

News story: Defence Secretary underlines UK commitment to European security

Speaking at a meeting of European Union Defence Ministers in Brussels, Sir Michael Fallon called on the EU to step up cooperation with NATO in order for the two organisations to more effectively tackle shared security challenges, including hybrid warfare and cyber.

Sir Michael also called for an improvement in Europe's performance in building national capabilities that can be made available to the EU and NATO. This requires more defence spending and better investment in key equipment.

Britain's commitments in 2017 underline the leading role in European Security the UK will continue to play. This year, Britain is leading NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a Brigade-size force which is ready and willing to respond to any threat. This spring, the UK will also deploy a battle group of around 800 personnel to lead in Estonia NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.

The Defence Secretary also confirmed Britain's strong role in EU missions and operations. HMS Echo is currently helping to tackle people smugglers in the Mediterranean, as part of the EU's mission Operation Sophia. Royal Navy deployments to the operation have helped destroy over 120 smuggling boats, apprehending 20 suspected smugglers in the process, and have helped to rescue 10,000 people from the high seas.

Britain also has over 150 UK personnel committed to EU missions and operations, including in Bosnia, Mali and Somalia, demonstrating Britain's global reach.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We are leaving the EU but we will continue to cooperate with our European partners on defence and security. This includes playing our part in the mission in the Mediterranean, rescuing migrants and tackling people smuggling.

Today I have urged the EU to cooperate more closely with NATO, to avoid unnecessary duplication and to work together on new threats, including cyber.

Sir Michael called on the EU and NATO to redouble their efforts on cooperation, noting that while good progress has been made, more work needed to be done, particularly on cyber, hybrid, maritime and coordinated exercises.

Today's meeting also brought forward improvements to the EU's Common Security

and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, through the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), to help improve planning and conduct of the training missions (known as non-executive missions) and to enhance civilian and military working. Important improvements to the agreement, suggested by the UK, were agreed today, including limiting the authority of the Director of the MPCC, and avoiding duplication with NATO structures.