

Press release: Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson press statement in Moscow

“We have to work hard to address those difficulties. We have to find a way forward.” Boris Johnson tells media in Moscow

It is very good to be here in Moscow. I think I am the first British Foreign Secretary to be here in about five-and-a-half years. But, of course, this is a very old diplomatic relationship that is 450 years old and dates from the time when Queen Elizabeth sent an envoy to Ivan the Terrible or Ivan the Fourth, as Sergei [Lavrov] has said he was called.

The reason for the length of my absence is that this is a difficult time in the relations between UK and Russia, as Sergei himself has just said. We can't ignore those difficulties, we can't pretend that they don't exist, and we don't share a common perspective on events in Ukraine or the Western Balkans or, as the Prime Minister Theresa May has said, on the Russian activities in cyberspace.

We speak up for the LGBT community in Chechnya, and elsewhere, as people would expect from us. But they would also expect that Britain and Russia, as two P5 countries, should be able, where possible, to coordinate and to work together on the issues that matter to our voters on the issues, that matter to people of the world. I believe that having talked many times to Sergei, and particularly after our conversations today, that there are things that we can do together as P5 member across the range of dossiers, as Sergei Lavrov has just said.

We may not have an identical point of view for instance about North Korea, but we share the same objective to make sure that there is peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and indeed that it is a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. Neither of us want to see North Korea armed with a nuclear ICBM, and that is very clear. We want to see progress in Syria on the basis, as Sergei has said, of Resolution 2254 – peace and progress for the people of Syria. That is something that unites us and I was very pleased, Sergei, in conclusion to hear what you had to say about our bilateral cultural, artistic, and scientific agenda.

In times of difficulty, this is always an area where we can do more together and it's great that there was a Shakespeare logo train on the Moscow metro. We reciprocated. It took a while to get a Russia emblazoned train on TFL but I think it happened eventually. There are things we can do together on scientific collaboration, space research.

There is plenty of opportunity for academic, cultural exchanges and 2019 is the year of music and we intend to make the most of it. I'm delighted that trade, in spite of the difficulties, in spite of the sanctions regime, trade is increasing and we certainly want to see more of that. Exports, as I said,

are I think around £5 billion worth to Russia at the moment. It is good news that Russian customers are buying loads more British things from kettle crisps to Bentleys. I would in no way discourage that.

I would just make one point very fervently. I am a Russophile, a committed Russophile. I took the trouble before becoming Foreign Secretary to station my ancestors around the world. I have them in Germany, in France, all over the place, America, and of course here in Moscow as well. I am certain that I am the first that the Foreign Secretary in the history of my office to be called Boris – probably the last for some time, I would think. Be in no doubt that I want to see an improvement in the relations between our peoples.

That in no way diminishes the difficulties that we currently have in our relationship at the moment. We have to work hard to address those difficulties. We have to find a way forward. We have to find a way forward and in the meantime what we want to do, as the UK and Russia, is to cooperate in those areas where we can to build that future. So thank you very much Sergei for generosity and your hospitality and for welcoming me and my team today.”