



European Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Lord Hanson of Flint

Wednesday 21 January 2026

2.35 pm

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Members present: Lord Ricketts (The Chair); Lady Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Ashton of Upholland; Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town; Baroness Ludford; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Suttie; The Duke of Wellington; Baroness Winterton of Doncaster.

Evidence Session No. 1

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Questions 1 - 12

Witness

I: Lord Hanson of Flint, Minister of State, Home Office; Nicola Smith, Deputy Director of Citizens' Rights for the EEA, Home Office.

Examination of witness

Lord Hanson of Flint and Nicola Smith.

Q1 The Chair: A very warm welcome to the House of Lords European Affairs Committee. This afternoon, we are delighted to have Lord Hanson of Flint, the Home Office Minister of State covering an extensive range of Home Office issues. Lord Flint, this is the first time we have had a Home Office Minister to this committee since the new Government came in, so we have plenty to ask you. Thank you very much. I also welcome Nicola Smith from the Home Office; we appreciate your expertise as well.

I declare an interest at the start of the committee. I am a non-executive board member of Getlink Eurotunnel. In that context, I will not take any part in the questions on the European entry system and how that is operating. With that, and the usual caveats that the microphones are live so be aware, and that we will take a transcript of this evidence session, perhaps we can kick off.

As this is the first time we have had a Home Office Minister and because the committee in its iterations over five or six years has spent a lot of time on the EU settlement system scheme, the way in which that has operated, and the problems and so on that have arisen, we would like to start this session on the EUSS, recognising that it has been a pretty remarkable achievement. I think there are now around 7 million EU citizens either in settled or pre-settled status. Applications continue to come in and there are continuing issues with the programme, including transfer from pre-settled to settled status and other things. I want to invite you to say a word at the beginning about how you see the Home Office continuing to maintain this system of EUSS. Do you accept that it is a long-term obligation that will be with us for a long time, will require resourcing to continue to deal with the various issues and is not a task that you can conclude any time in the foreseeable future?

Lord Hanson of Flint: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, colleagues, for the invitation. I am pleased to be here on behalf of the Home Office. I should say that Nicola is deputy director of citizens' rights for the EEA; so that is her speciality. There may be areas where she wishes to comment; if so, I shall bring her in.

The Chair: Please do.

Lord Hanson of Flint: The Home Office is extremely committed to the settlement scheme because, quite frankly, the citizens who are here, who applied for settled status and have it, are our neighbours and friends. They are the people who work with us. They work in this building. They are doctors, factory workers, shop assistants and care workers. They have made their lives and homes here, under the previous EU regime. We have a duty to maintain that for them as best we possibly can.

Colleagues will know that in the immigration and asylum Bill that is now the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025, under Section 45

we clarified and settled that status. Currently, we have 5.8 million people under the EUSS, 4.3 million of them with settled status. As far as I am concerned, it is a permanent scheme. That is why, since September 2023, the Home Office has had in place automatic processes for also extending the pre-settled scheme. We are very committed to it. We want to ensure that if there are issues—I know of particular challenges because I have spoken to members of this committee outside of this room on a bilateral basis—we are keen to look at them. We believe that, under the previous Government and since July 2024 under this Government, we have tried to ensure that we make the applications as simple as we can. We are committed to accepting that withdrawal rights do not expire and are a permanent feature.

The Chair: Thank you. I pass the floor to Baroness Ludford, who keeps a close eye on these issues.

Q2 **Baroness Ludford:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the Home Office and, indeed, your personal commitment to the long-term perspective of the EUSS. The first issue I would like to ask you about is that funding for advice charities is due to stop this March. There are still ongoing problems with some cases. Also, this end of funding corresponds with the plan for the Home Office to begin curtailing pre-settled status from holders who no longer qualify. There are going to be new cases coming up. Also, those organisations are supported only for those who make applications; support does not cover funding for appeals. In asking you whether there is any chance of extending funding beyond March, would the Home Office also extend the scope of funding to allow organisations to support individuals who get a “minded to curtail” letter from the Home Office? My point is that we are talking about a longer-term perspective. There are still problems. If there is a cliff edge in March, that could create more problems for the Home Office as well as for individuals. Can you give us any hope?

Lord Hanson of Flint: Since the UK left the European Union and up to March of this year, we have supplied some £33 million-worth of support to voluntary agencies that have helped people who are applying for EUSS status. There are no comparable support mechanisms in other countries for UK nationals in EU member states, so we are ahead of the game on this in giving a great deal of support. We have a tight financial settlement in the Home Office. I am responsible, with the Home Secretary, for looking across the board at what the allocations are. We are only just coming to the conclusion of our allocation procedures on this. In line with the overall reduction in applications, the Home Office is reducing grant funding because the bulk of areas where we had applications was the massive rush on exit from the EU. That is reducing shortly. I cannot confirm the position as yet, because we have not finalised our allocations for April 2026 onwards. I hope that we can do so shortly, and I will certainly write to the committee, Chair, when we have done that, if that is acceptable. At the moment, we have not finalised all that detail. We will finalise allocations only in the next few weeks.

Baroness Ludford: Okay. Hope springs eternal. I have a couple of other

questions. One looming issue is that the ETA, the electronic travel authorisation scheme, is becoming mandatory at the end of February. What support might the Home Office offer to people with EUSS status when they run into difficulties proving their status when incoming to the UK? As a subset of that, there could be problems for people who go out with their EU passport and come in with their British passport. I think some of us do that.

Lord Hanson of Flint: There are a lot of lucky dual citizens.

Baroness Ludford: Yes. The problem could arise particularly with carrier systems, coming inward from the ETA and then using an EU passport to go into the EU to prove ETIAS exemption. Carrier systems could get rather confused. Is the Home Office looking to teach carriers?

Lord Hanson of Flint: I think it is fair and proper to say that the Home Office is transitioning to a fully digital system and that is the plan. I think it is a good thing to do that because it will make life simpler in the longer term. We will have automatic checks against Home Office records. From 26 February, everyone except British and Irish citizens wishing to travel to the UK will need permission to travel. That will be through the ETA and, potentially, a visa for other countries. It could be an e-visa but that would include EUSS status or acceptable physical proof or an exemption. Those with EUSS status should already have an e-visa, so they should be able to travel accordingly, but they obviously need to check before travelling whether details are incorrect. For example, if they have obtained a new passport, they can update this online through the UKVI account they will have. There may be challenges but I do not anticipate much level of challenge because, essentially, we have had a lot of pragmatic discussions with stakeholders. We shared our plans with colleagues. We have hopefully given sufficient time up to the lead-in of 25 February for people to be aware of what they have. In December, we shared with stakeholders our plans to maintain a pragmatic approach at the border for non-visa nationals so that those with EUSS application, as evidenced by a certificate of application, can still use that as a permission-to-travel document. I do not know if Nicola wishes to add anything.

Baroness Ludford: On carriers being up to speed on dual nationals.

Nicola Smith: Yes, the Home Office has done extensive engagement with carriers to inform them about the new system and the introduction of ETAs, which as you know will be enforced from 26 February. In terms of dual citizens, my understanding is that if you have travelled into the EU on your EU passport, for example, that does not preclude you from travelling back to the UK on your British passport. We always advise British citizens travelling into the UK to travel on their British passport. I believe that if you have checked in using your EU passport, because those are the details you gave for your outbound flight, if you then present your British passport to the carrier at the desk, they will be able to associate that travel document with your details for travel into the UK.

Lord Hanson of Flint: Also, we have just updated on the gov.uk website the details for anybody who finds themselves in a position of having either their own EU passport or dual nationality, as mentioned by Baroness Ludford.

The Chair: One more quick question, Sarah.

Baroness Ludford: Yes, I will squeeze them both under the same umbrella. I have two examples where I question, and ask for your view, whether it is really worth the candle for the Home Office to stick to its guns. One is trying to remove EUSS status from people who have left the country. I wonder if that is worth the resources and potential risks involved, especially if the Government use only travel data as the basis for removing status. They had to backtrack on child benefit when that was found to be flawed.

Secondly, I will not explain this to colleagues because it is a bit arcane, but I know you will know what I am talking about: the Surinder Singh cases. The families of British nationals are being treated more harshly than the families of EU citizens. There was a deadline. These people all had EEA documentation. They did not realise that they had to get EUSS. Anyway, there was a deadline of August 2023, with no late applications. If EU citizens have non-EU family members—technically, it is non-EEA but non-EU is simpler—they can be considered for late applications. They do not face the same absolute brick wall as British citizens who brought in their non-EU family members a long time ago, before Brexit, and did not realise that they had EEA permits and stuff. They thought that was fine. They did not realise that they had to apply to the EUSS, and, indeed, the Home Office did not send letters to that cohort. Now they are told, “There’s nothing to be done. You’re going to have to leave the country if the family wants to stay together”. Have you done a proportionality assessment for both those types of cases? Surinder Singh cases may be small in number but the consequences are incredibly harsh. I am sorry, that went on a bit.

Lord Hanson of Flint: No, it is fine. I will take the first aspect initially, which is: are we looking to realign people’s EUSS status with the underlying withdrawal agreement rights? Yes, we are. From March 2026, we will begin to curtail, i.e. remove, pre-settled status in line with the withdrawal agreement. We are doing that if individuals blatantly now are not resident or involved in the United Kingdom again in the future. That is an assessment test being made. It is subject to individuals having the opportunity to give comment on that, because if they are maintaining those rights, and they want to maintain them, they can. It means they can have a right of appeal as well, if individuals feel that they have been treated badly. Ultimately, if they are individuals who have left the United Kingdom and do not wish to seek to have their rights maintained, I think it is reasonable for the Government to take some steps to examine that.

Again, the Baroness asked whether we should use international travel data as the basis for this process. We have confidence in the ability and accuracy of border data, particularly when it is considered with available

other data. A person's pre-settled status will not be cancelled or curtailed unless there is some caseworker intervention and some contact with the individual; and, as I just said, there is the right of appeal if they feel they have been badly treated. I think that that is a reasonable presumption to make to settle again the status and position in the shorter term.

Baroness Ludford mentioned the Surinder Singh route. My answer is quite detailed; apologies, Chair. This cohort relates to the family members of a British citizen who exercised their free movement rights in the UK before the end of 2020 and then returned to the UK, and it is not covered by the withdrawal agreement. The EU law right to reside in the UK based on the judgment on Surinder Singh ceased at the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. Instead, and this is the important point, the UK made a generous transition provision for them to access the EUSS system for more than four years, until 8 August 2023. We published information on the government website, we contacted people about that and at that moment that is the position. It is a very small cohort. I will ask Nicola if she wants to add anything to that. This is about trying to support the EUSS scheme as a whole, to welcome and regularise their status—as we have done under the immigration Act—but at the same time to ensure that the people who do not wish to exercise that status any more or that small cohort who did not do it in time have some certainty.

Baroness Ludford: Before we get to the next question, is the Home Office aware that this is another Windrush and could blow up? Maybe Nicola could say why there is this distinction between the way British-led families are treated and families of EU citizens in terms of being able to make late applications.

Nicola Smith: As Lord Hanson said, this particular cohort—which we call family members of qualifying British citizens or the Surinder Singh cohort—are not covered by the withdrawal agreement. The Home Office position is based on fairness to other British citizens whose foreign-national family members need to meet the requirements of UK law to join them in the UK. When we were members of the EU, we had an EU treaty basis for preferential treatment. As you said, they had rights to reside under EU law. Now that we are no longer members of the EU, those rights fell away at the end of the transition period. The transitional provision gave them a period of adjustment until 2023, as you said. That has now come to an end.

The Chair: We have to move on. We get the point. We have had this issue raised with us by, for example, the 3 million. A number of people are caught in this position, whom I hope the Home Office will keep in mind in reviewing what the right way forward is. Can we move on to other things, please?

Q3 **Baroness Suttie:** I turn to something that affects so many people—tourists, people travelling on business, et cetera—which is the UK-EU entry and exit arrangements. I have two questions. First, how would you assess how that is working so far for UK travellers since the introduction of the EU's entry/exit system? Secondly, following the common

understanding, there was quite a lot of publicity about the fact that we would all be able to use e-gates. In reality, it is up to member states of the European Union. Do the Government have a target for the number of ports and airports in the EU where UK travellers will be able to use e-gates?

Lord Hanson of Flint: Again, let me take the first part of the question first. It is logical to do so. I am always a hostage to fortune on this but the assessment that we made is that the EES has been smooth, with minimal disruption to travellers so far. Of the three ports with the juxtaposed border—Dover, Eurotunnel and St Pancras—there has been registration and there has not been too much difficulty with travel through or, in Dover's case, on the local road network. The Port of Dover and Eurotunnel are currently registering those travelling by coach or HGV, while Eurostar is registering a limited number of passengers. We will continue to monitor this but I do not think there has been—as I say, I am a hostage to fortune on this—a difficult situation to date. We will see, but I do not think that will be the case.

Baroness Suttie is right that we are attempting to get reciprocal rights with EU member states. It is a matter for each EU member state to date. The EU Commission has given us an understanding that it will not block member states wishing to do that. As of 19 May last year, there are no legal barriers to British citizens using e-gates. Access to e-gates is now provided at around 50 ports, with nine countries participating.

You ask what the ambition is. Self-evidently, my ambition would be that every port of entry and e-gate could be used for British citizens to enter the EU with electronic documentation, because it makes so much sense. For business people and travellers, it means there would not be a queue. That is a matter for discussion with each individual member state, but there is no block in principle by the EU Commission. There is a willingness on the part of member states to do that where practicable. In all cases, it is in nobody's interests to have long, frustrated queues of British citizens entering European Union nations. We will continue to lobby every EU state for that. It is important that we try to do that, because it is a service to our citizens which holidaymakers and business people in particular welcome.

Baroness Suttie: My understanding, following a Written Question in November last year, is that currently there are 54 ports where this is possible.

Lord Hanson of Flint: My figure is approximately 50.

Baroness Suttie: Are you saying there is not an actual target—you will just see how it goes?

Lord Hanson of Flint: We have agreements with 50-ish ports and nine member states. We have no blockage in principle from the European Commission. Self-evidently, the UK Government would want to ensure that their citizens and business people had speedy access through

countries. It is ultimately a decision for EU member states. Each individual state has to apply its own conditions, if they wish, but in principle it is a good thing. If I look at it from their perspective, it will be a good thing for them to have holiday passengers or business people arriving and not finding themselves in a two to three-hour queue, frustrated and going back home saying, "X country is a terrible place to visit". It is a positive thing from their perspective, and on both sides. Irrespective of your views on Brexit, that is a border control management issue which would have been in place before. It is a management issue and, if we can resolve it, we should.

The Chair: Let us turn to law enforcement co-operation. It is an issue that we looked at briefly in our recent report on the reset, *Unfinished Business*. We look forward to the Government's response fairly soon, I hope. In the meantime, we have some questions for you on that.

Q4 **Baroness Ashton of Upholland:** Welcome, Minister; it is very nice to see you. One of the most important aspects of trying to make sure that relations with our former partners in Europe work well is that, as far as possible, especially on serious organised crime, aspects of criminality, counterterrorism and so on, we are able to have as smooth a system as we can. When we met our witnesses from the police and elsewhere, the word that stayed with me and, I think, other members of the committee was "clunky" as a description of how things were. It was not that it did not work, but it was a much clunkier system. I would be interested in an overview and your assessment of how far and how well it is going compared with your ambitions.

Linked to that, one particular issue that I know was in the TCA was about surrender, the former arrest warrant and so on. We were interested that there really is not any information, statistics or numbers that we can crunch to look at the specifics of how things are going. Anything you can tell us about how we can look for information and what might be coming forward would be great. As I said, as an overview, how do you feel it is going? Can we deal with the clunkiness?

Lord Hanson of Flint: As you will know, Baroness Ashton, the Government had a manifesto commitment to improve a new security agreement with the EU to ensure real-time intelligence and enable our policing teams to work together. Self-evidently, that is in everybody's interests because criminals do not worry whether they are in France, Germany, Spain, Italy or other countries; they transfer money, resources and drugs across borders. It is in all our interests to have that. We lost some of that capability with our exit from the EU. On a personal basis, when I was a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons up to 2019, I was banging on all the time about the importance of Europol, information-sharing and ensuring that, whatever happened after the decision to leave, we maintained that crime-fighting assessment.

What I can say is that the UK-EU summit in May 2025 signalled a renewed phase of co-operation. Now we have commitments to increase co-operation with the EU to tackle drugs, migrant smuggling and serious

organised crime. We have enhanced data exchange. In fact, we have received 35,000 criminal records from the EU and they have had 54,000 from us. We have enhanced our strong co-operation through Europol and have people embedded there. We cannot be in Europol's decision-making body, but we can be as close to it as possible. We now have people embedded in Europol from criminal justice agencies. We are looking to strengthen judicial co-operation and ensure that we provide packages that can remove people and take people from other countries, and it is important that between us we do whatever we can within that. There are still certain limits, because Europol is a body governed by member states; so we are not part of that. We are not sharing information as we did in other areas prior to our exit from the EU, but our ambition is to do whatever we can to bring together as much information and crime-fighting capability as we can.

Chair, I know that this is your last committee—thank you for your service—but in future I am very happy to supply the European Affairs Committee with some information about how we are progressing on that and what the targets are.

The Chair: I think it is safe for me to say that a future committee and future Chair would very much welcome that, Minister. Thank you.

Q5 Lord Stirrup: Good afternoon, Minister. Let me drill down a little further on that whole issue. You talked about the importance of information sharing. Of course, under the TCA we continue to participate in the EU's Prüm system, but that system has now been developed further. We now have Prüm II, which has been in place for nearly two years, but at the moment it is not clear to what extent, if any, we will be aligned with it. It seems to involve some pretty important stuff: facial image data and police records, along with its central router model. It is not something that is subject to dynamic alignment, but it does seem that, if we want to maintain that efficient and effective flow of information, any changes to the EU system must be reflected in our arrangements with them as quickly as possible; yet here we are nearly two years later and we are not sure where we are with this. I accept that a general election has intervened, but it is over a year and a half since that, it is eight months since the EU-UK summit and it is still not clear. So where are we with Prüm II?

Lord Hanson of Flint: That is a good question. I hope this is helpful. In part, we are dependent on where the European Union settles on Prüm II. We understand that it agreed Prüm II in 2024, but the settlement it has made is yet to be underpinned and underlaid by secondary legislation. The general problem I have is that until we see the final legislation—as I understand it, that is due in the first quarter of 2026, which we are now in—until that happens, we cannot understand the detail of the EU's position. If it is helpful, Chair, I am very happy to write to the parliamentary committee on significant developments as we take this forward. Again, we will not have lost any capability when Prüm II goes live. The current timetable for Prüm II is from July 2027 onwards. We are awaiting the secondary legislation as a whole. The two systems will need

to run in parallel—this is not my complication but the EU’s—because one country in the EU is not participating in Prüm II, so there is a bit of work to be done, if I may say so, Lord Stirrup, and I am trying to understand the landscape and respond to it in due course.

Lord Stirrup: You say “in due course”. Could we have your assurance—I understand that until you see the necessary legislation you will not know precisely what is required—that the Home Office will address it as a matter of urgency?

Lord Hanson of Flint: Absolutely. The UK will continue to operate the Prüm arrangements in the trade and co-operation agreement, which allows searching its biometric data. That is in line with the May 2025 summit understanding. We are going to explore how we can co-operate, but the EU itself has not settled on what it is and the Home Office would want to maximise that data sharing. Going back to Baroness Ashton’s earlier point, we want to maximise data sharing. It is in both parties’ interests to ensure that we know what the bad actors are doing, from where and how they are operating, and that, where possible, we operate jointly against them to reduce their criminal capability.

Lord Stirrup: Specifically on vehicle registration data, I believe that the EU carried out its evaluation visit last June. That was clearly required before the UK could connect with the Prüm system, but is the rollout of the connection for vehicle registration data now under way?

Lord Hanson of Flint: Yes. From memory, the EU evaluated the UK some time before June 2025. We passed the evaluation, which is a good thing. I hope that member states have now allowed us to begin to have vehicle data exchange. We can probably do that from March of this year. We hope to start data exchanges shortly after that. Again, that is the plan, hope and anticipation. They have assessed us; we have passed and we are ready to do it. We hope to do it at a date in March as a starting point.

The Chair: Again, the new committee would appreciate being kept up to date with that. It is obviously an issue of interest to a lot of people here.

Q6

Baroness Winterton of Doncaster: Minister, you are as detailed as I thought you would be. I wonder whether I might press you on a couple of things. You talked about discussions since the EU summit and said there were certain areas within Europol, because of the UK not being in it, where you could not share data. Do you have any more information about what those particular areas are and about the sharing of criminal records of third-country nationals? Obviously, that is so important in terms of organised crime, human trafficking and so on. That is an area in which I am very interested. Are there also some technical issues that get in the way of that? You talked about the manifesto. One of its commitments was about real-time intelligence. Because of the absence of access to SIS II, there are some real problems there. When we talk about timescales, is there much that can happen in the course of this Parliament where you feel real progress could be made? You said that

you would write to the committee with further information, but if there is anything you can say immediately, it would be helpful.

Lord Hanson of Flint: In principle, what we want to say is that in the EU-UK summit in May last year we got commitments to explore ways to reinforce that mutual aid on exchanging criminal records, particularly those of third-country nationals. Going back to Baroness Ashton's initial comment on this, this is absolutely vital in how we can deal with bad actors who are trying to damage the EU and the United Kingdom. There are lots of exploratory discussions and work going on. I cannot give a running commentary on what progress is being made, but the key objective is that the UK Government want to achieve a position whereby, if we can, we have that shared exchange of criminal records. There are technical issues. I am just looking at the EU's new European criminal record system. Its third-country nationals' database will go live later this year. That was operating with 25 member states. We want to see how we can get access to those databases, but that is a matter for discussion and negotiation.

As to the principal direction of travel, where would I want to be? I want to be where we can share that data. Where are we now? They are developing it. We are not quite there. We have an agreement in principle to look at how we can do it. There are a number of technical issues on that. For example, the European database is expected to hold information on 7 million criminal records across the EU. From our perspective, member states will be able to request that information. We would want to have access to it, but it is subject to negotiation.

Baroness Winterton of Doncaster: Do you feel optimistic? Presumably, it works the other way, too.

Lord Hanson of Flint: I am always optimistic. I was optimistic that we would not leave in the first place. It is difficult. This is part of cross-government negotiation. There is a whole range of other factors with the European Union on how we reset the relationship, but I just start from the basic principle: is it in the interests of our nearest large European neighbours to have shared access to criminal records? The answer, self-evidently, is yes. That is the objective; that is the direction of travel, but there is a lot of negotiation and, with due respect, I cannot give a running commentary on where we are on that.

The Chair: We perfectly understand that. The committee in its various iterations in the past has looked at how the workarounds to SIS II are functioning. We have heard at various points about problems the police have with extra manpower required to double-key alerts that would normally have gone automatically through SIS II into this new I-LEAP, and hope that that can all be turned into a much more effective multilateral agreement at some point. Is that still the direction of travel?

Lord Hanson of Flint: The other point to put on the table for colleagues is that we should not forget that two European countries, Denmark and Ireland, decided not to go into the scheme for sharing criminal records

that the European Union has in place. It is not for me to answer for the Danish or Irish Governments, but that is another complication.

The Chair: That is interesting; thank you.

Q7 **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town:** You have already spoken about Europol. When the common understanding talked about “pending arrangements” between us and Europol, did that refer to what has become the embedding of our people there, or is there more likely to happen?

Lord Hanson of Flint: The “pending arrangements” are technical instruments that sit within the existing UK-Europol working administrative arrangements as referenced in the trade and co-operation agreement. That is the paragraph and formal words that I can say that cover that point, so you know exactly what the formal wording is about where we are. The bottom line again is that Europol and the National Crime Agency need to work together. They are working together closely. They need to agree those arrangements. The arrangements setting out the status of UK liaison officers to Europol have already been signed. As I mentioned in earlier questions, going back to Baroness Ashton’s initial comment, UK National Crime Agency and other officers are embedded in Europol. The practical and operational detail around those co-operation mechanisms is still sensitive information and requires formalised arrangements. We are still looking to examine that. Ministerially, the principal direction of travel is, “Let’s get as close as we can”.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: At the moment, understanding that it may move, what sorts of activities or groups are organised through Europol that we can either participate in or indeed lead or initiate?

Lord Hanson of Flint: The UK can initiate joint investigation teams and regularly acts as a lead operational partner where appropriate. We have people embedded in Europol under that liaison officer agreement between the National Crime Agency and Europol. The UK is able to maintain a permanent multiagency liaison bureau of 20 officers at the headquarters in the Hague. We have the 1959 European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. With that, we can provide a legal basis for those joint investigation teams to work between the UK and EU member states. In theory, as a third-party country, we can talk to Europol, but at the end of the day we cannot instigate operational taskforces and we are not party to the governing body. In the old days, the chief officer of Europol, Rob Wainwright, was a UK citizen. We had a seat at the table. We do not now. That is the consequence of a 10 year-old decision that was taken, and we have to work within that to try to get the best we can.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: I would like to ask one slightly different thing. It may not come under your competence, in which case maybe it could be passed on. When we were doing all this work at the time of Brexit, we were also looking at civil law. There were issues about insolvency when court orders here needed enforcing, getting back resources that had been taken, and matrimonial access to children or

maintenance agreements. There were big worries that partly because of information in that it would not work as well. Do you have any intelligence about whether that is working, or is it outside your remit?

Lord Hanson of Flint: If I am totally honest, a lot of that lies with MoJ and other departments. I try my best to be across as much as I can, but outside the Home Office it remains a struggle on occasions. Through my Private Secretary, we can make a note of that request and commission a note from an appropriate MoJ Minister to supply information to the committee.

The Chair: That would be very helpful.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: If there are no problems that is great, but if there are some it would be useful to know.

The Chair: It has been raised with us in the past and has human consequences for many families and businesses, so it would be very helpful for us to be kept up to date on that. Thank you. Let us move on to irregular migration with the Duke of Wellington.

Q8 **The Duke of Wellington:** Good afternoon, Minister. The papers here in front of us concern irregular migration. If I may, I will ask you one question about that, and then touch on regular or legal migration. On irregular, illegal migration, the papers seem to concentrate on the question of whether you have to reach bilateral agreements or multilateral EU agreements. Where do you think you are going on that? Do you see advantages in bilateral agreements versus multilateral or EU-wide agreements?

Lord Hanson of Flint: There is a role for both if possible. Our House recently completed the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act. That established Border Security Command. The border security commander has been, on behalf of the Home Secretary, in hand-to-hand discussions with a number of partners in Europe: the French, Dutch and Belgians as the most immediate impacted partners, as well as with the Germans downstream. As a result of those bilateral or dual-lateral—or whatever the phrase is—arrangements that we have had, we have been able to sign the agreement with the French on the “one in, one out” scheme and we have had changes going through the German Parliament now that are changing the way in which the German Parliament acts on legislation on downstream activity, on boat supply and engine supply. We have the Calais Group, which is imaginatively named, looking at the issues on the three borders of Belgium, France and Holland. That is all independent bilateral action. It is being led by the Prime Minister, the former Home Secretary, the current Home Secretary and the border security commander.

At the same time, we found the European Commission engaged, productive and a partner in this. From its perspective, there is a joint collective issue for all of us to tackle illegal migration. At the EU-UK summit in May 2025, a range of commitments were agreed, including

ongoing discussions at an official level to look at how we can enhance co-operation with EU agencies, develop innovative approaches to stopping channel crossings and particularly—this is really important in a world context—looking at what happens beyond the borders of Europe in north Africa and the Middle East. Again, the UK is a big player in that world market, as is the EU. If we can add value together, joint action can be taken to deal with some of the pressures leading people to cross the Med to go through Europe and arrive in the UK, or to go via EU member states on a land border through EU member states to try to arrive in the UK. I would say to the Duke of Wellington in this case that we can and should do bilateral, but we can and should look at the macro issues collectively.

The Duke of Wellington: Thank you very much. Could I now touch on the slightly different but related subject of legal migration? I was at a conference in Spain recently and asked a Minister to what they ascribed the much higher growth rate in Spain than in most other European countries. They said their own calculations are that 80% of their growth comes from legal immigration, in their case of course many from South America. The fact that legal migration is going down quite fast is apparently having a serious economic effect. In fact, I even read an article suggesting that by the end of the year net immigration may be near zero, which is slightly disturbing for the prospects for economic growth. Do you and the Home Office working with the Treasury have any thoughts about allowing or granting more legal migration to achieve your targets for economic growth, which are supported by everybody? That seems to be partly dependent in some other countries on legal immigration.

Lord Hanson of Flint: This area is not my direct responsibility in the Home Office, but I speak for the department as a whole. The department published an immigration White Paper towards the end of last year. That set out how we can have individuals coming to the country where there are skill shortages, specific skill needs or there are entrepreneurs who can grow our economy, at the same time as trying to look at how we manage migration in an effective way. The immigration White Paper set some ambitious targets for control in the broader sense of migration as well as to try to ensure that we upskill UK citizens and provide a long-term plan to meet our future needs from the large cohort of UK citizens who currently are not in work, training or able to meet the current economic market that we want to grow because the skill levels have not been there. It is a very fine balance.

We are also looking at a whole range of issues to do with the family route on migration. There are big political challenges on family routes and how many people come from families, and we are looking at that as a wider issue. But I would say to the committee, and via you as the Duke, that we are trying to make sure that we manage the immigration White Paper in a way that grows the UK economy and the skill base of the UK economy. I am acutely aware, as are we all now, that, going back to the initial questions from Baroness Ludford about the 5.8 million, many of those citizens from outside the EU are the people who make our health

service run, make our businesses grow, and are contributors to growing the new skills that we need in our country. That balance has to be made. I refer the committee to the immigration White Paper that sets out a number of objectives that we are trying to achieve. That will find itself into legislative change over the next 12 months in certain areas.

Q9 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** I will continue on the theme of migration and would like to ask a question about FRONTEX. I appreciate that when we were members of the European Union we opted out under the justice heading anyway. In February 2024, a working arrangement was made with FRONTEX and the Home Office. My question to start is about those working arrangements because we do not appear to have seen much detail about what is really involved in that. Could you explain to the committee what you think you have been able to achieve by following up on that working arrangement with FRONTEX that you could not have achieved if it were not in place?

Lord Hanson of Flint: The most important thing is the ability to analyse movement flows of individuals who are moving illegally. They do not just arrive at the channel; they are moving through a range of mechanisms, partners and in some cases criminal activity. FRONTEX has given us, in particular, access to the risk analysis network that provides our department, the Home Office, with a much more comprehensive understanding of illegal migration routes and trends in Europe. That goes back to the earlier questions from the Duke about illegal migration and European co-operation. That information database can help us understand who, why, where and when. I can hear a bell.

The Chair: It is the Commons.

Lord Hanson of Flint: I knew we were due a vote at some point. Our participation with FRONTEX allows us to detect and disrupt organised criminal groups particularly involved in document fraud, illegal migration and transportation. We would not have access to that information without involvement with FRONTEX. The working arrangement creates what I would term a long-term framework for that closer co-operation, which again is in all our interests. As the Home Secretary announced at the Western Balkans summit in October, the Home Office is exploring options to go further with FRONTEX to provide intelligence and law enforcement expertise to support our international partners in disrupting those illegal migration routes. "Stop the boats" and our strategy are both the same in the end. They are about disrupting the criminal networks that bring people with false hope through illegal migration to our borders. How we can disrupt those is a key element of our co-operation with FRONTEX.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Thank you. Can I refer back to a question the Duke asked on irregular migration? You made the point about the importance of noticing movement of people across from north Africa because of the routes there. How productive has it been working with FRONTEX on that? I recall 10 years ago when there was a clash of attitudes towards, shall we say, human rights between the way we operated and the way FRONTEX operated in the Mediterranean.

Lord Hanson of Flint: There is good co-operation with FRONTEX. For the committee's benefit, there is a publicly available working arrangement document that shows the standards that we set with FRONTEX. Although a lot of that work is operational, broad principles underpin it and we have a joint objective. We can now share information with FRONTEX and from FRONTEX that helps the UK's situational awareness and risk analysis work much better. In practice, that means that we can help joint operations with European partners where appropriate to try to tackle that. If I was asking me the questions, I would say, "Do you have any statistics on how many people have been arrested, how many gangs have been broken, what the jail terms are for those gangs and other issues?" That is information that we always try to collect. I can point to a number of jail sentences and gang members who are in prison now because of joint operations, and I am happy to supply whatever information I can in due course about those issues.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Thank you. We can almost feel the clatter of typing for putting down Questions for Written Answer.

Lord Hanson of Flint: I am always happy to answer Written Questions.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Following up on that, are there any aspects beyond that agreement that you feel would add value to it? Is there anything more that you would like to see in that?

Lord Hanson of Flint: I do not think I can add anything specific. In principle, we are not members of the European Union now. That is a decision that the UK has taken. However, there are common interests on migration flows, criminal gangs, drug movement and areas of common interest where the objective is exactly the same for our European former partners who are still our European partners in tackling those issues. The UK Government as part of the reset are always open to areas that benefit the United Kingdom and, in passing, happen to benefit the European Union as well. Where there are areas in future, we have to come to some arrangements and discuss those areas. From my perspective, it is a direction of travel that, if necessity requires, we would be positive towards.

Q10 **The Chair:** Still on the issue of irregular migration, the common understanding that the Prime Minister signed with Ursula von der Leyen in May at the summit referred to exploring co-operation in the Rabat and Khartoum processes in upstream efforts to counter migration from Africa. They were new to me. Is there any progress? Is that one of the ways to work with EU partners on this upstream issue?

Lord Hanson of Flint: I will give the committee, I hope, a helpful update on that. The UK did work on and has looked at the Khartoum and Rabat processes to explore how we can participate in those important regional migration dialogues. We had some discussions with partners in May last year. This is via my colleagues in the FCDO who presented to groups on why the UK should participate in that. My latest information, hot off the press today, is that we have been informed that our request

will be raised in the meeting on 28 and 29 January this year. That is next week; this year is going quite fast already. I am very happy to give some feedback to the committee post that. Essentially, we want to participate; we want to ensure that we look at those important regional migration dialogues. There is a common interest, but we are not part of the club so we have to ask.

The Chair: Very good, thank you very much indeed. That brings us to the end of the prepared questions. I know that a couple of members want to use extra time if we may for a couple of follow-up questions.

- Q11 **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town:** My question is about the mood music. The committee went to Brussels—I do not know when—for our last inquiry on the reset, and we all felt a very different atmosphere there since the change of Government. It is always interesting to know how that works with you in your committees when you go? Do you feel that these are just common problems to be solved rather than an “us and them”, not just with the commission or council meetings but also with member states? We also heard from—you touched on it earlier, I think—UK citizens living in EU countries where there are clearly some problems with some of those countries. How are your discussions with them? Does this tend to be, “We’re jointly trying to get over this”? Are you feeling positive about the way you work with them?

Lord Hanson of Flint: On a personal basis, I rarely get out of the building because I am stuck in here either with Bills legislation or with Home Office business. I know that our officials dealing with this and the wider government team led by Nick Thomas-Symonds in the Cabinet Office are looking at this pragmatically. The mood music across the board and that I have had in terms of the discussions that we are undertaking bilaterally in the Home Office is that there are problems that need to be resolved. There are international criminals. There is the growth of AI. I am doing a fraud strategy that I am responsible for, which I will touch on in a moment, where we are looking at European co-operation. There is a range of issues whereby there are common problems, and those common problems transcend the economic community. They are issues that impact on nations that are in or out of that economic community.

To give you an example, look at the area that I deal with directly—fraud. We are producing a new government fraud strategy. It will probably be published next month. As the Home Office, we have put £1 million into a fraud conference being held in Vienna where we are looking to get bilateral agreements with not just European countries but countries outside the European Union to get agreement on tackling fraud. Fraud, as are drugs and illegal and irregular migration, is a transnational issue. We cannot solve those issues in a United Kingdom context. If we have common cause on fraud, criminal justice and drugs with our European partners, of course we are going to work with them.

I do not want to be too political in this, but I am a politician. I think the mood music of previous Governments was, “Let’s get out of Europe, let’s retrench at home, and let’s deal with these problems because they’re our

problems. Let's just get away from the European Union and let's retrench, put the walls round and let's go home". That is not the mood music that I or this Government have. The Government are being pragmatic in saying, "We've left the European Union, but there are key areas—fraud, criminal justice, drugs and migration—where there is a common interest. How do we work together to solve those problems?" That has real benefits in terms of the French situation in the channel, the German legislation going through Parliament now, the potential for Khartoum and Rabat in a couple of weeks' time on this, and the longer upstream issues of co-operation. Particularly on the mood music if we look at where we are now in the world, some plates are moving as well, are they not? Therefore, our European homeland is one where there are, even more so now, common economic interests that are potentially in a different place than they were four, five, six or seven years ago, or certainly at the time of the referendum in 2016.

The Chair: Indeed. You just touched on the UK-French agreement. Could you give us a brief update on how the "one in, one out" agreement agreed last May is working? I know it is in force, but I am not absolutely clear how many returns we are being able to make.

Lord Hanson of Flint: It is an agreement. It is working well. I could probably say to you about 200 individuals have been returned. We are trying not to give a running commentary, but if I am pushed on that I will say 200 at the moment.¹ We are trying not to give a returning commentary because it is important that criminal gangs are aware that we are after them. It is also important that we do not give them a running commentary on what we are doing.

The Chair: Indeed. Deterrence of the gangs is very good.

Q12 **Lord Stirrup:** There is going to be another UK-EU summit this year. The date is uncertain, but it may be as early as May. What at this stage do you think the Home Office priorities would be for that particular summit? What areas would you like to see addressed there? Allied to that, you are responsible for citizens' rights within the UK. Citizens' rights abroad are the purview of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Youth experience schemes are under the Cabinet Office. To what extent do the departments meet regularly to discuss these issues and priorities in the run-up to such a summit and more widely across the year, or are they dealt with in silos?

Lord Hanson of Flint: No, there is a Cabinet Committee on Europe that either I attend or the Home Secretary attends. We look at common issues such as to do with the outcome of Erasmus. That was considered by that committee. If you are asking, Lord Stirrup, what the objectives of any future summit are, they are very straightforward for me. Ultimately, the Home Office's job is to prevent terrorism, to reduce crime and to have strong borders. That is the simple Home Office job. We should look at

¹ Subsequent to the meeting, Lord Hanson informed the Committee that his reference to "around 200" people was incorrect and he should have said "over 200".

where further co-operation is needed on those three areas. That means that we need to share information and criminal justice outcomes in a better way. We need to look at what the pressures are on issues like migration and, with our European partners, the three, five and seven-year plan to tackle those issues. They are not about rejoining the EU. They are about neighbours looking at common interests. How that materialises itself will be a cross-government approach. There is always kickback on issues because we left the club. That is the state of affairs. Ultimately, I and colleagues in the Home Office context have to determine where we can jointly add value to the job of protecting citizens against terrorism, reducing crime and strengthening all our borders.

Lord Stirrup: That is very clear and very helpful. Thank you very much indeed. I just add that the European Parliament adopted an own initiative report on the implementation of the UK-EU TCA. During a debate on it, Nina Carberry MEP said that ambitious pledges made at the May 2025 summit must be met by equally ambitious follow-through and called for clear timelines and concrete results. That is rather in line with what you just said and what we called for in our recent report. We look forward to a positive response in that regard when it comes from the Government very shortly.

Lord Hanson of Flint: I am a timeline sort of guy. I like to know where we are going, how we are going to get there and when we have arrived. From my perspective, that would be the objective from the Home Office and a ministerial locus.

The Chair: Thank you. Again, there is a House of Commons vote. The Duke of Wellington has the last question.

The Duke of Wellington: I have a supplementary to Lord Stirrup's question. You stated your three duties at the Home Office. May I suggest that it might be helpful also to think about how the Home Office can contribute to the Government's main target of achieving economic growth? That comes back to my earlier question? A more liberal visa policy might contribute to economic growth.

Lord Hanson of Flint: That is an argument. On the migration front, the White Paper is trying to address that issue and how we address the skills of the future. If I may say so, we are tackling illegal activity in the UK of people undermining salaries, undermining wages and having people employed illegally. We are having that type of activity tightened up. We have done an awful lot of activity in the Home Office on trying to crack down on illegal workers, making sure that there are minimum standards, and that people are not undercut. That is all part of an economic growth argument as well. Protecting ourselves against terrorist attack is part of economic growth activity. Stopping illegal drugs in our communities is part of economic growth activity. It may not be immediately obvious, but if police resources are dealing with criminal activity, that criminal activity is a drain.

Let me give an example in the fraud space, which I am directly responsible for. A lot of fraud that takes place in the United Kingdom, which is a Home Office responsibility to reduce, is generated outside the United Kingdom. Some 44% of all crime is fraud. When fraud takes place and individuals are defrauded by false sales, romance scams or money being taken out of their accounts by fraudsters, that money is not going to Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester or London; it probably goes outside the European Union. We have signed a unilateral agreement with Nigeria. We have signed a unilateral agreement with Vietnam. We have the conference in Vienna on 16 and 17 March. We are trying to lead the way as the UK on a United Nations resolution on fraud. That is a crime issue. For me, it is also an economic issue of confidence in the UK economy, not undermining British businesses, and not having money going from people's pockets in Liverpool to some fraudster in a foreign country.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That is a very good note on which to wrap this up. Minister, thank you so much for your time. You have covered a very wide ground and a lot of issues that the committee has long been interested in. We appreciate it very much. We also appreciate your kind undertaking to let us have further information as and when you can on various issues.

Lord Hanson of Flint: I wish you well as the new committee. It has been more of a pleasure than I thought it was going to be.

The Chair: Then we have not done our job well. Minister, thank you so much.