

Home Secretary meeting with Belgium Interior Minister

During Verlinden's 2 day visit to the UK, the Home Secretary briefed her counterpart on how the UK is supporting Ukrainians, including the extension of the existing family route and introduction of an uncapped humanitarian sponsorship pathway.

On the subject of illegal migration, they both agreed that a crucial part of tackling this shared challenge is international partnership and cooperation.

During the meeting, the Home Secretary confirmed that the UK will fund a package of security measures to tackle dangerous illegal journeys between the two countries, facilitated by criminal gangs. This will support a new command and operational response centre, roll out surveillance technology and provide additional frontline resource along the Belgian border.

This increased information sharing and partnership working will help reduce the number of people making these dangerous journeys, prevent the loss of life across the Channel and dismantle more criminal gangs.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Countries across Europe and beyond must work together to respond to issues which have a global impact.

Minister Verlinden and I reasserted at our meeting that our respective governments abhor Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The attack on a sovereign state is in clear breach of international law and norms and cannot be without consequences.

Our commitment to jointly tackle illegal immigration through the introduction of new security measures in Belgium, will show how critical collaborative working is to saving lives and disrupting the business model of international criminal gangs.

Those practical steps complement the changes to the law we are making here in the UK as we implement our New Plan for Immigration and overhaul our broken asylum system, which currently does little to disincentivise individuals from attempting to enter the UK illegally.

Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden said:

The United Kingdom is an important neighbour and excellent operational cooperation between our two countries is therefore important. Organised crime, such as migrant smuggling, does not

stop at borders. In a post-Brexit era, it is important to continue working together to stop these illegal activities.

In regard to illegal migration to the UK, our police officers are strongly committed to dismantling criminal networks, which in turn has a positive impact in mitigating the problem in France.

Information exchange is key in our joint commitment to tackle organised crime. I look forward to starting negotiations with a view to concluding a police cooperation agreement. Such an agreement between Belgium and the UK should create the possibility of exchanging even more information in real time with a view to disrupting networks of people smugglers and other forms of organised crime, such as drug trafficking and child sexual abuse.

The meeting was also an opportunity officially to start negotiations between both countries on a law enforcement cooperation agreement, to further enhance the partnership between the UK and Belgium, demonstrating a continued commitment to working together across judicial cooperation and law enforcement.

These measures and closer cooperation follow a joint declaration between the 2 countries to tackle organised immigration crime, signed by the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and Belgian Prime Minister, Alexander De Croo, in November 2021.

During the meeting the Home Secretary welcomed the Belgian initiative to discuss a bilateral law enforcement cooperation agreement. She noted that the UK values law enforcement cooperation with Belgium, and is keen to explore how this can be further strengthened.

The Home Secretary also praised Belgium's recent successful police operations against drugs-related crime and welcomed further discussions regarding serious and organised crime threats. This will provide an opportunity to collaborate on approaches to tackling shared threats, particularly in tackling drug supply.

Both look forward to speaking again and remain in contact in the weeks and months ahead.