



HOUSE OF LORDS

International Agreements Committee

Corrected oral evidence: UK-Poland Security and Defence Partnership

Tuesday 30 June 2026

2.05 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Johnson of Lainston (The Chair); Lord Anderson of Swansea; Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Lord Boateng; Baroness Blower; Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury; Lord German; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Lawlor; Baroness Verma.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 10 - 23

Witnesses

Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; Kirsty Hayes, Director for Europe, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; Joanne Hamer, Director, Euro-Atlantic Security, Ministry of Defence; Katy Reid, Deputy Head for Europe North, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Examination of witnesses

Stephen Doughty, Kirsty Hayes, Joanne Hamer and Katy Reid.

Q10 The Chair: Welcome, everyone. I am extremely pleased to be able to discuss today the UK-Poland defence and security partnership. It is really very relevant in terms of timing. Today, we release the defence investment plan. We have not all had a chance to go through it, but this clearly makes this discussion highly topical.

I am very pleased to be joined by Stephen Doughty, the Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories in the FCDO. Thank you very much for giving us your time; it is hugely appreciated—I know you have to go in about half an hour. Carrying on from that point, Kirsty Hayes, director for Europe at the FCDO, and Joanne Hamer at the Euro-Atlantic security department of the Ministry of Defence will continue your good work, so thank you very much indeed.

We are joined online by Baroness Lawlor, who has a question, but I will go first, if that is all right. In all honesty, these treaties are very relevant in terms of showing good will. There are a lot of powerful words and some good rhetoric. We are interested particularly in the detail. I was struck when reading the treaty that there was not a huge amount about actual financial contribution. On procurement, weapons development and systems development, it would be interesting to hear what is actually going to happen there. What are we committing to and what is Poland committing to? I assume we are hoping to sell our technology to Poland and probably vice versa.

There was an interesting section about smoothing out regulatory issues. I would be interested to know what they were—maybe they were around procurement. If so, what are we actually doing to make sure that we really are properly in sync with an incredibly important partner in such a strategic position? Thank you very much indeed for being with us, and I look forward to hearing your responses.

Stephen Doughty: Thank you, Chair, and members of the committee. I am always happy to appear on the subject of these different agreements that we have been taking forward, which are significant. This is the latest in a number of treaties we have signed over the last two years, which are very much meant to reinforce one another and our existing commitments through NATO, through our new EU-UK defence and security partnership and a range of other measures.

What we have seen in relation to our relationship with Germany, our relationship with France and this crucial treaty with Poland is what I always describe as interlocking strands in a muscle. They are not meant to contradict or to do everything on their own; it is about the combined impact of the individual bilateral relationship being strengthened and all the parts of it being strengthened, and then our core NATO relationship, or indeed our new security and defence partnership with the EU. Of course, when you flex them all together, the strands of a muscle get

stronger and larger and also send a very clear signal to our adversaries and those who wish us harm.

If I may, I will say a little bit about the UK-Poland relationship to start with, because this is a unique and special relationship. It is actually imbued in my own family as well, with two members of my family married to Poles. We have an extraordinary history, particularly dating back to our work together in the Second World War, which was commemorated during the high-level visit recently, and of course with our work today on NATO's eastern flank, which the Foreign Secretary was visiting just recently. I too have met with our brave Armed Forces personnel and have stood alongside different Polish counterparts at different points in key fora.

In this very uncertain world—not least with the threat from Russia to European security, but more broadly—Poland is one of our most steady and essential partners. It is on the front line. Poland's border is our border when it comes to Article 5, and its security is our security. This treaty marks a step change in that relationship, building on the existing agreements. It moves from close co-operation to a much deeper and more structured partnership, which I will let colleagues go into some of the detail on. It is across defence, security and economic resilience.

You will note that a number of other factors are touched on in the treaty. The provisions in the treaty are deliberately framed at a strategic and high level, because that allows a more flexible structure to develop and to deepen the co-operation on a range of areas, rather than prescribing very narrow or time-bound obligations. If we have too much micromanagement in these documents, they will not allow the flexibility and operational response that are needed.

You will know that alongside it, we have a series of landmark projects that will demonstrate how we deliver that in practice. Some of the areas in which we are going to deepen the capability co-operation, which you asked about, include next generation land capabilities, large-scale joint exercises that will take place in a much deeper sense, deeper interoperability on counterdrone warfare and, of course, on electronic warfare and missile defence.

A very important part of the kind of discussions that I have had with counterparts in Poland is our work together against hybrid threats. That can be cyber attacks, disinformation, the disruption of hostile state activity, some of the activity we have seen in relation to sabotage, attempts to destabilise economies, societies, critical national infrastructure and all those aspects, and intelligence sharing and the development of specialist capabilities to respond. I can very much reassure the committee that those are well under way with our Polish counterparts.

You rightly touched on the industrial co-operation part of it. It is worth billions and is basically going to be UK and Polish expertise coming together to develop and manufacture next generation capabilities, which

is going to be particularly focused on air and missile defence systems. Of course, that is going to have a benefit back here at home in terms of UK jobs and supply chains, and wider NATO capability.

I do not want to get ahead of the Statement that is being made—I know it is happening semi in parallel—but there is a lot here that will echo what comes out in the defence Statement today.

We are also looking at energy security, wider economic resilience, tackling organised crime and illegal migration, co-operating on border security, intelligence sharing and criminal networks. I have had excellent conversations with Polish counterparts on those issues as well. Of course, those can also all be used in hybrid ways by hostile states. You only have to look at some of the activity that has happened in relation to the Belarus border and the dynamics that we have seen to see why that matters.

We are absolutely convinced that this is a necessary deepening and strengthening of the UK-Poland relationship. It provides a flexible framework, as I said. It also complements all our existing initiatives; it does not seek to supplant our NATO relationship or our Article 5 commitments, or indeed our wider commitments under the EU-UK security and defence partnership. But it is a very important step forward with one of our most crucial and like-minded partners, so I hope that is helpful just to situate things.

The Chair: It was very helpful indeed; thank you very much.

Q11 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Minister, thank you for that introduction. What is the effect of Article 2 of the treaty, in particular paragraphs 4 and 5, in respect of both the UK and Poland's commitments to each other's defence? Do they add anything? Do they differ in any way from both countries' existing obligations to each other under Article 5 of NATO, the Atlantic alliance? As for the second question, could you just tell us whether we are confident that all parties in Poland are going to support the ratification of this agreement when it comes before the Polish parliament?

Stephen Doughty: On the second point, it is obviously not for me to comment on domestic Polish politics, but I am certain that this treaty has been entered into in good faith by the Polish Government. We have strong relationships across the parliament and different parts of the Government, so we are confident that they have entered into this in good faith.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: After all, the main opposition party holds the presidency, which has the capacity to veto legislation. I do not think it is commenting on their internal politics to say whether they are supporting it.

Stephen Doughty: We have a strong relationship with the presidency and with the Government across the piece, as we always have done, and we are confident that this is going to be supported and is going to pass in

Poland. But again, I am not going to comment on what any individual politician or party might decide to do inside Polish politics.

On the point you asked about the commitments in Article 2(5) of the treaty and the complement, I believe, to Article 5 of the Washington treaty, very much in relation to what I said in my opening remarks, these are mutually reinforcing strands of a muscle. Article 5 is the ultimate commitment. It is our NATO commitment, the bedrock of our collective security and deterrence against aggressors, and we are very clear about that. But it helps that we have very specific commitments to other partners, particularly as we are looking at an enhanced and deepened European part of NATO, so this is a very important signal that we send there. It reaffirms our commitment to each other as the UK and Poland—and to NATO and Article 5—by having additional commitments like this, and the signals that sends to those who might seek to threaten our security. So I see them as very complementary and not in any way in conflict with one another.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: And you do not feel any concern that by saying it complements and strengthens Article 5 of NATO, it casts some doubt on the validity of Article 5?

Stephen Doughty: No, absolutely not. We are absolutely clear about that, as are all NATO partners. I am confident that will be made clear in Ankara at the summit later this month. We are very clear that these are mutually reinforcing and complementary objectives.

Baroness Verma: Thank you Minister. On the effect of Article 2, where do you see that we could tighten up or maybe improve it, so that the muscle you are talking about becomes even more reinforced? I agree with you that it is a sum of many small parts. On the hybrid side of warfare, where increasingly technology is outpacing us all, are we in the same lane as the Polish advancements on technology, are we behind, or are we in front?

Stephen Doughty: One of the reasons for this deepening of co-operation is because we share absolutely the same objectives and assessment of the threat. This is aimed not only at us leading on that co-operation to develop responses to those threats together but at what we offer together to NATO. That is the crucial aspect here.

This is being mirrored in lots of other pieces of work. I was up in Latvia a few months ago, looking at the UK drone coalition work there. This capability is important for the UK-Latvia relationship and our commitments to the Baltic states, but also to NATO as a whole. Our Polish friends have a very clear-eyed and crystal-clear assessment of the threat, in the way that we do, and some extraordinary capabilities. We are going to learn from one another as we deepen that—particularly, as you say, in those sub-threshold hybrid threats. As countries, we have both experienced these threats on our own soil. We have a lot to offer to the rest of NATO in understanding how to counter and disrupt them.

Q12 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Minister, good afternoon. One of our witnesses has said that except in respect of migration, the agreement adds little to the existing bilateral agreements of 2017 and 2023 between our two countries. Do you agree, and would it help bilateral defence co-operation if Poland were to join the JEF, which we have of course led since the Newport NATO summit?

Stephen Doughty: I do not agree with the characterisation that was set out. It is very clear that this is deepening, strengthening and broadening the co-operation. As you mentioned, the additional areas featured in this treaty relate to economic and energy security, serious and organised crime, irregular migration, hybrid threats and all these things. It is important that we see security as one indivisible whole; all these things interact with each other. In a world where hostile states might choose to engage criminal proxies in their activities, or where serious and organised crime groups might also be using hybrid technologies and techniques—drones are only one way—these are all threats to our security and stability. For example, you only have to look at the way that migration has been weaponised on the Polish border and the borders of NATO. It is absolutely essential that we set this out and show the changing nature of the threat we face and the responses to it that exist. We and Poland have a deep understanding of this. That is why this is set out so clearly in this treaty and will be then followed up with the very specific projects we are working on.

I will not get into commenting on the JEF, but we enjoy working very closely with Poland on a series of important activities on the security of the Baltic and the wider region.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: What are the objections to Polish membership?

Stephen Doughty: It is not for me to get into a discussion there. Obviously, JEF is a grouping of countries, and you have to have agreement on behalf of all. But we work very closely with them, particularly in some of the same operational areas—I mentioned the Baltic—whether it is our airspace or the response to critical national infrastructure threats. Therefore, we have a series of different arrangements and co-operations. This is important as it deepens the UK and Polish exercising together, particularly between our land forces and capabilities. That is a very important step forward and a huge contribution to NATO.

Lord Boateng: Would it be true to say, Minister, that Poland has expressed concerns about the reduced size of our army and a desire to see us increase numbers in that regard? It is not simply a question of drones and what we can do together in that area; there are also concerns that the Poles have expressed about the size of our army.

Stephen Doughty: I am not sure which particular comments you are referring to, but Poland has an immense respect for our Armed Forces and capabilities.

Lord Boateng: It would like to see more of them—that is the point.

Stephen Doughty: We all want to see more, and we all want to see more capability. That is the trajectory we are on. I am not going to get ahead of the Statement that is being made in parallel, but there will be much to welcome in it and much to welcome about the trajectory. Of course, we have that important NATO summit coming up. I know the deep admiration our Polish friends have for our capabilities and our practical impact, because the quality and capability are often crucial, as well as numbers. We have excellent relations and some unique capabilities that we are working on together. It is absolutely clear that we all need to invest more in defence in Europe. That is what we are doing as a Government and what we will be setting out today.

The Chair: Baroness Lawlor is joining us online.

- Q13 **Baroness Lawlor:** Thank you very much, Mr Doughty. You have already touched quite elaborately on why the treaty goes beyond security and defence issues to include energy security, illegal migration and so on. But may I just reinforce, in my question, the comments of Lord Boateng? I take what you say about increasing understanding—and it is all very good—but in a sense, they are feel-good factors. What makes the real difference, beyond having confidence in capabilities, is seeing practical results. For many people in Poland, irrespective of party, one of the great concerns was the announcement of the withdrawal of NATO troops, though that has been halted, and the desire to have some other cast-iron guarantee. Could you comment on your view of increasing capabilities and that of those who see a more traditional presence as necessary?

Stephen Doughty: They are all crucial, obviously: conventional capability, but also the ability to respond to hybrid and new threats. You will appreciate that I do not want to go into particular operational details on this. However, take for example the disinformation threats that we see, emanating not least from Russia.

I spoke to the Foreign Affairs Committee a few months ago and was very clear that Russia is engaged in information warfare against our countries. Overtly, that we know, it is spending €1.5 billion a year—€30 million a week. A significant amount of this is in attempting to distort narratives and create divisions in both our countries and indeed for many of our other friends and allies. The UK and Poland have a very clear-headed assessment of that threat, how we can counter it and what we need to do together, and we are absolutely deepening and strengthening the capabilities to do that. That really matters.

Another area is the protection of critical national infrastructure, cyber and so on. I might bring in Joanne to say a little bit more about some of the details of different things we are doing together practically in this area.

Joanne Hamer: What we are looking to do here plays to one of the earlier points about how we develop capabilities that both join our co-operation and enhance the collaboration of our industries. There is that

learning together, and we know there is much to be learned from the lessons of Ukraine in terms of the capabilities we need going forward, which then supports the NATO element—which takes us back to the Article 5 comment from earlier on.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We are doing extremely well—we have never moved so fast in the history of this committee, I think. I am very pleased. Everyone wants the chance to talk to the Minister.

Q14 **Lord German:** I want to come in on Article 3. One of the fascinating aspects of Article 3, of course, is that it talks about creating a bilateral framework to work collaboratively with Europe and regional partners on tackling migration issues. The EU is operating as one, from now on; this month it has introduced the EU migration pact and the associated regulations that went with it. Could you explain how a partnership agreement to create an agreement with Europe more widely would work, and what would specifically be in and out of that? That is unless you can tell us we are going to move closer towards the EU pact and the relevant regulation that goes with it.

Stephen Doughty: I do not want to get ahead of processes that are going on with the EU-UK summit track. I am going to bring in Kirsty in a moment, so I do not want to get ahead of that, because there is a wider discussion going on with EU counterparts about how we can work better to tackle these threats.

Certainly, from my own conversations with Poland, it has some unique expertise and experience in dealing with challenges at its own border, some of which are similar to ours and some of which are quite different and obviously relate to a land border. There is a huge amount that we can be doing as the UK and Poland in terms of intelligence sharing, techniques and law enforcement, such as agencies working and learning from one another on new technologies that might be being used at borders to deal with irregular migration threats, and, fundamentally, that link to serious and organised crime, traffickers and, in some cases, hostile states. There is a huge amount that we can be doing as the UK and Poland, which will naturally complement any wider discussions or dialogues we are having on closer co-operation.

The Government have set out very clearly that we see closer co-operation with the EU as absolutely essential for our national security and tackling threats from irregular migration. It is a permanent part of every conversation I have with EU counterparts. Just in recent weeks, I have been discussing with our Bulgarian friends our work together at the Bulgaria-Turkey border. I have also been in discussions with our friends in Hungary just last week. So this features very naturally in each of our bilateral dialogues, but also then naturally complements an EU track. Kirsty may want to add a little on that.

Kirsty Hayes: The Minister is quite right, of course, that migration, particularly irregular migration, and particularly that which is fuelled by serious and organised crime or indeed malign actors, is an existential

threat for us, not only for all member states of the EU but for Europe writ large.

First of all, we welcome the fact that the EU is working internally between member states to tackle this issue, and we of course want to work with the EU on it, but I do not think that means we cannot do serious work bilaterally with individual member states, whether that is Poland, in this case, or for example the impact we have seen of our bilateral work with France, which is already having quite a significant knock-on effect in the reduction in small boat arrivals. This is a multidimensional challenge in which we need to work in a series of different geometries with different European partners. In that sense, the inclusion of migration among other security challenges in this new treaty is a significant step forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have a last few questions for the Minister, if he is kind enough to engage with us for a few moments longer.

Q15 **Baroness Blower:** Minister, you have to some extent touched on this. To what extent does the treaty help us to address the variety of hybrid threats that the UK and Poland face from Russia? In specific terms, what does that look like in terms of education and training, as it says in lots of places? Further to that, in the 2023 document it was stated that the two countries, Poland and the UK, would explore joint cyber projects in support of Ukraine in the western Balkans. Is that ongoing? Is there anything more you can say about that?

Stephen Doughty: I will bring in Joanne in a moment on some of the detailed points. The range of hybrid threats is extensive. There is disinformation, cyber attacks, attacks on critical national infrastructure, sabotage, the activities of so-called diplomats from some countries who are operating and disrupting, and attacks and threats against nationals of other countries in third-country locations. At the very extreme end, we have seen the use of chemical weapons on UK soil. These are huge, varied and wide, and they are being employed by our adversaries. This is not just Russia, I hasten to add, but others too.

You rightly point out education and training. Some of this is really crucial, that we are starting from first principles here in understanding the nature of the threat, what is having impact, how it is coming and where it is coming from. Take disinformation, for example. It is impossible for any country, particularly given the volume of disinformation that is out there, to respond to every single piece of disinformation, like a bot on a Facebook page or a false message being passed around on WhatsApp, Telegram or whatever it might be.

It is crucial that by working with key partners such as Poland we are understanding where the real nodes and networks are and how we take out and disrupt—and, in some cases, expose—those activities. In what we have just done in the North Atlantic, exposing Russian activity there, we have shown that we know what it is doing, we are happy to expose it for doing so and we are capable of disrupting it. That is a very important

signal to send to our adversaries, too. We have also done that through our sanctions, including co-ordinated sanctions with the EU on different networks: cyber networks, disinformation networks and others. There are some particular partners—of which Poland is one—who really understand this and have capabilities that match our own, and with whom we can work together.

As I said, it is not just what we are doing for each other bilaterally and the threats we face from hybrid activities; it is what we then offer to our fellow NATO partners and others, because these tactics are being tried in multiple locations. I am really delighted with the co-operation we are having, but obviously I will not go into too many individual projects.

The Chair: I might just stop you there, because I know you have to go.

Stephen Doughty: Yes, in five minutes.

The Chair: I have a quick follow-up question. These are all good things, but surely they are happening already. Why will the treaty make a difference? Is there a specific technical point to say, "Tomorrow, we will have more information sharing and everything else"? What is the difference?

Stephen Doughty: In some of these areas, I think you also need to have a very strong framework. This often involves working across government, both in the UK and in Poland, and with the EU or different parts of NATO. It is an important signal and framework that then gives a sure underpinning to the engagement we are rightly having with different parts of the Polish governmental system or otherwise. I do not know whether Joanne wants to add anything.

The Chair: It gets our Government to actually work together, which is quite useful.

Stephen Doughty: Yes, all the different parts of our Governments. I have excellent co-operation with my MoD and Home Office colleagues on this, and our teams work together very closely. That has to happen with all our partners as well, and I am confident that it happens in Poland.

The Chair: Do you have two more minutes?

Stephen Doughty: Yes, sure. I wonder whether there is something to add on the cyber front.

The Chair: We will come back to that. Joanne, can you remember to come back on that point, because I would like to dig a bit deeper?

Q16 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Minister, you have been giving a picture of working together with Poland. Earlier on, you said that the treaty was a step change building on previous agreements, but you then said that there should not be too much micromanagement. Can I pick up on how we are going to deliver this? You mentioned that you are following up on specific projects that you are currently working on. What are the specific

projects?

Stephen Doughty: I will let the team give some examples of different particular pieces, but what I was trying to say at the beginning was that the overall framework is there to empower, not to constrain. It also sends clear signals to all the systems in both our Governments, as well as our EU partners, our NATO partners and, fundamentally, our adversaries, so that they can very clearly see what we are working on together. I do not know whether we have some of the specific landmark projects—they are called “lighthouse projects” in some of the treaties, but these are landmark projects.

Joanne Hamer: I will give one example, and Kirsty may then want to jump in. We talked about weapons earlier, so the one I would pick up on relates to weapons. Crucially, we are developing a new sovereign effector together. The UK and Poland are positioning themselves as a joint European leader in complex weapons, which presents a really exciting opportunity. What we are trying to do with that—the Minister has touched on this—is drive innovation and reduce dependency on external suppliers, and we want to make sure that there are long-term prosperity opportunities for both parties.

Baroness Anelay, you asked about delivery and making sure that we deliver on that. Certainly, from a defence perspective, we will have an underpinning bilateral defence plan that will support the treaty. The Defence Secretary will hold us to account on that, and we will report to the treaty owners on how we are doing against it, so we will be held to account on delivery.

Kirsty Hayes: I can give a couple of examples outside the hard defence space, one of which is co-ordination on sanctions policy, which is obviously a key part of our economic deterrence of hostile actors. We will be strengthening our co-operation on both implementation and enforcement. Another would be our joint action plan on irregular migration, which we have already touched on. All the landmark projects are actually published, and we could certainly circulate them to the committee, if you have not seen them.

The way it has been working in the case of lighthouse projects under the treaty we have signed with Germany, for example, is a really good way that we can hold ourselves to account. We have a structure in place, and we make sure that it is not all about the excitement of the signing of a treaty; it is about the substance within the treaty being taken forward in practical, pragmatic stages.

Stephen Doughty: I will give one other example. While this is about expanding the definition of security, one of our landmark projects is importantly expanding our health co-operation, particularly in issues related to health security—for example, how we respond to CBRN threats, how we deal with people who are injured in conflict, or how we deal with civil contingencies, medical evacuations and all those really important issues.

We have a huge amount to learn from Poland on its civil resilience piece, as we do from our friends in the Baltic and Nordic countries. I really welcome the fact that we are seeing security in a broader sense here, because these are ultimately the things that keep people in this country safe, whether that is developing a particular medical technique or a way of detecting something. Given the threats from adversaries that we know we are up against, that is absolutely critical.

Q17 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Apologies for arriving so late; of course, I have not heard what has gone before, so apologies if I am repeating myself. One of the things that came through last week was the really strong relationship between the UK and Poland. I am old enough to remember something called the Anglo-Polish round table, which existed before the end of communist rule, and that was a very important element in building relationships.

How will the treaty's commitments on industrial defence co-operation impact defence industries in the UK and Poland, particularly on co-production and co-development? One of our witnesses last week, Justyna Gotkowska, said that there was a really strong feeling of co-operation between our two countries, so it would be nice to end a very positive note.

Stephen Doughty: We have mentioned a couple of the projects that we are working on developing, but another is large-calibre ammunition production and our expertise in drone and electronic warfare. I think you will see that those sit very well alongside some of the announcements that will be made today—I want to get ahead of those. I think there will be a crucial UK-Poland part of our wider mutual defence readiness and capability.

I have huge affection for Poland and a real recognition of the history that we have together. I had a very moving moment when I attended, with Lord Coaker, the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem, in which my own grandfather fought; he was taken a prisoner of war and wounded. Of course, not many miles away the Polish were also bravely fighting, including General Sosabowski and others. I attended moving memorials at both Ginkel Heath and Driel with Polish friends.

What was really powerful to me was not only that we finally recognised that it had not been properly recognised by the UK Government, which was a change that we secured through a statement from the Prime Minister and others, but that seeing our UK paratroopers and personnel alongside today's Polish paratroopers and personnel was an incredibly powerful signal. It showed not only that we had fought alongside each other before but that we were ready to defend our countries and this continent again, if required. I think that is a great testament to the strength and depth of that relationship.

Q18 The Chair: Minister, thank you very much indeed. While we speak, the defence investment plan is being revealed, so I am sure you are going to go across and join that. Your engagement today has been hugely

significant—we really appreciate it.

Joanne and Kirsty, thank you very much for staying with us for a bit longer. Maybe we can go to some of the more specific points that I know you want to contribute on. Joanne, I think you were going to talk about some of the cyber threats and how we are going to work together with Poland through this treaty specifically.

Joanne Hamer: Can I go in reverse order, as I just want to pick up on that important industrial point? We talked about co-development and co-production, which is absolutely the place we want to be. What I would particularly bring out is that this is about getting both our industries and our military to military working better together, which is ever more important. Industrially, we are hoping for joint requirements that jointly shape delivery, building skills together, making sure that the skills are transferrable with one another and enhancing the co-production, which I think is going to be critical.

One vignette that you may not be aware of is that we have something called the UK-Poland Joint Programme Office, which is both industry and government working together, based in Abbey Wood. It is seeing through the programmes that are already in place, and it will then also oversee the programmes that we do in future. I think the industrial place is in a really good position, just to build on what has been said.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: I am interested in this, because skills is one of the things that we are interested in domestically. Can you expand a little bit on the co-operation on skills?

Joanne Hamer: This is both of us learning from each other. For example, the Polish are very keen to rebuild their shipbuilding industry, so they are learning from us. It is then about what skills we can learn from them and, as the Minister said, it is very much about strengthening the partnership we have with them as well. That is about looking at where we both have skills gaps and asking whether we can help one another take that forward. I hope that answers your question.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: I think we have all experienced the skills gaps since the Polish have left.

The Chair: On procurement, with this plan being announced today, the constant feedback is, "It is very well having more money, but is it going to be spent better?" Many of us remain concerned that the MoD simply does not procure effectively and rapidly enough. Do you think this will help drive change within the MoD? Is it truly adaptable enough to actually work closely with a partner like Poland, which seems to be moving faster than we are in the new types of technology we need?

Joanne Hamer: You asked earlier about some of the lessons that we are learning. One of the areas where we have struggled, but we are now learning through those struggles, is the ability to transfer information and commercial processes, which really picks up your point. We now have good collaboration and we are learning those lessons. Certainly, from a

defence perspective, we have learned how to be more agile with our procurement through the Ukraine conflict and our support to Ukraine. We are looking to put those lessons more and more into business as usual, so those will support the relationship with Poland.

- Q19 **Lord Anderson of Swansea:** It is going off-piste a little, but we have excellent relations with Poland, and we have excellent relations with Germany through the Trinity House agreement, yet there is almost a lingering hostility towards Germany from many leading Poles based on historic experience. Is there any prospect of us acting as a bridge and helping to improve relations on that sort of level between Germany and Poland?

Kirsty Hayes: We certainly can try to work in a trilateral manner. While I recognise the historical situation, as you set out, I think the urgency of the threat on the eastern flank of Europe has led to all European states working together more closely and forging ahead. I do not necessarily recognise the current characterisation of tension between Poland and Germany. Where we can play a productive and supportive role in that space, we would be very happy to do so with both our Polish and German friends.

Joanne Hamer: Just to build on that, with the burden shift that we are seeing in NATO, we will see European nations working together much more closely to develop the capabilities that we need to fill the gaps left by the Americans.

- Q20 **Lord Boateng:** Culture plays very little part in this treaty, which is of course primarily focused on security and defence. However, over the centuries there has actually been a strong cultural link between the UK and Poland—musically and in a number of other ways. I wonder how the Government plan to flesh out what is referred to in the treaty, namely society links. Do you envisage that there will be more youth exchanges, or that there will be opportunities for cultural exchanges going forward that underpin the relationship of values that binds our two countries together?

Kirsty Hayes: First of all, thank you for raising this. I think we would all recognise the tremendously powerful people-to-people links between our two countries, and the really significant contribution that the Polish community in the UK makes to our life and society. I would draw your attention to a couple of the landmark projects, one of which is close collaboration on science and technology. The other is the deepening links between our diplomatic services, which is something we are taking forward, but I think you are right that there is space to do more. The important thing to remember with all these treaties and projects is that they are not the end state. The strengthening of our links with our most important European partners should be a continual endeavour. That is something we can certainly look to take away for the future. If I could beg your indulgence, I just want to recognise the work of Katy and Oliver in my team, who are two of the real drivers behind this treaty and the

project. I am sure they can take this away as something that they will work on with our embassy.

Katy Reid: I can add on that point, if I am allowed. I am not sitting at the table.

The Chairman: Just come forward. Welcome: a surprise witness.

Katy Reid: I am deputy head of Europe North department, so I have been covering Poland and several other countries for the last couple of years. There was a decision by Ministers to keep this treaty focused on security and defence—and security and defence in their widest context, as the Minister has explained, incorporating national security, illegal migration and economic resilience. On culture, we have good co-operation with Poland. The British Council concluded its season of culture just a few months ago. There were dozens of events in UK and Polish cities that celebrated the deep people-to-people connections that we have between the countries. On youth mobility, there are discussions with EU partners on youth experience at the moment, which I think is the appropriate vehicle for that discussion, rather than a bilateral issue.

Kirsty Hayes: Sorry, I should have picked up on that point.

Baroness Verma: Following on from what you just said, the concern is the skills gaps, particularly in the UK, and alongside that the approach we have to migration. We need to deal with illegal migration, of course, but in the wider context of migration, tackling the skills gaps with partners is critical for us. I think it comes to your point about the cultural side of all this within the debate, which I find is becoming more and more difficult. I do not know how you work around that, but it is really important, given that we are lagging behind in many areas on skills.

Kirsty Hayes: If I may, I will pick up on a couple of points there. On specific skills, there is probably a global shortage in terms of countering some of these particularly hybrid threats, issues such as disinformation and cyber. This is not a governmental battle; it is a societal one. That is why the treaty draws out education and training as being so fundamental. Looking more specifically at skills gaps and migration writ large, Katy was right to highlight the fact that we are working really closely with EU partners on what a youth experience scheme might look like for our young people in particular. That is something we can continue to discuss with European partners.

Q21 **Lord Boateng:** Let me give you one very practical example, and I declare my interest as a director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Polish musicians in the UK and British musicians in the UK and in our respective countries are finding it increasingly difficult, frankly, to navigate the complex hurdles following Brexit in terms of keeping alive, maintaining and taking forward those cultural links. What positively can be done in that regard that might show the way for a broader EU-UK approach to the issue of musicians working in this area? I am old enough to remember the Know-How Fund and all that went into the links

between the UK and Poland in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Culture played a hugely important part in all that, and we neglect it at our peril. It would be helpful, if you cannot answer now, if you would write to the chairman of the committee about this issue, because it is one that is tied up with the broader issue of the defence of our values.

Kirsty Hayes: I really recognise the problem you outline there. I think our musical artists have found touring within the EU incredibly challenging, and that is a loss for everybody. It is a very important part of our soft power offer as the UK, but it is also a loss for potential audiences who benefit from the richness of that offer. Again, I cannot get ahead of ongoing negotiations with the EU at the moment, but it is something we are very seized on and we would be very happy to share further information at a later date.

The Chair: It is often raised in this House.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: On the cultural side, I am impressed by the fact that Poland must be almost unique in calling its main airport after a musician—Chopin. I ask about the English language. I assume that in this bilateral defence co-operation, English is the language used by both sides. We have been teaching the Polish military English for quite a long time. Presumably that continues. To what extent is it spread with English language teachers going to Poland?

Joanne Hamer: We still do English language training. I would have to check on whether it is us going to them or them coming to us. I am afraid I do not know that detail, but we can provide an answer pretty much immediately after the session, if that is acceptable.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: Lord Boateng, thank you, because it is normally the subject I bring up. This is not criticism, but in your response you said science and technology, and actually it is not just science and technology; it is culture. On the matter of youth mobility and so on, that is obviously for the Government, but I understand that it is quite useful if it is not Brussels-led but communication with each country. It is not just musicians, by the way; it is artists across the spectrum, the problem about being able to go to Europe but not come back after 90 days, and all that kind of stuff. As I understand it, we are being asked to be bilateral, as it were. I just hand that thought over.

Kirsty Hayes: The reason I mentioned science and technology is that it is encompassed within the framing of security in the bilateral treaty and, as Katy has set out, that does not mean we are not doing a lot of bilateral cultural work with Poland; it is just not framed in this particular treaty and series of projects.

Baroness Blower: I hope that even if the burden is that we are teaching English to our Polish friends and counterparts, we are actually making sure that some of our people have some words of Polish. It would be just a matter of courtesy, really.

This is really a remark rather than a question, following on from Paul's question about culture. I know from my experiences in the education area and working with teachers' unions across Europe that there is an immensely close and very good working relationship between the teachers' unions in Poland and the teachers' unions in Germany. They do a very great deal of work together and seek to make sure that it features in their curricula. Of course, they are not the people who choose that—it is their Governments—but they do a lot of work on that. British unions, through the European level of Education International, have also done a lot of work with both Germany and Poland and trilaterally.

Q22 Baroness Lawlor: You are writing to Lord Boateng about the cultural exchanges because you say that at the moment you cannot really comment, but the issue of visas and obstacles placed in the way of touring artists has reached crisis point. I am not sure that you have acknowledged the seriousness of the position, given that this was one of the very modest requests made by the Government to the EU in the run-up to the reset. It was a modest request both before the Labour Government was elected and after, and no progress whatever has been made. Could you at least clarify this for the committee now, if you are not at liberty to say what is going on? Is this a question of bilateral allowance, or is it a question of not being permitted at EU level?

There is a defence and security aspect, because I have heard and we have been told—if not in this committee then elsewhere—that part of the problem is the security risks attached to the equipment that touring artists have to bring, and it complicates visas and allowance for visas. It cannot be brushed aside, it is a very serious matter and it goes to the heart of a number of other questions. Perhaps when you write to us, you could let us know where these things have gone. Can you tell us now: is it an EU-wide obstruction or is it a country doing something on a unilateral basis?

Kirsty Hayes: I am very sorry if it felt like I was downplaying this issue, because I fully recognise how existential this issue is at both an individual and an industry level. For what it is worth, it is something I feel strongly about on a personal level too.

Lord Boateng: That was very clear in your answer.

Kirsty Hayes: Thank you. In my opinion, the most effective way to tackle this issue is at EU level. That is why I gave the answer I did. As I say, discussions with the EU are ongoing at the moment, and I do not want to get ahead of those, particularly given the postponement of the UK-EU summit, but I just emphasise that we are very seized of the issue. The Minister is no longer here, but I know it is something he feels strongly about as well.

Baroness Lawlor: Can this be tackled on a bilateral level? The EU poured cold water on it at the 2025 summit. Can it be done, as a matter of fact, on a bilateral level?

The Chair: That is a good question. I do not know whether you know the answer to that.

Kirsty Hayes: I will follow up on that.

The Chair: Thank you. When I was in the Department for Business and Trade, this was called cabotage. Is that the word? It is a bizarre, totally unnecessary obstruction, and everyone has been trying to get rid of it, so we wish you great success on that.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I welcome your recognition that there is not a bilateral bypass to a problem that is at EU level; we have to deal with them both. Are we satisfied that the Poles in their activities within the EU are taking a helpful line, trying to unlock this seemingly rather tangled problem of carnets, cabotage and so on?

Kirsty Hayes: At the risk of sounding evasive, I do not think it is my place to comment on how EU member states are interacting with the EU on this or any other issue. What I know is that in quite a lot of EU member states, there would be a lot of welcome for more British artists coming over, and vice versa.

The Chair: Any other last questions?

Lord Anderson of Swansea: My declaration is that I have a granddaughter who is a ballerina in Poland, so she has managed.

Joanne Hamer: Fantastic. I am delighted to hear that.

Q23 **The Chair:** We should do a trip to watch a performance of "The Nutcracker", or whatever it is. Very good.

My last question is in relation to the German friendship and defence treaty that we signed recently. This seemed to be a bit more detailed and to cover more areas, in my reading of it. At the same time, the treaty with Germany was also quite extensive and was building on other treaties. Is there any significant difference, maybe an evolution or something that we should comment on, in relation to the two treaties and their differences?

Kirsty Hayes: We are trying to take forward concrete improvements in our security collaboration with a number of key players across Europe. I think this is a really extensive and impactful treaty that we should feel proud of but, as I said before, this is not the end of a journey. With each one of our key defence partnerships, we should look at not just what we have achieved so far but what the future is. That is why in both treaties we have put a lot of emphasis on the concrete projects, the lighthouse and landmark projects, because it is not just the aspirations set out in the treaty that are important; it is the concrete actions.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Katy Reid, thank you for joining us as well. Kirsty Hayes and Joanne Hamer, thank you for your time. This is something that we are going to follow in detail. We hope to

produce a report in the next couple of months, which we would refer to you; hopefully you will be pleased with what we say. We try to be as helpful, but also as critical, as necessary on where we think these treaties should go. Your time today has been greatly appreciated, so thank you very much for being with us.