direct you to what the Lord Chancellor said in her Committee of Ministers speech on 18 June where she said that discussion on the future of the convention needs to happen among ECHR member states. We have had 75 years of success with it, but there are pressing challenges facing our societies, and the Lord Chancellor set out our agenda very clearly in that regard.

The Chair: Just on one in, one out, the press seem to have decided that there is going to be an agreement with the French on a returns agreement next week, which would be interesting, especially if it is not part of an EU one. Can you give us any guidance on the reports that we are reading?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Obviously we cannot anticipate what might or might not be agreed at the very important UK-France summit next week. All I would say is that we are working very closely with France on the channel; there is no doubt about that. In a previous life and a previous role in opposition, I have been down to Dover and across the channel and have seen exactly what the two law enforcement jurisdictions are seeking to do in terms of preventing people being in great danger at sea in these very small craft. We obviously want to take action on this, and we are always working closely with the French and looking to deepen co-operation on what we can both do in terms of this issue.

The Chair: You bring back my previous life as well, Minister, thank you very much.

Q187 **Baroness Ludford:** I have two short questions. First, how would you get a returns agreement with France as an EU country without getting access to the Eurodac database? Secondly, on illegal working by irregular migrants, there has been a lot of publicity in the press about food delivery companies and those horrible speeding e-bikes, and those bikes being left outside asylum hotels. Is anyone considering that if you

allowed asylum seekers the legal right to work—which is coming up in this House with the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill—it would actually undermine the organised smuggling gangs, which is what we all agree needs to be done?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: There are two points there. First, the problem in terms of the right to work is that it becomes a pull factor, and obviously you have to be extremely careful about that, but that is not government policy. Secondly, law enforcement absolutely has to deal with illegal working, which is precisely what the Government's position is.

In terms of the first part of your question, which is the balance between what is European Union competence and what you are able to do bilaterally, we are always striking that balance. There are a lot of things at an EU level in terms of the relationship with Europol, as I have already mentioned, which is hugely important in terms of tackling people smuggling. These are not competing priorities; they reinforce each other. What we are able to gain from information and working with the EU reinforces what we can do bilaterally with France. I am afraid it is just the case of the world we live in that the people who end up in the Pas-de-Calais and across other parts of the French coast have usually arrived there via routes of thousands of miles. That upstream working of disrupting the people-smuggling routes is something that we have to and do work with alongside dealing with the immediate issue of the boats in the channel.

Lord Frost: Just briefly on this point, we want an agreement with the French on channel crossings and related questions, and the French were the main demandeur on fisheries; do you think it might have been better not to have conceded everything on fisheries while you were still negotiating an agreement with the French on returns?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We did not concede everything on fisheries, Lord Frost. You and I will have to disagree on the outcome and how we judge it. In terms of the work we are doing at the moment, this is a shared priority, not just for the UK and France—although the UK and France obviously have a very particular issue in relation to the channel. One of the whole purposes of the common understanding is a recognition that it is not just about one or two countries but a continent-wide problem. Without co-operation, we do not stand any chance of busting the people-smuggling gangs.

Q188 Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I was thinking that, lovely though it is to travel around the world, and I certainly did a lot of it, it is always a lot easier if you can sit down with your 27 colleagues once a month and work through the issues. It is a shame those days have gone. I worry most of all about the economy and trying to deal with the fact that the figures suggest we have lost about 4% of GDP as a consequence of Brexit. There will be variations on that number, but it is still huge. One of the aspirations for the ongoing reset is how to address this, of which this is a small part so far. Although defence and security are incredibly important, it was always going to be at some level easier because we are

so important in that field and in that world to our European and American partners.

Can you give us a taste of what your ambitions would be by the next election for where we might have been able to do more to address some of the economic challenges created? Specifically thinking about Europe, I know that we have done a lot with India and other trade agreements—I am not suggesting otherwise—but are there other things that you would like to be able to have done in terms of the relationship with the EU?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Some of them have already emerged in the course of this discussion; my answer to Lord Stirrup earlier about services is a very good example. Mutual recognition of professional qualifications and the wider point about a mutual recognition agreement is not a secret. Also, in terms of energy, for example, we have managed to stabilise the energy chapter in the trade and co-operation agreement. You have seen Octopus Energy come out and say that there is potential to reduce energy bills. There is the enormous potential of investment in the North Sea; only in recent weeks I was at the Viking Link interconnector, which runs between Lincolnshire and Denmark, seeing the real potential to have a much more efficient, effective electricity trading arrangement between the EU and the UK. Stephen has already discussed participation in SAFE, which has an imperative in terms of defence and security. Again, the defence sector has been speaking in favour of that from a jobs and economy point of view as well. There is the SPS agreement, and the linkage of the emissions trading system, which also means we can secure an exemption to the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism, which is worth £700 million in taxes that firms will not have to pay. In direct answer to your question, Baroness Ashton, these are all areas where pushing forward is really important but will also be economically important.

Stephen Doughty: I add, looking at some individual investments that have been made, a number of which I have touched on already, that Italian investment to the UK that the Prime Minister announced back in September was £500 million. We have a new deal for Urenco on nuclear fuel to France, and there is a Portuguese drone manufacturer that is going to develop 1,000 new jobs in the UK, so these are all very significant. I know they are all in defence, but they are across some of our key sectors, and they genuinely are as a result of the kind of atmosphere that we are creating for business here, more generally as a Government, but also that new and refreshed relationship with countries individually and more broadly, and the important role we are playing with UKEF, investing in infrastructure projects and so on, which will have huge benefits for jobs and business back here in the UK.

This is a team sport across the whole Government, and we are working very closely with colleagues in DBT and elsewhere to identify the opportunities. The Government are acting as an engine for that growth and for those jobs because that is fundamentally what we are about as a Government.

Q189 Lord Stirrup: There is fairly widespread agreement that the European members of NATO, as well as improving their defence capabilities more widely, should be investing in procuring and operating at least some of those strategic capabilities which to date we have relied upon the United States for, and which are beyond the capacity of any single nation to be able to afford. In that regard, we have a difficulty in co-operating with the EU because the EU's processes for third countries do not allow for full strategic partnerships. The EU has a difficulty in that some of its members are rather disobliging on defence issues. There have been proposals, for example from the Bruegel think tank in Brussels for new, separate mechanisms that would square this particular circle. Are the Government examining and/or pursuing any of these innovative solutions to what are urgent problems?

Stephen Doughty: I totally recognise what you are referring to. The first thing is that NATO is the bedrock of our security, as you know, and the transatlantic relationship in capabilities is utterly crucial to the safety and security of this country and indeed for the European continent and will continue to be so. That is very important to say because, much as we are rightfully developing and deepening our relationships, not only with the EU but with individual member states and non-EU member states on these issues, that transatlantic relationship is at the forefront and must remain so.

Lord Stirrup: But presumably you would also agree that strengthening European capabilities is fundamental to securing that transatlantic relationship?

Stephen Doughty: Absolutely, and the UK and Europe both offer a huge amount to the NATO family. Actually, that was one of the great successes of the NATO summit in The Hague just last week in terms of the commitments and the unity that we saw, but also that recognition that we have to adapt to and invest in particularly new capabilities, whether that is in drone manufacture or in response to hybrid techniques and conventional weaponry. Again, I am very clear that we are a leading light in that, whether it is in terms of the armaments factories that the Secretary of State for Defence has announced or in terms of our commitment to major investments in our air force, and so on.

Obviously, there are unique arrangements in relation to both SAFE and other European programmes. I know there are a number of other interesting proposals out there, and we will look at all proposals that can help strengthen European defence capability and get the resources where they need to be because the challenges we face are immense.

In that regard, I also pray in aid to our relationship with Ukraine because our co-operation with Ukraine is not just one way; it is a two-way co-operation in terms of what Ukraine has experienced, for example in drone warfare, on the battlefield, in cyber-attacks and hybrid attacks. We as Europeans collectively need to learn from that, and co-operating with the best expertise and innovation in somewhere like Ukraine, or indeed the experience that Moldova has had in responding to a Russian threat, is

going to be absolutely crucial going forward. We are going to act as a leading light in that, working with our NATO partners, the EU, and in different arrangements like the JEF and so on. I see all these things, fundamentally, as mutually complementary.

The Chair: I will wrap up with a short question to each of the two Ministers which will be useful for our report from a procedural point of view, in a way. First, Mr Thomas-Symonds, on the relationship between the current process we have running with the EU after 19 May and the TCA review, which is sitting there in the treaty as a mechanism, to what extent is the dynamic that you have outlined following on from the 19 May summit overtaking and overlaying that TCA review, or will that still be an important moment?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The objective, coming into office, if we were lucky enough to do that, was always to get ahead of the TCA review and not to wait until the TCA review to make changes. We have already secured a very substantial change to the existing TCA by stabilising the energy chapter, so this is very much ahead of that now, and that becomes part of this process. But the objective was always to reset the relationship and build a new strategic partnership to get ahead. There were different conceptions as to what that review was: was it a largely technical review as to how the TCA was working, or not? So, I suggest that that has been overtaken by what has happened, and it is the implementation of what we have agreed here, some of which involves a change to the TCA—the energy chapter is just one example that we want to push forward.

Q190 **The Chair:** Mr Doughty, and perhaps Mr Thomas-Symonds, what you have described is a considerable intensification of the negotiation process with the EU and, in decision-shaping, quite a lot of engagement upstream with member states through bilateral capitals. Are you confident we have the human resources that we need in place, both in the mission in Brussels and in embassies, not just the number of people but with the right skills? I was interested to see from the figures that were kindly supplied to us for the mission in Brussels, for example, that there were a very large number of Foreign Office people but not very many from other civil service departments, which is probably the reverse of what it would have been 10 or 15 years ago.

Are we skilled up and do we have the resources after the rather tight spending round settlements on both Cabinet Office and the FCDO to staff and resource this acceleration of process adequately?

Stephen Doughty: Obviously, you cannot simply always rest on existing structures, and we are going through a number of processes within the FCDO at the moment. But I am confident, and I am reliably informed we have around 2,500 across the Europe network. Victoria, is that correct?

Victoria Billing: In the whole Europe network, country-based staff and UK-based staff, it is about 2,500. They are not all just working on

Europe; they are delivering those growth deals, security and everything else.

Stephen Doughty: Overall, I think we have 6,100 officials who work on or with an interest in European issues—the so-called Europe cadre—and we are also investing a huge amount in training, equipping and developing them across different government departments. Notwithstanding what you said about UKMis itself, certainly my experience of engaging with the bilateral embassies is that there is very close working across the platform with colleagues from DBT, the Home Office, the MoJ, other specialised agencies and so on, and that is hugely impressive to see. They are very much focused now on the Government's missions and on the goals that the Prime Minister has set out in the Plan for Change. So I am very confident and hugely impressed by what I have seen across the network; I am sure you feel the same, Nick.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I absolutely agree, but I just want to finish on this. Lord Ricketts, you made the point about the letter to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Commons not being copied to this committee, which my officials and I have noted and will take back. I hope you do not take it as intentional in any sense, and that you take my appearances here as my evidence of the respect in which I hold the committee, and I am sure I will be back in due course.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We are mindful of the fact we are the only committee in Parliament that is purely dedicated to relations with European affairs, and so obviously we are grateful to be copied in and involved in the correspondence that goes on with the Commons as well.

Most of all, however, I want to thank both Ministers and the accompanying officials for being with us through a very hot afternoon and getting through a very extensive agenda of business. If there is anything else that you want to put on the record in the light of this, please do feel free to write to us, of course. I might also say in the presence of Hermione and Victoria that we have a very good working relationship at official level, both with the Cabinet Office and with the FCDO. For example, we have recently concluded a scrutiny arrangement to ensure that we have the right processes to scrutinise EU documents here. So many thanks to the officials for keeping us well informed. With that and our renewed thanks to you both, I draw this public meeting to a close.