

News story: 1,500 British troops exercising with NATO allies in Europe

The Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon has today visited some of the 1,500 British personnel currently exercising across five countries in Europe, joining NATO allies in a sign of solidarity against any potential threat.

Sir Michael met with the troops in Romania, including the UK's 20th Armoured Brigade as part of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force Land component, which the UK took the lead of in January this year. The approximately 500-strong British force have been deployed on Exercise Noble Jump, working alongside 14 partner nations and testing NATO's ability to deploy forces quickly and in response to a crisis.

Elsewhere in Europe, a company of 45 Commando of the Royal Marines joined the US-led Sabre Strike exercise in Latvia and Lithuania, working alongside Norwegian and Polish forces. Troops from the Light Dragoons and amphibious engineers from 75 Engineer Regiment also joined the exercise in Poland while the Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup 5 Rifles exercised in Estonia.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The UK is playing a leading role in the NATO alliance and with around 1,500 British personnel exercising in Europe this week, nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in this region. We are standing side by side with our allies in the East, a sign of our unwavering commitment to European security.

While in the country, Sir Michael is also visiting Royal Air Force personnel deployed to Romania as part of the NATO Southern Air Policing mission.

The detachment of four Typhoon fighter jets from 3 Fighter Squadron has been based in Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase in south east Romania since May. Deployed for up to four months, they are working alongside the Romanian Air Force to police the skies over the Black Sea.

Secretary of State for Defence Sir Michael Fallon added:

The UK is stepping up in its support for NATO's collective defence from the north to the south of the alliance. Through this deployment, RAF planes will be ready to secure NATO airspace and provide reassurance to allies in the Black Sea region.

During his visit, Sir Michael toured the airbase and spoke with RAF personnel deployed on the Mission. The Defence Secretary also witnessed the fighter jets participate in a practice Quick Reaction Alert.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon visits some of the 1,500 British personnel currently exercising across five countries in Europe. Crown Copyright.

[Green Party statement on Grenfell Tower fire](#)



Green Party

14 June 2017

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone in Grenfell Tower and to the families and friends of all those affected. We send our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the emergency services who once again have responded so quickly

and effectively, and shown how much they are needed.

“The priority right now must be to look after everyone affected. We do not yet know the full details of what has happened but a full investigation must take place as soon as possible. It is clear that residents had previously expressed clear concerns about safety. Their questions must be answered.”

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[Relocation: Commission launches infringement procedures against the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland](#)

Despite the Commission's repeated calls for action, these three countries remain in breach of their legal obligations and have shown disregard for their commitments to Greece, Italy and other Member States.

The Council Decisions require Member States to pledge available places for relocation every three months to ensure a swift and orderly relocation procedure. Whereas **Hungary** has not taken any action at all since the relocation scheme started, **Poland** has not relocated anyone and not pledged since December 2015. The **Czech Republic** has not relocated anyone since August 2016 and not made any new pledges for over a year

The Commission had previously announced in the 12th Relocation and Resettlement report presented on 16 May that those Member States that have not relocated anyone, or have not pledged for almost a year, breaching their legal obligations, should start doing so immediately and within a month. As announced yesterday in the 13th report on relocation and resettlement, since no action has yet been taken by the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to meet their legal obligations, the Commission has decided today to launch infringement procedures and address letters of formal notice to these three Member States.

Next steps

A **letter of formal notice** is a first official request for information and the first step in an infringement procedure. Given that the Council Decisions on relocation were adopted in response to an emergency situation and in view of the repeated calls to the three Member States, the authorities of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland now have one month to respond to the arguments

put forward by the Commission, instead of the customary two-month deadline. If no reply to the letter of formal notice is received, or if the observations presented in reply to that notice cannot be considered satisfactory, the Commission may decide to move to the next stage of the infringement procedure, and send a 'reasoned opinion' to the Member States. If necessary, the Commission may then refer the case to the Court of Justice of the EU.

Background

The temporary **emergency relocation scheme** was established in two Council Decisions in September 2015, in which Member States committed to relocate persons in need of international protection from Italy and Greece. The relocation decisions concern the commitment to relocate 98,255 people, after the Council adopted an amendment to the 2nd Council Decision on relocation on 29 September 2016 to make 54,000 places not yet allocated available for the purpose of legally admitting Syrians from Turkey to the EU.

The Commission has been reporting regularly on implementation of the two Council Decisions through its regular relocation and resettlement reports, which it has used to call for the necessary action to be taken. As reported yesterday in the 13th report on relocation and resettlement, the pace of relocation has significantly increased in 2017 with almost 10,300 persons relocated since January – a fivefold increase compared to the same period in 2016. As of 9 June, the total number of relocations stands at 20,283 (13,766 from Greece, 6,458 from Italy). With most of the Member States now relocating from Italy and Greece, it is feasible to relocate all those eligible by September 2017 if the pace of relocation is further stepped up. Whereas in Greece there are 11,350 persons currently registered for relocation, more efforts are needed in Italy to identify and rapidly register eligible asylum seekers.

The 13th report noted that regrettably, despite repeated calls, the **Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland**, in breach of their legal obligations stemming from the Council Decisions and their commitments to Greece, Italy and other Member States, have not yet taken the necessary action and announced that the Commission has decided to launch infringement procedures against these three Member States. Other Member States have been pledging and relocating. Member States' legal obligation to relocate will not cease after September – the Council Decisions on relocation apply to all persons arriving in Greece or Italy until 26 September 2017 and eligible applicants must be relocated within a reasonable timeframe thereafter.

For More Information

[Communication: Thirteenth Report on Relocation and Resettlement](#)

[Annex 1: Relocations from Greece](#)

[Annex 2: Relocations from Italy](#)

[Annex 3: Relocations from Italy and Greece](#)

[Factsheet: Relocation and Resettlement](#)

[Council Decision on the relocation of 40,000 people from Italy and Greece](#)

[Council Decision on the relocation of 120,000 people from Italy and Greece](#)

On the key decisions in the June 2017 infringements package, see full [MEMO/17/1577](#).

On the general infringements procedure, see [MEMO/12/12](#) ([an info graph](#)).

On the [EU infringements procedure](#).

[Debbie Abrahams MP comment on today's ONS labour market statistics](#)

Debbie Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, commenting on today's labour market stats from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), said:

"We welcome the overall increase in employment, but are deeply concerned that millions remain in low paid, insecure work.

"The Government has also failed to close the employment gap faced by women, disabled people and BAME groups, who have too often borne the brunt of austerity cuts.

"With the cost of basic essentials rising by 2.9 per cent, while wages stagnate, too many of Britain's families are struggling to get by while Theresa May focuses on holding her unstable coalition of chaos together.

"Only a Labour government will ensure working people's living standards are protected with a real Living Wage of £10 per hour, and an immediate end to austerity spending cuts.

"The Prime Minister must stand aside and let a Labour government build an economy that works for the many, not the few."

[SNP kept rail scheme delay secret ahead of General Election](#)

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- SNP kept rail scheme delay secret ahead of General Election

14 Jun 2017



The SNP knew its flagship rail project between Glasgow and Edinburgh would be delayed last month, but chose not to make the information public before the General Election.

It emerged at the weekend that the electrification of the line between the two cities would not be up-and-running until the autumn, almost a year behind schedule.

Now transport minister Humza Yousaf has admitted he was informed of the delay on May 25, a fortnight before the country went to the polls.

He told Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr that he received the letter from Network Rail chief executive Mark Carne more than two weeks ago, and will now come under pressure to publish the correspondence.

It is the latest disruption to hit Scotland's railway services in recent years.

And while Mr Yousaf has tried to shift the blame onto Network Rail, he previously took credit for the project, telling Holyrood: "We are in the midst of one of the most significant transformations of our railway infrastructure in recent memory."

Today's rural economy and connectivity committee is expected to hear more about the delay to the scheme, which is part of a £795 million improvement programme.

Despite being reluctant to reveal details of the delays ahead of the General Election, the Scottish Government made several separate funding announcements during that period, prompting accusations of breaching rules on purdah.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr said:

"There are serious questions to be asked about why the Scottish Government kept this important information to itself for so long.

"The transport minister admitted he was informed on May 25, yet we had to wait until Sunday until those key details emerged.

“Many will suspect the impending General Election may have influenced the SNP’s decision to keep this bad news under wraps.

“That’s irresponsible government, especially during a period where the SNP was more than happy to make contentious funding announcements during a period of purdah.

“Now the minister has confirmed he has this letter, he should make it public immediately.”

Scottish Conservative MSP Jamie Greene, a member of the rural economy and connectivity committee, said:

“It is extremely concerning to hear the electrification of the line is yet again delayed, bringing us nearly a year over the Scottish Government’s original deadline.

“Passengers who have already had to put up with major disruptions to the line will be dismayed to learn that electric trains will not be operating until October.

“This is one of Scotland’s flagship lines connecting two of our most important cities – it needs to be fit for the 21st century.”

Delays to the scheme were confirmed at the weekend:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/transport/delays-hit-electric-train-plans-for-edinburgh-glasgow-line-1-4472211>

Transport minister Humza Yousaf admitted yesterday he knew about the delay as early as May 25:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11003&mode=pdf>

And he previously boasted to parliament about how his Scottish Government was delivering on the scheme:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10642&mode=pdf>

Despite being reluctant to reveal details of the delay, the SNP was more than happy to make a series of funding announcements in the run up to the General Election:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/06/officials-admit-they-did-break-purdah-rules-over-snp-glasgow-funding-deal/>

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/06/cash-for-votes-scandal-snp-overruled-civil-servants-on-lm-crofting-spending-announcement/>