

## Probate fees

I lobbied the government against the proposed increase in probate fees. I was pleased to learn yesterday that they are not proceeding with this increase in the present Parliament. I hope they do not reappear in the Manifesto.

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## News story: Defence Secretary announces £539 million investment in new missiles systems

The deal ensures our Armed Forces have the best equipment available to protect the new Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers and the extended fleet from current and future threats.

The half a billion-pound contracts will sustain over 130 jobs with MBDA in the UK, with missile modification and service support being carried out in Stevenage, Henlow, Bristol and Bolton.

### **Secretary of State, Sir Michael Fallon, said:**

This substantial investment in missile systems is vital in protecting our ships and planes from the most complex global threats as our Armed Forces keep the UK safe.

Backed by our rising Defence budget, these contracts will sustain high skilled jobs across the UK and demonstrate that strong defence and a strong economy go hand in hand.

As part of a £41 million contract, the Meteor air-to-air missiles will arm the UK's F-35B Lightning II squadrons. It will provide the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy with a world beating missile that can engage with targets moving at huge speed and at a very long range. The weapon will enter service on Typhoon with the RAF in 2018 and the F-35B from 2024, and will be used on a range of missions including protecting the Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers.



Meteor missile fired from a fighter jet. Image courtesy of MBDA Systems.

Meanwhile, a £175 million in-service support contract for the anti-air Sea Viper weapon system will ensure that the Royal Navy's Type 45 Destroyers can continue to provide unparalleled protection from air attack to the extended fleet. Under the contract, the missiles will be maintained, repaired and overhauled as and when required to ensure continued capability. The Sea Viper missile defends ships against multiple threats, including missiles and fighter aircraft.

The final contract is a £323 million deal to purchase the next batch of cutting-edge air defence missiles for the British Army and Royal Navy, offering increased capability at a lower cost. Designed and manufactured by MBDA UK at sites in Bolton, Stevenage and Henlow, the next-generation CAMM missile will provide the Armed Forces with missiles for use on sea and on land. CAMM has the capability to defend against anti-ship cruise missiles, aircraft and other highly sophisticated threats. Signalling our continued investment in Type 26 programme, CAMM will provide the anti-air defence capability on the new Type 26 Frigates for the Royal Navy and will also form part of the Sea Ceptor weapon system on the Type 23 Frigate and will also enhance the British Army's Ground Based Air Defence capability by replacing the in-service Rapier system.

**Tony Douglas, Chief Executive Officer of Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, said:**

Work on these cutting-edge missiles, which will help to protect the

UK at home and abroad and secure jobs across the country, demonstrates the importance of Defence investment. That is why, working closely with our industry partners, we continue to drive innovation and value into everything we do; securing next generation equipment for our Armed Forces at the best possible value for the taxpayer.

**Dave Armstrong, Managing Director of MBDA UK, added:**

MBDA is delighted by the continued trust placed in us by the Ministry of Defence and the British military. The contracts announced today for Meteor, CAMM and Sea Viper will help protect all three UK Armed Services, providing them with new cutting-edge capabilities and ensuring their current systems remain relevant for the future. They will also help to secure hundreds of high-skilled people at MBDA UK and in the UK supply chain, maintaining the UK's manufacturing base and providing us with a platform for exports.

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## **Statement on the ban of the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

Yesterday's decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to ban the activities of the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia on grounds of "extremism" could make it possible to launch criminal prosecutions against Jehovah's Witnesses for mere acts of worship.

Jehovah's Witnesses, like all other religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation as well as by Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards.

The European Union continues to promote freedom of religion or belief as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

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## **Investment Plan for Europe: EUR 150**

## million to finance green shipping

The European Investment Bank and Dutch bank ABN Amro will sign an agreement today to support investments for greening the European shipping fleet. This framework is the first with a financial institution in the Netherlands and is supported by the "Connecting Europe Facility" and was made possible by the "EFSI" (European Fund for Strategic Investments), central pillar of the Juncker Commission's Investment Plan for Europe.

The framework guarantee agreement will ensure that promoters of sustainable projects in the maritime transport sector can benefit from favourable financial terms as a result of the EIB's AAA rating. The facility is open for both retrofitting of existing shipping as well as for projects that envisage the construction of new vessels with a green innovation aspect, it applies to both inland shipping and seagoing operators.

"The Bank received a clear signal from the market that there was a financing gap for the greening of shipping fleets." said EIB vice-president Pim van Ballekom. "By allowing the EIB to take more risk, the Investment Plan for Europe enabled us to create a new instrument to support shipping companies in complying with the European sustainability standards. This is the second agreement under a EUR 750 million EFSI Green Shipping Guarantee Programme, which was set up after numerous discussions with Dutch counterparts from the public and private sector. We are really looking to ship owners to make use of it so that we can implement it in other countries as well."

Daphne de Kluis, CEO Commercial Clients ABN AMRO added: "We are very happy we can support the Juncker plan through this initiative. The EIB facility is an extra stimulus for ABN AMRO to stimulate our shipping clients to look for sustainable solutions. It fits perfectly with our other efforts to promote sustainable solutions in this important sector."

EU Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc said: "Financing the transition to more sustainable transport systems and networks requires a commitment to invest. Today's agreement demonstrates that the Investment Plan can play an important role in mobilising private finance to support this transition."

This sector risk bearing programme is meant for projects that will improve the environmental performance of transport vessels in terms of diminishing the emission of pollutants as well as increasing fuel efficiency. Projects should be proposed to the ABN Amro Bank and will be subject to their eligibility and risk acceptance criteria.

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# **Register for the open AHAW meeting**

Registration is open for observers to attend the [10-11 May plenary meeting](#) of EFSA's Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare, in Parma, Italy. If you are unable to attend the meeting in person but would like to follow the open sessions, you can watch via our dedicated web stream. Registration closes on 1 May for people who wish to attend the meeting in person and on 4 May for those who would like to follow proceedings online.

[Register here](#)