

EU-Myanmar relations

Myanmar's efforts in **combating forced labour**, acknowledged by the International Labour Organisation, have opened the way for the EU to reinstate preferential market access under the "Everything But Arms" scheme in 2013. As a result **bilateral trade reached €1.55 billion in 2016** up from €404 million in 2012. **Myanmar exports to the EU reached almost €1 billion**. Major exports from Myanmar to the EU were garments (more than 69% of total exports), rice (8%), and footwear (6%). According to Myanmar's official statistics (as of January 2017), the **EU was the 4th largest foreign investor in 2016**. According to Myanmar's official figures (end January 2017), cumulated existing investments originating from the EU amounted to USD 4.8 billion (or 8.2%), behind China (USD 18.4 billion or 31% of total), Singapore (USD 15.7 billion or 27%) and Hong Kong (USD 7.4 billion or 13% of total).

The EU is working towards concluding an **Investment Protection Agreement** to enable European businesses to realise the full potential offered by the country's economy, while complying with the highest standards of corporate social responsibility and responsible investment.

The EU demonstrated its commitment to work with the government, the International Labour Organization and other partners (Denmark, the United States and Japan) **on labour rights** when joining the *Initiative to Promote Fundamental Labour Rights and Practices in Myanmar* in May 2015. The EU is also actively engaged to promote **responsible business conduct** and is funding a €9 million ILO/OECD project in this area in a number of Asian countries, including Myanmar.

In order to help European business to better tap Myanmar's vast economic and investment potential, Myanmar has been selected as a **European Economic Diplomacy** case study country. The recently established [Eurochamber](#) can play an important role in representing EU business interests in the country.

Steps have been taken to prepare for negotiations on a [Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement \(FLEGT VPA\)](#). Progress is however dependent on the outcome of the peace process since vast forest areas are located in ethnic areas. The EU attaches particular importance to the preservation of environment and biodiversity.

Green Party condemns Conservative MP's comments on homosexuality



Green Party

28 April 2017

The Green Party has responded to allegations Conservative MP Andrew Turner told college students that homosexuality is 'wrong' and 'dangerous to society' [1].

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

"There's no place for these prehistoric pronouncements in our politics. It's astounding that in this day and age we're hearing reports of an MP spreading such hatred, particularly in a college which should be a place of learning and respect.

"The Isle of Wight deserves so much better from its elected representative. Green Party candidate Vix Lowthion [2] will stand up for a fairer, more inclusive society and champion the rights of all, including the LGBTIQ+ community. Vote Green to kick this bigotry out of Parliament.

"This has come on the same day the Green Party launched its LGBTIQ+ manifesto [3] with promises to protect LGBTIQ+ refugees, provide decent HIV protection and promote rights for intersex and trans people."

Notes:

1. <https://onthewight.com/isle-of-wight-mp-homosexuality-wrong-dangerous-to-society-andrew-turner-students/>
2. Vix Lowthion is the Green Party's education spokesperson and general election candidate in the Isle of Wight, where she is a teacher.
3. <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2017/04/28/greens-to-launch-lgbtiqa-manifesto-in-church/>

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Profit should never be a motive in benefit assessments

Yesterday, in the Scottish Parliament, I ruled out the use of private companies in assessing people for the benefits that will be delivered under Scotland's new social security system.

This was a proud moment. Profit should never ever be a motive in these important assessments and I wanted to let the people who will be relying on benefits know that I had listened to them and was making a clear decision on this issue.

The Government have refused to set out their state pension age plans – McDonnell

John McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, commenting on the Government's refusal to set out their State Pension age plans, said:

"Today the Government have refused to set out their plans for the State Pension age before the election, despite the legal requirement to report to Parliament before the 7th May.

"It comes on the back of the Prime Minister's continued refusal to commit to the State Pension triple-lock.

"This is yet more worrying news for pensioners already hit by a squeeze to their living standards. Labour is calling for clarity from the Tories on their plans for the future of the State Pension age.

"Pensioners, and working people, cannot afford not to know the future of the State Pension age.

"This is more evidence that this election is a choice between a Tory party that fails working people and a Labour Party that will stand up for working people and deliver a better, fairer Britain."

Ends

Scotland's female STEM struggle revealed

28 Apr 2017



The SNP need to do more to encourage females into participating in STEM subjects, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The calls come after latest figures from the SQA show that girls are significantly underrepresented in STEM subjects at Higher and National 5 level.

Of those taking Higher exams, only 9 per cent of engineering science, 27 per cent of physics and 17 per cent of computing students were female.

National 5 level also revealed a lack of female participation – 7 per cent of engineering, 27 per cent of physics and 18 per cent of computing examinees being girls.

Those girls who did take STEM subjects were shown to have performed better than boys – 81 per cent of girls achieving grades A to C compared to 72 per cent of boys.

Scottish Conservative shadow secretary for education, Liz Smith MSP said:

“These statistics are further proof of the extent of the STEM challenge facing the Scottish Government.

“The number of female students entering key subjects is only a very small fraction of the total entries from their male counterparts.

“Therefore, it begs the question about the effectiveness of the Scottish Government’s STEM strategy – a strategy that is already facing criticism from some academic bodies like the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

“Those female students who do enter for STEM subjects generally perform very well indeed, so it is even more disappointing that there are such low entries.

“Almost every report published by the science and technology industries tell us how important STEM subjects are to the future of the Scottish economy and how important women are to these new employment opportunities.

“The Scottish Government has much to do to address these concerns. Scotland needs many more graduates skilled in STEM subjects and women must be a very important part of that.”

Statistics were taken from SQA's Annual Statistical Report 2016 available via this link: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/63001.html>