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Evidence on

THE EU AGENDA ON MIGRATION

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Questions 1 - 10

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10.10 am

Witness: James Brokenshire MP

Members present

Baroness Prashar (Chairman)
Lord Condon
Lord Cormack
Lord Faulkner of Worcester
Baroness Janke
Lord Jay of Ewelme
Baroness Massey of Darwen
Baroness Pinnock
Lord Ribeiro
Lord Soley
Lord Wasserman

Examination of Witness

James Brokenshire MP, Minister of State for Immigration

Q1 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for your time, Mr Brokenshire. You are very familiar with the format of our Committee. This particular evidence session is being televised live, and is of course open and public. The session will be recorded, and a verbatim report will be produced and put on the website. As usual, if you wish to make any amendments when you receive the transcript, please get your officials to get in touch. If you would like to give us any supplementary evidence afterwards, please feel free to do so. Do you want to say anything by way of introduction, or shall we go straight into questions?

James Brokenshire MP: No I do not, Baroness Prashar, but first I thank the Committee for inviting me here today. This is obviously a significant and important matter, and the Government have been taking a number of steps on it. As the Prime Minister said, the key element is how we break the link between people thinking that they can get on to boats in the Mediterranean and effectively achieve some form of settlement in the EU. There is all the work that has been taking place in the Mediterranean to save lives, but equally there is all the work that needs to take place that we might describe as being upstream, beyond the horizon of the Mediterranean coast, to see that people do not put their lives at risk by making this perilous journey, and there are the measures against organised immigration crime, the people traffickers, those who perversely and sickly seem to see this as some sort of trade of a commodity—that human beings are a commodity. It is utterly appalling. That is why the Government are committed to a number of different measures and are working with European partners. A great deal of this is reflected in the European Agenda on Migration, which this Committee is specifically taking evidence on, but I welcome this session. There are a number of important themes which this Government would like to underline and emphasise: the commitment to ease that burden and that pressure; the role of international and regional development assistance; and some of the other parallel processes that are ongoing, such as the Khartoum process. A great deal of work is happening that needs to happen, but equally I emphasise that there are no easy solutions here.

The Chairman: Let us start with that. I want to explore with you whether you think that the European Agenda on Migration strikes the right balance between immediate action and long-term solutions to the global crisis issues, because you hinted—

James Brokenshire MP: The agenda clearly provides a range of different issues, including: the short-term immediate challenges of preventing people from losing their lives in the Mediterranean; the sense of how we take action against the organised people traffickers; the CDSP initiatives; and the initiative to establish some form of facility in Niger, which is one of the forward-leading pieces of work that is identified. It seeks to look beyond the immediate Schengen border, and it is absolutely right and proper that it does so. We take issue with the emphasis that is given in the plan to relocation and that side of the agenda. We have said that it should be for member states to determine, and we have not signed up to compulsory relocation or resettlement because we think that is almost moving the problem around and dealing with the symptoms rather than the underlying cause. It is that element that perhaps we would say is not correctly balanced in that way. But, ultimately, the whole programme touches on a broad range of issues and underlines the seriousness of the issues that we face and the need for a coherent, end-to-end approach, which I think is required.

The Chairman: So you think that it does provide a coherent approach. Is that your view?

James Brokenshire MP: I think it does. There are different aspects to this in the work programme. There is obviously the work on FRONTEX, the regional development and protection programmes, and the common security and defence policy initiative. Obviously we are supporting the first phase of that work. So it does look at the more upstream aspects. We always think that is where we need to place the greatest emphasis, because ultimately that is where the underlying issues are being caused from. We see the challenges of possibly somewhere between 500,000 and 600,000 people in Libya at the moment estimated to want to make that journey northwards towards the EU. We are dealing with significant numbers here and are looking at how, through regional development and other assistance, we can intervene to stop flows across Africa. Equally, we are looking at how processes such as the Khartoum process, with the European Union working with the African Union, can deal with some of the underlying issues of people trafficking and smuggling, and with some of the organised criminality that in many ways is painting a false picture and giving people false hope and exploiting them in a really appalling way. It is all those aspects that we need to continue to remain focused on in order to break these linkages and to see that we have a long-term solution, as well as finding stability in Libya of course, and colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office continue to take work forward in creating greater stability within that state.

The Chairman: We will explore this further.

Q2 Lord Jay of Ewelme: In your Explanatory Memorandum on the Agenda on Migration, you say that the UK has “committed significant support to the current joint efforts in the Mediterranean”, and you have just said that again now. Could you say a little more on what resources we have allocated to that so far, and the order of magnitude? How much did they cost? What effect do you think it has had so far?

James Brokenshire MP: Again, you could break this down in a number of ways. We have committed the capabilities of HMS “Bulwark” and three Merlin helicopters in relation to the search and rescue issues, and they were deployed initially in April. There are other assets as well through some of our Border Force cutters, which equally remain deployed. On the impact of that in supporting FRONTEX’s Operation Triton initiative, overall I think that tens of thousands of lives have been saved through that initiative, and around 3,000 by UK assets alone. But it is important to understand that it very much goes beyond that in the contribution that is being made. For example, we have the European Asylum Support Office, which the UK has been supportive of for a number of years, to deal with the co-ordination of practical co-operation on the ground in some of these southern Mediterranean countries. In the last

three years, the UK has contributed more resources to EASO than any other member state, with over 1,000 expert working days to missions in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Cyprus. We continue to see that as an essential way forward.

It is also, very briefly, how you look at international development and the aid assistance that we have given to Syria—£800 million, with £100 million more now committed. Equally, there is some of the aid to Africa as well, where our international development budget is around £4 billion. So there are a number of different facets to this in terms of the commitments that we are giving.

Q3 Lord Condon: Minister, I shall take us on to discussing the pressure on the front-line states, Italy and Greece and so on. At the JHA Council meeting on 16 June, the Minister spoke about the need for solidarity but then went on to say that there needs to be a balance between solidarity and responsibility by those states. Where do the Government see that balance, and how it should be struck?

James Brokenshire MP: As I think I have highlighted through some of the existing contributions that we have made to the European effort through EASO, FRONTEX and through other means, we support the concept of solidarity on asylum matters within the EU and the contributions that have been given. We believe that solidarity follows on from member states making every effort to meet their own responsibilities under EU law, and in particular that they secure proper controls at the external border and introduce, for example, fingerprinting to the fullest possible extent. That is something that we continue to challenge on. Certainly at the Justice and Home Affairs Council last October there was a further underlining of the need for member states to take action on fingerprinting, and obviously then to put that into the Eurodac system to aid matching of those who may then be confronted or met by other member states later on. It is about ensuring that we have those systems in place. Clearly we want to support, through EASO and a number of other initiatives, raising standards and providing technical assistance, but solidarity remains important and builds from responsibility, in terms of the balance and how to strike it.

Lord Condon: Does the reality of geography mean that Italy, Greece and to a lesser extent Malta will just have to continue to shoulder the majority of the burden of asylum seeking, and that that will be the case for the foreseeable future?

James Brokenshire MP: If we are seeing arrivals through different routes, the responsibility is on us for taking the basic biometrics and the basic checks. Clearly through EASO and other EU initiatives, and FRONTEX itself—albeit it that the UK is not a formal member of FRONTEX, the external border agency dealing the EU external border, although we support and provide assistance to FRONTEX—asylum claims may well become more prevalent in those member states. But ultimately it is important that we uphold the Dublin regulations and that those claiming asylum should claim it in the first safe state that they come to. If that is not enforced, the question is whether you get into asylum shopping and whether that then gets exploited by those who are painting a false picture of hope within the EU. So there are a number of different layers to look at and a number of different steps that we need to take to start to break some of these linkages, and to see how we can facilitate the terms as well from some of these countries. It is that sort of technical assistance and support that I know the UK will be very keen to underscore.

Lord Condon: Is there a danger in the short term, with the sheer pressure of numbers, Italy and Greece will almost encourage people to move out of those countries once they have landed, and that the interplay with judicial decisions means that countries cannot readily send them back because they are contravening various issues? We could be faced with those front-

line states almost moving people through swiftly, knowing that they are not going to come back, and just displacing the problem elsewhere into the EU.

James Brokenshire MP: I suppose that is where we come to the point about the sense of responsibility, and responsibility then building solidarity. If we can see that EU member states are doing what they are required to do and are taking all necessary measures to meet their responsibility, that leads to a sense of solidarity that comes through from other member states. I view it in those terms, with that sequencing. Clearly we have seen some more recent steps where France has taken action around the internal Schengen border—and part of this obviously feeds into the wider debate on free movement around the Schengen border itself and the situations in which you are able to put some suspensions in place to Schengen for a serious threat to public policy or internal security. But it is important that we see the fingerprinting and other activity that takes place from a security standpoint, as well as an upholding of Dublin and other regulatory standpoints. If pressures then build up in the support that may be needed to meet that, it is precisely the mechanisms that we have through FRONTEX and EASO and other steps that member states can take that can underpin that.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Baroness Massey, do you want to ask a supplementary?

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Yes, I do. Good morning, Minister. Has any thinking or concern gone into how Greece will cope, given its present precarious situation, with all that is hitting it in terms of this issue?

James Brokenshire MP: We have provided, and continue to provide, technical support to Greece through the European Asylum Support Office, recognising that Greece has had challenges over its internal asylum processing for some time, as well as challenges in how it has handled the pre-existing pressures—hence the reason for the suspension of Dublin returns to Greece because of the system issues that it has faced. We are looking at how further EU funding can be deployed. There is EU funding available to deploy to Greece, to assist it in the continued management of asylum applications that are taking place there, through the different EU structures. The challenge is working with the Greek authorities to ensure that that meshes into aspects of some of the Greek state and front-line agencies that are dealing with that, which is certainly precisely why we have an EASO liaison officer there: to work with the Greek Administration to see how that can then build and what the needs are to establish further funding and support through the EU. Clearly Greece feels the pressure from the eastern migratory route. In essence, there are two primary routes of migration: the southern Mediterranean heading north to Italy and the eastern route that comes through from Greece. Obviously we are supporting other EU partners to further enhance and address this. So there is thinking and there is that work that is ongoing, so it has certainly not been ignored—far from it. There has been ongoing work for some time.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: And it will continue, given the present difficult situation in Greece?

James Brokenshire MP: Greece remains a European member state, so absolutely. All the mechanisms that are there through the European Asylum Support Office remain, and we continue to work with Greece bilaterally, as well as multilaterally, through EU structures, to be able to support it in dealing with the pressures that it sees from the eastern route.

Q4 Lord Soley: I turn to the push-pull argument that the Government have moved. You argue that certain rescue and relocation operates as a sort of pull factor towards the EU. Would not most people say that if you are in a state at war or a collapsing state where there is

no rule of law or stable Government, the push factor is far more important? Where is your evidence that it is a pull factor?

James Brokenshire MP: I would probably use the terminology of ensuring that the steps do not make a situation even worse. One of the really awful parts of the whole Mediterranean migration crisis was the way in which people traffickers sought to exploit the search and rescue process by using increasingly unseaworthy boats, just prior to Italy's decision to suspend Operation Mare Nostrum, with the risk that that brings with it. Effectively, it assumed that because there was search and rescue there, they could tell people that they would be rescued, which put lives at greater and greater risk. There was the appalling case earlier this year when a vessel with significant numbers of migrants effectively capsized when a rescue boat was very close at hand. It is an awful, awful situation that we see, where people traffickers will seek to exploit, seek to sell a sense of false hope and take advantage. I have heard some reports of traffickers putting out boats and then ringing the Italian coastguard to say, "Oh, we've just pushed this vessel out. Come and rescue them". It is a horrible, complicated picture that we see, and we have to take steps to try to break some of these links if there is rescue, but equally how return can take place, and to try to break the linkage between people setting out in vessels and people getting to the EU.

On the issue of relocation, that side of the piece, it is difficult to see how that does not support or play into some of the false narrative that some of the people traffickers seek to advance: here's the EU setting up arrangements and putting them in place, so if you do try to head northwards you can get some sort of settlement within the European Union". It was interesting to note some of the strident comments of the Eritrean Foreign Minister at the time that this would lead in effect to a flow of people out of Eritrea. Clearly there are other human rights issues and broader issues that relate to Eritrea, and I entirely understand that. None-the-less, it was notable to see those comments. Sadly, from 2013 prior to Mare Nostrum being in place, there were an estimated 600 deaths. In 2014, with Mare Nostrum in place, there were 3,500 deaths. This is a complex picture, and all I would argue is that we have to be very careful not to encourage or make a difficult situation even more difficult to resolve when we know that there is exploitation and those appalling traffickers and criminals who use some of these things to perpetrate further abuse.

Lord Soley: I do not doubt that there is abuse or that there some very evil people involved in encouraging this trade, but I worry that the Government seem to be putting an awful lot of eggs in that basket when the evidence is pretty overwhelming that people are fleeing for their lives or from disastrous situations at home. When you present it in this way, you are presenting one side of the issue with great emphasis. You indicated that when Mare Nostrum was dropped, under FRONTEX, which was less effective, the numbers dramatically increased by nearly 200%.

James Brokenshire MP: I would say a couple of things in response to that. First, in the mix of people who seek to make that journey, our estimate is that the majority of them are probably economic migrants rather than those who are fleeing persecution or some sort of civil conflict. Therefore, they are trying to make a better life in the EU, rather than it being on that greater humanitarian side. The work that the EU Commission is advancing on the potential to have some sort of facility in Niger is important in that context. We need to understand where those pressures are coming from, and the manner in which social media and other mechanisms are being used to try to encourage people effectively to see a flow of often wealthier, better educated people from parts of Africa—because the sad reality is that they are the ones with the money to pay to the people traffickers. It is that context that I would underline with regard to the flow of people that we see, and how it is a broader mix than is

sometimes presented. The Mare Nostrum decision was taken by Italy. It was an Italian decision that, yes, was supported by 28 member states. It was the position seen towards the end of last year of increasing risk being taken by migrants and people traffickers to exploit the search and rescue facilities that were there. It was this appalling position that we were seeing—and, sadly, people traffickers have no compunction about whether some of these people live or die.

Lord Soley: Do you accept that the figures went up after FRONTEX was brought in to replace Mare Nostrum? If your theory is right about pull and the message had gone back, it is less easy now—but in fact the numbers went up, as we can see from the figures, by 160%

James Brokenshire MP: The IOM published its figures and its estimates on the flows that we have seen this year, which was precisely why FRONTEX's Operation Triton received significant additional resource. I described the work that we have done in providing Royal Naval and other assets directly to save lives. It was absolutely right and proper that we should do so against the horrendous humanitarian picture that we saw in the Mediterranean, with action being taken to prevent loss of life.

Lord Cormack: I have a brief supplementary question, if I may. Do we not have an absolute duty in that those who are pushed into the sea should be pulled out of the sea?

James Brokenshire MP: Yes, and the commitment that we have given in supporting FRONTEX and saving lives is precisely the contribution that the UK is making to Operation Triton to see that lives are saved and that people are not needlessly losing their lives in the Mediterranean Sea. We are saying that that cannot be the only solution. It has to be about breaking that link and about preventing people from making that perilous journey in the first place, because otherwise you just see a continuous, horrific cycle of more and more people putting their lives at risk. Even with the facilities that can be put in place, there will always be the risk that lives will be lost, particularly, as we are seeing, with very unseaworthy vessels literally being shoved off the Libyan coast in the hope that somebody is going to come and pick them up. It is that element of risk and exploitation, and the element of having a long-term sustainable solution to deal with these pressures, that we must absolutely advance.

Lord Cormack: I shall come back to that later, but very simply a civilised community cannot see people put to death.

James Brokenshire MP: No, and that is absolutely why we have been supporting the Operation Triton initiative, even though we are not members of FRONTEX and recognise that. This country has a proud tradition through humanitarian and international development assistance in dealing with humanitarian crises. Certainly that is a part of the contribution that we are making and will continue to make, but we have to break that link and deal with the broader issues, as well as continue that work on saving lives.

Q5 Lord Ribeiro: You have said quite clearly that in your opinion the majority of the people coming through are economic migrants, rather than coming for humanitarian reasons. I think the intention is that those who fulfil the criteria for entry are probably going to be the Syrians, Eritreans and Somalis. How are you able to determine what percentage of these people are genuine or not, and do you have hard figures that prove that the pull factor is not a myth and that these people are not all economic migrants?

James Brokenshire MP: Obviously we know the continuing challenges from the ongoing conflict and difficulties in Syria, with several million people being displaced. It is why we argue that that lends itself to a regional solution, why relocating people away from the region does not offer the long-term approach needed and why our response has been to provide the

significant humanitarian assistance that we have done. We are second only to the US in the financial contribution that we have made in respect of Syria, having committed funds of £900 million. If you look at the mix of those who are presenting themselves, and possibly some of the ways in which we can look at this—the nationalities of those who are presenting themselves and our asylum intake numbers—a link can be drawn, in part through the eastern route, the southern route and how that presents itself in terms of the asylum intake numbers that we see and the mix of nationalities that are reflected within that. We see a much broader mix from those nationalities than simply by looking at the Syrian refugees. When we consider the southern Mediterranean now, the Syrian refugees have tended to move more towards the eastern route than the southern route, and the numbers are being made up more by different African nations. It is how you look at the breakdown of the different numbers and the nationalities that are provided there.

Lord Ribeiro: That was the point behind my question, because it seems to me that we are dealing with the Mediterranean position, and the majority of people are coming through from the African side rather than the eastern side—in other words Somalis, Eritreans—

James Brokenshire MP: Yes

Lord Ribeiro: And perhaps quite a lot of Africans who went to work in Libya now feel threatened and wish to move on towards the European Union.

James Brokenshire MP: Equally, we are seeing in our intake significant numbers from countries such as Sudan. Obviously, because of different diasporas, communities and other factors, people will tend to go to different European countries, or try to make those efforts in that way. That seems to be the pattern that we are now seeing: that it is more the African countries that make up that mix of those who are taking the southern route. The Syrians are tending to take the eastern route more.

Lord Ribeiro: A final question. You talk about Niger as a possible area where one could not so much contain but perhaps resolve the situation. Do you feel that this could be a way in which to deal with some of the African migrants?

James Brokenshire MP: I am certainly very interested in the Commission's proposals on Niger, and we as a Government have joined the working group to develop this. It is also worth considering whether a similar centre might be developed in the Horn of Africa because of the flows that we see from a number of states that you have highlighted—in parallel to the work that is being taken forward in Niger. That has to be linked to regional development and protection programmes. That is something that we are keen to see. We have to be careful, though, that it is not seen somehow as providing a further means of access to employment or education in the EU via one of these centres. So we have to be careful about how this work is developed and that it does not cause additional problems or add to the complications that we already see. However, the initiative is worth taking forward and we are certainly keen to influence its development.

Baroness Pinnock: You have given us very detailed answers and I have tried to listen carefully. I might have missed this in an answer that you have already given, but you said a few minutes ago that the majority of migrants on both routes are economic migrants. Can you provide us with the scale of that and the evidence that they are economic migrants? What is the basis of that assessment?

James Brokenshire MP: I responded to a previous question about the mix of nationalities—the countries that are reflected within the mix from the southern Mediterranean. I would point to those elements, but although I have given some details we may be able to share other data with the Committee to aid you in the inquiry. It is that overall blend that I would point to in

relation to what I was saying about the mix and economic migration. However, if it would help, I will take that away as an action point to see what further information we can share around that issue, because I understand from the questions that have been picked up the importance that you attach to this.

The Chairman: That would be very helpful. Thank you.

Baroness Pinnock: Thank you for that. It would be great to share that information. I have another question about scale and the proportion of contributions. You have rightly pointed to the horrendous nature of what is going on and having a degree of humanitarian response to it. You also pointed to some of the technical support that the Government are providing. Can you put that into a scale for me, so that I can get a feeling for the value in funding terms of the measures that we are taking, as compared to those being taken by Italy, Greece, Germany or France—a league table, if you like?

James Brokenshire MP: These things often do not lend themselves to league tables. However, the UK contributes around 15% of EU development spending, for example, which gives some context of the work that we are doing on that side. We give more support, I believe, to the European Asylum Support Office than any other member state. There may be other elements that provide the sense of the contribution that we are making and how we are pulling our weight. Through different UNHCR resettlement schemes, for example, the UK resettles around 1,000 people a year, which stands well in comparison to other European member states. Between 2008 and 2014, according the European Commission's figures, the UK resettled the second highest number of people in need in the EU.

The Chairman: Would it be possible to provide these data and the league table to us in writing? It would be very helpful, if you could do that at this stage.

James Brokenshire MP: No, there are certain points that we can pull out, if that would be helpful.

The Chairman: Data on all these issues would be very helpful. Thank you.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Could I pick up on a point that you made a moment or two ago about providing alternatives for potential migrants, particularly from Syria, going to Europe through Libya? I think I am right in saying that your colleagues in the Department for International Development are very keen to encourage the Governments particularly of Lebanon and Jordan to find opportunities for work, education and health as an alternative to travelling to Europe. First, can you confirm that that is indeed the case? Secondly, are you satisfied that your department is working closely enough with that department to produce a decent outcome?

James Brokenshire MP: Yes, I think we have stepped up. There are very good relations between the Home Office and the Department for International Development, because we have a lot of shared objectives. I have highlighted the funding in the form of humanitarian assistance that has been provided by the Department for International Development directly to Syria with the £800 million, plus the £100 million that has been committed, and how from a humanitarian standpoint that has had a huge impact. I have numbers here: about 8.7 million food rations, clean water for 1.5 million people a month, 1.3 medical consultations in Syria and the region. We are also working with other countries in the region to provide support. You rightly highlighted countries such as the Lebanon. I certainly believe that this is about longer-term arrangements relating to employment and the need, from a regional developmental perspective, to support Syrians who have been displaced from their country. The specifics of that probably fall more within the purview of Department for International Development, and certainly DfID has been taking forward initiatives around the countries

outside Libya and beyond that immediate humanitarian welfare perspective to provide further support in education, employment and skills to meet some of the needs that are there. So I certainly understand that it is that type of work that is being done.

Q6 Baroness Massey of Darwen: Could I ask a question about the relocation requirements?

James Brokenshire MP: Yes.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: What is the Government's experience of voluntary relocation schemes? How many individuals has the UK voluntarily relocated in the past, and does it intend to continue doing so?

James Brokenshire MP: It is important to underline the distinction between relocation—in other words, relocating people around the EU once they are here—and resettlement. On relocation, the UK contributed to what was known as the EUREMA resettlement scheme in 2011, which assisted Malta in dealing with the pressures of hosting a relatively high number of recognised beneficiaries of international protection. I have to say that the numbers were relatively small, but it was apparent from the evaluation of the pilot project that refugees were not inclined to go to some member states because of the lack of ties, diaspora—there is a whole range of reasons why particular refugees might want or aspire to go to particular countries. Even from that perspective, it adds to our concern about the feasibility of the current relocation proposals, because it seems likely that we would then see further secondary flows of migrants trying to move to their member state of choice, given the Schengen arrangements and the internal borders. That is the weakness of the relocation mechanisms: you might try to relocate people to one country, but the reality is that they are unlikely to stay there.

Q7 Baroness Janke: Following on from that question, could you elaborate on why you feel that relocation is unlikely to prove successful?

James Brokenshire MP: It is ultimately for member states to make these decisions voluntarily. That is an important point of principle. But there is the weakness and the challenge of secondary movement; it is effectively moving a problem around rather than actually dealing with it. That, I suppose, is the weakness in relocation that I would point to. Again, we need to look beyond the shores of Europe and put our emphasis on breaking the flow, breaking the numbers that are coming from different parts of the world and trying to come to the EU. That is where the emphasis should lie, rather than on relocation, for the reasons that I have identified.

Baroness Janke: Other members have referred to the fact that there are very unstable parts of the world: Syria, the wars in the Middle East, the wars in Africa. My colleagues have already asked you about the economic assumption—the assumption that the majority are economic migrants. How do you effectively feel that you are going to deal with the problem, given that these world situations, certainly at present, look unlikely to calm down and become reasonably stable?

James Brokenshire MP: There are recognised parts of the world where there is civil strife. Huge issues remain in Syria. That is why we have continued to work with the UNHCR on resettlement. That is the distinction that I would draw: the distinction between relocating and resettling—in other words, welcoming people to this country who are in the most need. Resettling has underpinned our work with the UNHCR through, for example, our Gateway programme, which has been in operation for quite some years, and work through the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, where we are using humanitarian aid and assistance

very directly to provide help in-region in the countries that need that help. Equally, where there are issues of vulnerability and particular need, our resettlement programmes, through Gateway, through the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, are intended to meet some of those specific needs and to give very direct help to those who may have been through things like sexual exploitation or who may have specific medical needs that simply cannot be met in a particular region. That is why we have measures in place and have had for some time, working with the UNHCR directly, and that is something that we do voluntarily; it is not mandated upon us. Equally, that complements the work that we are doing with our regional and international development assistance.

Baroness Janke: Can I ask you about scale again? We hear obviously not just about Syria but about unrest and wars in other areas in the Middle East, for example Palestine, issues in the Yemen, and so on, and we hear that the pressure of migration into Lebanon, for example, is very, very high. Could you perhaps provide us with some written information on your resettlement of the most vulnerable and your work with the UNHCR?

James Brokenshire MP: As I say, our resettlement numbers are at around 1,000 a year and are based on need: those vulnerable cases. We have the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, which is focused on Syria, and other resettlement programmes with other parts of the world, which is why we look to the UNHCR to identify individuals or groups that would be suitable for these sorts of programmes. They are based on need, and that is the response that we give to that. The reality is that when you are talking about a Syrian crisis involving several million people who are affected by it, resettlement is not the solution. It has to be about what assistance can be provided in-region, which is why the sorts of assistance that can be provided in Lebanon through international development in relation to skills, work and opportunity, which was raised in a question earlier, has to be the right emphasis. But there will be specific cases of need where our resettlement programmes can respond. Certainly we are doing this through the different schemes that I have set out, but certainly we can provide some further granularity, if you would find that helpful—

Baroness Janke: Detail on the scale would be helpful.

James Brokenshire MP: —on the different schemes and obviously our close co-operation with the UNHCR.

Q8 Lord Cormack: Minister, I am sure we are all grateful for your answers. You are obviously seeking to deal with a series of complex interlocking problems with commitment, but I come back to the subject that we touched on earlier. You have said in the past that the Government share the Commission's desire to prevent further loss of life at sea. You have said that Britain will continue to make an important contribution to search and rescue missions. Indeed, you have emphasised that in similar words this morning. But, Minister, how can that be squared with the withdrawal of HMS "Bulwark" from Operation Triton?

James Brokenshire MP: HMS "Bulwark" requires refit work and needed to be withdrawn at that point. I underline the incredible job that HMS "Bulwark" has fulfilled while it has been in the Mediterranean, saving—

Lord Cormack: Could it not have continued?

James Brokenshire MP: No, it needed to come back for the work that has been undertaken on it. It has now been replaced by HMS "Enterprise", which will be performing its role. Obviously, if there is search and rescue that it can support, it will do so, but it is also supporting the common security and defence proposals and the first phase of developing an intelligence picture of the flows of people traffickers and the exploitation that is taking place

through that route. HMS “Enterprise” has been deployed to the Mediterranean to support that activity, which contributes to preventing lives being lost in the Mediterranean. Of course it will be involved in rescue, as it would as a vessel in the Mediterranean in any event.

We still have our Border Force cutters, which remain deployed; we still have a Merlin helicopter deployed. The UK is still contributing to Operation Triton, and now to the first phase of the common security and defence policy initiative, to start to break those flows, to prevent lives from being put at risk, to identify vessels that may be about to be used to put people out into the Mediterranean. The question is how we develop the next phase of this work. That is precisely what the deployment of HMS “Enterprise” is intended to facilitate—as well, of course, as continuing to support search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

Lord Cormack: What about the relative size of the vessels concerned?

James Brokenshire MP: That is about how we develop the programme of work moving forward and why I think it is important that we support the EU initiative to break those flows and prevent vessels from being used and deployed in the first place. HMS “Enterprise” is there. It will support search and rescue operations.

Lord Cormack: Can it do what “Bulwark” did?

James Brokenshire MP: It is providing a slightly different role.

Lord Cormack: And a lesser role.

James Brokenshire MP: A different role. I do not see it as a lesser role. Indeed, I think it is absolutely integral to saving lives that we prevent vessels setting off, that we break the links that are there, that we go after the people traffickers. It is also why we have set up the new task force, bringing the National Crime Agency, immigration enforcement, the Border Force and the Crown Prosecution Service together to enhance our response to organised crime and the trafficking that is leading to people setting off from the coast. This obviously then complements the work that is being undertaken that HMS “Enterprise” is supporting, as well as its continued role in rescue operations.

I see it as a developing picture, a developing role. It continues to underline the commitment that the UK is giving to this issue and to preventing lives being lost.

Lord Cormack: I am sure we are very grateful for that. “Bulwark” is being refitted. Is this a very lengthy refit? Do the Government intend to put it back?

James Brokenshire MP: Obviously “Bulwark” will come back into service at some point, but my understanding is that the work required on it will take some time, as customary refit activities do.

We need to continue to develop and reflect on the overall need to break these linkages and to prevent lives being lost. I would say that the contribution being made by “Enterprise”, by the cutters and by the Merlin helicopter stands comparison with the contributions being made by other European countries. We remain committed to supporting FRONTEX operations in that way.

Lord Cormack: Have you seen these things at first hand?

James Brokenshire MP: I have not been down to the Mediterranean directly to see the work, but I know that the Secretary of State for Defence has been to see it for himself. Therefore, there is that connection, very much, that we have as a Government in supporting that activity. Indeed, the head of the UK Border Force himself has been down to support that work and to understand the way in which our Border Force cutters are absolutely being used to support search and rescue operations.

It is about that mix of providing direct rescue as well as providing information, intelligence and cover so that other vessels can be deployed to conduct the rescue operation itself. In other words, it is more blended, more multifaceted, in that way. Again, the work that “Enterprise” will do will play an important role on a number of different levels.

Q9 Lord Ribeiro: In the Explanatory Memorandum on the European Agenda on Migration, at paragraph 26 the Government note that the UK has “committed significant support to the current joint efforts in the Mediterranean”. However, it goes on to state that “any sustainable approach to search and rescue must involve their ‘decoupling’ from entry into the EU, except where there is a genuine case for asylum”. How are you actually able to establish a genuine case for asylum, and what you mean by that statement?

James Brokenshire MP: That touches on some of the themes that we have already explored in part in this session. We have to break the link that continues to play into the hands of criminal facilitators with people thinking that if they get on to a vessel, they will be able to get to the EU and remain in the EU, regardless of whether they have a valid asylum claim or not. That is the point that we were trying to make in the Explanatory Memorandum: the balance of nationalities that we see. Someone who has come to the shores of the EU is entitled to have their asylum claim processed in accordance with the relevant law. The problem is that people traffickers will use all sorts of techniques to sell a message, sell a narrative, sell a picture of transfer of people from across the African continent to the EU. The point that we are making is about breaking the link, so that if people are here who are not entitled to be here, we support initiatives such as return and support other nations to return those who do not have a valid asylum claim within the European Union. We are pointing to breaking those linkages in that flow of people across continents. For those who do not have a lawful entitlement to asylum, we should see returns taking place.

Lord Ribeiro: Would you like to comment on the fact that, as I understand it, some nationals have refused to have their fingerprints taken, or have gone to measures that make fingerprinting effectively useless?

James Brokenshire MP: Your question is quite timely, because I have just signed a letter to go to Lord Boswell on a parallel issue about the implementation of what are known as the Eurodac regulations, the system that fingerprints would go into. The letter concerns the estimate given of the number that are actually going into the Eurodac computer system, contrasted with the estimated number that perhaps should be being recorded. I have data from the EU agency, eu-LISA, which deals with all the computer systems and everything involved in them. It estimates from the number of Eurodac transmissions by Italy in 2014, as compared to the FRONTEX risk analysis from a similar period, that that gap could be about 55,000, so we are looking at significant numbers here, which is why it is important that we continue to work with southern European countries to see that greater fingerprinting is undertaken. The letter that I am about to issue to Lord Boswell may be instructive for this Committee as well. It may add some further background and colour to these specific points.

Lord Soley: Why fingerprinting? Why not a more effective biometric?

James Brokenshire MP: Fingerprinting has tended to be used, and the systems have been put in place for sharing on that basis—hence the Eurodac database itself. Therefore, the platforms, systems and processes have tended to rely on fingerprinting. That is the near-term arrangement on which we need to continue to work with European countries. Of course over time, other biometrics that are less intrusive might be developed, but I think that they are several years down the track in terms of the sort of investment and infrastructure that would

be required. That is why it remains essential that we continue to focus on fingerprinting in the near term.

Lord Soley: But they are all photographed, and eye recognition can be done at that stage and is a lot more effective and a lot quicker. The technology is already there in all the major countries.

James Brokenshire MP: But when you look at the systems that are required to share information across the EU, that in itself is a huge programme of work that would take many years to do at significant cost, based on experience of other EU programmes. Given the pressures now, we have arrangements for fingerprinting that provide the mechanisms for sharing across the EU. That is why in the near term and for the foreseeable future we have to rely on this system to provide us with the best information.

Lord Condon: Minister, the Explanatory Memorandum to us states that the United Kingdom is taking a leading role in developing initiatives designed to tackle the root causes of migration. Are there major initiatives that we should be aware of that we have not explored so far in this session?

James Brokenshire MP: There are a number of different parts of this. We have spoken about working with the Commission on Niger, and that is part of it. It is about how we use our international development aid and assistance work on economic and other developmental work across Africa, and the steps that can be taken through that route. So there is separate work that DfID is taking forward to support the activity. Clearly, there is a continuing process around the common security and defence work at EU level, which the UK is supporting.

Perhaps the one issue that we have not touched on in any great detail is the Khartoum process and the ancillary Rabat process. I was in Rome at the end of last year for the launch of the Khartoum process, which is an exchange between the EU and the African Union states to deal with some of the issues. One of the leading elements of this relates to people trafficking, smuggling and organised criminality. So that initiative is being taken forward, with the UK part of the core steering group.

The Chairman: When was that launched?

James Brokenshire MP: It was launched in November last year. A summit is taking place in Valletta in Malta, and clearly working groups have been taking place. That would give us another good opportunity to make progress on the upstream work. So that is a parallel track that we are developing from a practical and diplomatic perspective with the African Union, and particularly focusing on the Horn of Africa, which is very relevant to the flows of migration that we see here in the UK. So there are a number of different aspects to this, and Khartoum is the one that we have not touched on to a great extent in this session thus far.

Q10 The Chairman: Can I ask a supplementary? The work that you are doing through international development is obviously very good and necessary, but along with that are you measuring the impact of that? Is it actually reducing the number of people wanting to migrate to Europe? Is that having the desired impact?

James Brokenshire MP: Obviously the metrics on this are quite difficult over relatively short time periods to be able to point to. That regional development, stability and assistance work is key. A core part of this, in all candour, is a stable Libya—looking further away from the Mediterranean coast on what is happening in the Mediterranean Sea, and looking at what is happening on the shores of Libya. That involves work on a number of different levels: diplomatically, with the Prime Minister's envoy, and other assistance, along with the work of IOM on Libya. Creating a stable Libya will make a significant difference in dealing with

some of the immediate pressures—then working back from there to the Niger initiative and other initiatives that we think may be relevant in the context of the Horn of Africa, along with other economic and development work in a number of transit and source countries. Countries such as Sudan or Ethiopia could be quite important in this. So it is about how we can continue to assess the numbers in Libya at the moment. But as I have underlined in this evidence session, 500,000 or 600,000 people are considering making that journey, so it is a significant challenge and number that we are dealing with there. The work has to look at all the different elements to deal with the stock of people who are already in Libya and looking to make the journey, as well as steps that we can take through transit and source to stem that flow. It is quite hard to point to metrics, just because of the evolving nature of the challenge that we are dealing with.

Lord Wasserman: I wanted to make a comment on the fingerprint point. While iris and all the rest of it is very good for identity, people tend not to leave their irises at scenes of crime, but they do leave their fingerprints. So I think that we should build a database of fingerprints, because once these people are here in Europe those fingerprints might be very useful some time down the line. So I hope that we will not chase after other identity systems.

James Brokenshire MP: I am grateful to Lord Wasserman for his comment, because we are doing a separate piece of work on foreign national offenders, the use of data-sharing across the EU, and European criminal records information systems along with the work of the second-generation Schengen information system, which may well feature in further evidence sessions of this Committee in the months ahead, so I shall not stray more widely than that at this stage.

Lord Cormack: Very briefly, it would be helpful to have a paper copy of the Khartoum process—as you say, we have not really focused on that this morning—and anything that you think should be brought to our attention. The specific question I want to ask you touches on Libya and how crucial it is to have stability there. There has been much talk about camps in Libya, where people could be persuaded to stay while their applications are sifted, and so on. How realistic is that, and what progress has been made towards it?

James Brokenshire MP: As I think I indicated in a previous answer, our focus on the development of the centres is at this stage probably outside of Libya, because of the operating conditions. I know from discussions from some of the different agencies that they are considering what work can be undertaken within Libya, notwithstanding some of the immediate challenges. Our work in Libya is absolutely about supporting progress towards a UN-mediated ceasefire and a stable political settlement there. That is our immediate priority in Libya—and how the UK special envoy to the Libyan political transition, Jonathan Powell, and the UK diplomatic network are working hard with key Libyan interlocutors and international partners to support UN efforts to facilitate a fully inclusive dialogue to reach a lasting political agreement. That is where our immediate focus is on Libya; once we can achieve that, that will provide the environment in which we can look to further advance some of the broader issues on migration and on centres that could be established. Clearly that is the immediate challenge.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed, Minister. As you said, these are difficult and complicated issues, and we are grateful to you for at least describing to us the Government's approach to this. You have been very generous with your time, so thank you.