

Foreign Secretary reinforces support for Western Balkans stability at talks in London.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has today (Monday 13 December) hosted the Foreign Ministers of the six Western Balkans countries, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The UK previously hosted the Western Balkans Summit in 2018 where leaders of the six countries made commitments in a series of Joint Declarations on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, War Crimes, and Missing Persons in the territory of the former Yugoslavia and Anti-Corruption.

The talks come as tensions in the region have reached a peak. The international High Representative has warned that Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently facing the greatest existential threat in its post-war period, and that there is a real prospect of further division and conflict. Along with international partners, the UK is working to tackle any threats to stability after 26 years of hard-won progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The current situation in the Western Balkans was also discussed at the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting which took place over the weekend in Liverpool.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The UK is committed to the Western Balkans and to the defence and promotion of freedom and democracy in the region.

As I bring together the Foreign Ministers of the six countries in the region to London, as well as representatives from the European Union and the United States, tensions are high and the international community must act to protect hard-won peace.

Boosting economic ties with the region is a vital way to create jobs and wealth, ensure stability and support freedom.

The Foreign Secretary met each of the six Foreign Ministers. Representatives from the US and the EU were also in attendance.

The UK has maintained a long-standing focus on reconciliation work and transitional justice in the Western Balkans, including: * being one of the key donors to the construction and setting up of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina * providing political, financial and logistical support to the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, and * funding the work of the International Commission for Missing Persons

The UK supports the Western Balkans' aspirations for Euro-Atlantic

integration. Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations remain central to achieving this aim and to maintaining stability in the region.

The talks will also seek to reaffirm the UK's commitment to the Berlin Process and encourage the role of civil society to foster peace and stability in the region.

The UK has urged political leaders in the region to reject hate speech, to condemn any glorification of the perpetrators of genocide and war crimes, and to respect the verdicts of international and domestic courts.

ENDS

Background:

In 2018 at the Berlin Process Western Balkans Summit in London, the UK negotiated the signing of three Joint Declarations focusing on War Crimes, Missing Persons, and Good Neighbourly Relations. All the Berlin Process Leaders signed. These were reconfirmed on 5 July 2021 at the latest Berlin Process Summit and involved learning the lessons of history, promoting reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and resolving outstanding issues affecting the region. The Western Balkans leaders also signed up to individual anti-corruption pledges.

The countries also met the Prime Minister in Downing Street in 2018 after a meeting with European Bank of Reconciliation and Development.

The UK recently appointed Sir Stuart Peach as its [Special Envoy to the Western Balkans](#).

[Defence steps up support to vaccine programme](#)

News story

More than 750 Armed Forces personnel will be administering Covid-19 vaccines and helping with planning to maximise the effectiveness of the booster rollout



A member of the Armed Forces administers a Covid-19 vaccine in Northampton

750 Armed Forces personnel have been made available to support the [NHS](#), the [Department of Health and Social Care](#) and [Scottish Government](#) to accelerate the vaccine booster programme.

Over 100 personnel are currently supporting the vaccine rollout in Scotland. 600 Armed Forces personnel have been made available to [NHS England](#) to administer vaccines, working in small teams across the country.

In addition, around 50 personnel will provide planning support to NHS England. 41 planners will deploy to NHS trusts across England and 10 logistics experts will be based at NHS England's headquarters in London.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

We have rapidly mobilised Service personnel to work alongside our dedicated health services to accelerate the vaccine booster programme.

Our Armed Forces will help to get vaccines into arms as quickly as possible as we continue our efforts to support the UK's response to the pandemic.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

We are turbocharging our COVID-19 booster programme to offer every adult in England a vaccine by the end of the year to protect people from the Omicron variant.

Building our defences through boosters is a hugely important national mission and it's brilliant to see the military supporting our NHS staff in our race against the virus.

Please get boosted now to top-up your immunity and keep yourself and your loved ones safe this winter.

Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin said:

I'm proud of our Armed Forces who are once again stepping up to help protect people and communities.

We have a long history of working hand in hand with the NHS as two organisations with a common goal – to help keep our people safe.

Planners based at NHS England headquarters will be led by Brigadier Phil Prosser who was previously deployed to support the delivery of the vaccine programme which began in December 2020. They will work alongside NHS England to maximise existing capacity and ensure the vaccine programme can be delivered at pace.

Since March 2020, Defence has supported over 430 tasks as part of Operation Rescript – Defence's support to the UK's response to the pandemic. Defence is currently supporting ambulance services in Wales and Scotland and the vaccine rollout in Scotland among other tasks including testing.

Support is being provided through the [Military Aid to the Civil Authorities \(MACA\)](#) process.

Personnel supporting on Operation Rescript tasks have deployed from across the three services – Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force – and are a mixture of regulars and reservists.

Published 13 December 2021

[National Highways lifting and completing roadworks for festive getaway](#)

This means nearly 98 per cent of motorways and major A roads will be roadworks-free in time for those travelling to see loved ones or making other journeys for Christmas.

National Highways travel-time data from the past couple of Christmases suggests next Thursday – the day before Christmas Eve – is likely to be one of the busier travel days on England's major A-road and motorway network in the run up to the festive period.

But as many people take advantage of the holidays to visit friends and family, drivers will be happy to hear traffic levels are not expected to be

any higher than usual.

To help keep festive disruption to a minimum, the vast majority of roadworks will be removed from England's motorway and major A-road network from 6am Tuesday 21 December until 12.01am on Tuesday 4 January.

To make sure Christmas journeys go as planned, National Highways is encouraging drivers to check traffic conditions before they set off and to make sure their vehicle is ready for the journey ahead.

National Highways Customer Service Director, Melanie Clarke said:

We don't want roadworks to spoil Christmas so we're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible; that's why we're keeping almost 98 per cent of the road network we manage free from roadworks.

Our dedicated control room teams and traffic officer patrols are geared up to help those travelling over the Christmas period and we're expecting Thursday 23 December to be one of the busier days in the lead up to the festive period.

We know from experience that peak travel times can vary in the run up to Christmas, and so we're encouraging drivers to check traffic conditions before heading out to help keep traffic flowing.

And we're also asking motorists to be prepared before setting off. Almost half of breakdowns can be easily avoided if motorists carry out simple vehicle checks before their journeys.

Before setting off, motorists are encouraged to:

- Check fuel: Make sure you have enough to get to your destination
- Check tyres: Check your tyre pressure and the condition of your tyres, including the spare. Look out for cuts or wear and make sure the tyres have a minimum tread depth of 1.6mm, which is the legal limit
- Check engine oil: Use your dipstick to check oil before any long journey, and top up if needed – take your car back to the garage if you're topping up more than usual
- Check water: To ensure you have good visibility, always keep your screen wash topped up so you can clear debris or dirt off your windscreen
- Check your lights: If your indicators, hazard lights, headlights, fog lights, reverse lights or brake lights are not functioning properly, you are putting yourself at risk. In addition, light malfunctions can be a reason for your vehicle to fail its MOT

Drivers are also being reminded that the M42 will be fully closed between junctions 9 and 10 for HS2 works over the festive period.

HS2 will be carrying out work between junctions 9 (Dunton Interchange) and Junction 10 (Tamworth Interchange) to prepare the ground for movement of the

Marston Box bridge in Winter 2022.

Marston Box is the bridge that will carry the HS2 line across the M42 Motorway near Junction 9, north of Lea Marston and Curdworth in North Warwickshire.

To ensure the safety of the workforce, the road will be fully closed from 9pm on Friday 24 December (Christmas Eve) to 9pm on Friday 31 December 2021 (New Year's Eve).

A diversion route will be in place during the closure.

National Highways has advice about traffic conditions on its website, Twitter feeds, and information line (0300 123 5000).

A series of vehicle checks videos are available to help people carry out basic vehicle checks before they set off on their travels.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

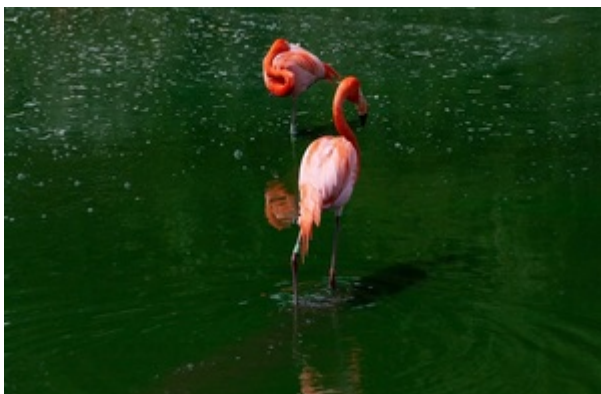
Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Swans and flamingos

News story

Latest blog by GAD in which we look at how sustainable finance can help address climate change.



In Swans and Flamingos, we consider the need for sustainable finance to help

address climate change. [This blog](#) investigates the challenges around these issues.

Published 13 December 2021

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Keynote address at Asia House Global Trade Dialogue](#)

Thank you very much indeed Michael. It's a real pleasure to be able to speak to you all today, sadly not in person, technology being what we are able to use in order to ensure we keep ourselves and our families safe as we can, because of course the pandemic has shown us some of the challenges it brings but also the importance of diverse, resilient, global trade networks.

Supply chains were created in the Age of Exploration, an important part of our island story and our proud maritime traditions.

The voyages of one of the earliest explorers of the Asia-Pacific from our islands, the famous merchant Ralph Fitch, gets a mention in Shakespeare's Macbeth.

And of course in 1786, one of Britain's greatest sailors, the Royal Navy's Captain James Cook, mapped the Pacific Ocean, yielding vital new trade routes and safe harbours for international shipping.

Captain Cook's goat became the first farm animal to circumnavigate the globe – twice, in fact.

But Cook himself came to a sticky end while trying to kidnap the King of Hawaii – a story in itself – but his goat managed to retire back to Britain – and indeed on a government pension.

I am hopeful that those perilous endeavours are unlikely to be repeated, as I'm sure the Treasury hopes too!

It is perhaps though to that buccaneering spirit and entrepreneurship of explorers like Ralph Fitch and Captain Cook that we now look as an independent, sovereign, free trading nation once again, realising untapped trading opportunities with fast growing economies and partners around the world.

As we made clear in our Integrated Review published last year – the largest such review of the government's vision for Britain's future since the Cold War – we know that the Indo Pacific region is absolutely vital to that future.

It's home to some of the world's fastest growing economies, and it's critical to Global Britain's strategic, economic, and security interests.

The centre of economic gravity is moving East.

By 2030, ASEAN's digital economy alone is projected to hit a colossal \$1 trillion. And 65 percent of the world's middle-class consumers are expected to be in Asia. This will drive global demand for precisely the type of high-quality goods and services in which the UK excels.

So, as we emerge from the economic shock of the pandemic, we are seizing this pivotal moment with both hands.

Next year will be a five-star year for the UK's trade agenda, as we look to begin formal negotiations on deals with Canada, with Mexico, the Gulf Cooperation Council and India. In particular of course, a big focus will be our plans to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the CPTPP, a huge free trade area with a combined GDP of £8.4 trillion, including the Pacific region's most dynamic economies.

And early next year I hope to visit several CPTPP members, including Japan and Singapore, to take those discussions forward.

Our ambition is to reach bilateral and multilateral deals with countries whose trade was worth more than £140 billion last year.

This is a really ambitious goal that will put Global Britain in pole position to pursue new opportunities, one which the Prime Minister and I are excited and determined about. We know that a revolution in e-commerce also means that transfers of services are becoming ever more important components of the international trading system. An engineer's report, a 3D printer design, or advance in machine learning can be just as valuable as the contents of a cargo container.

In this new era of digital trade, the potential for UK firms in the advanced, tech savvy and rapidly expanding markets in Asia is truly extraordinary. So, leveraging the UK's unique strengths as the world's second largest services exporter – and fifth biggest exporter of digital tech services – we have a unique opportunity to get ahead of the curve.

That's why as Michael mentioned on Thursday, I was delighted to reach an Agreement in Principle on a digital trade agreement with Singapore – a gateway to the wider Indo-Pacific region.

The world's most comprehensive, and indeed the first of its kind.

Reflecting the G7 Digital Trade Principles which we brokered under the UK presidency in October, this DEA overhauls outdated trade rules, secures open digital markets through better cross-border data flows, and champions digital trading systems.

It reforms the slashing of red tape and makes trade cheaper, faster, and indeed more secure. A great example of what two outward looking, free trading

nations can accomplish together, which we intend to build on in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. We have already become a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, and we have secured FTAs in the region including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

We have reached Agreements in Principle with Australia and New Zealand, deals that are going to create new opportunities for exporters, and better choice and value for consumers.

So now, in close collaboration with brilliant British businesses, we are opening up access to markets across Asia.

Led by Her Majesty's fantastic Trade Commissioners: Simon Penney in the Middle East; John Edwards in China; Natalie Black in Asia, and Alan Gemmell in South Asia. From UK cosmetics being able to sell to the fast-growing markets of Indonesia and China, British poultry being served on Japanese tables thanks to our ground-breaking FTA, to British apples being exported to India for the first time.

We are also identifying new opportunities through Trade Dialogues, and taking our relationships further with Enhanced Trade Partnerships.

These are perhaps less likely to hit the headlines than FTAs, but they have the potential to make a real difference to British business.

Take India, for example – already the UK's 15th largest trading partner.

The trade partnership the Prime Minister announced in May has the ambition to double our bilateral trade by 2030 – already £24 billion before the pandemic struck. An FTA could strengthen this further by unlocking opportunities in areas where UK firms are second to none.

And circumstances permitting, I hope to commence talks on such an agreement during a visit to India early next year.

Our ambitions in the Indo-Pacific go far beyond the economic, of course. The region is also critical to our security and global ambition to support open societies.

So, as we look to seize the moment of opportunity to reshape our relationships on the world stage as Global Britain, it is to our like-minded friends and allies in the Asia Pacific that we look.

And using our influence to shape international trade to reflect our core values, including freedom, fairness, sovereignty, the rule of law, and good environmentalist policies. The UK believes in open markets and fair competition where all countries are treated fairly in the global system and businesses can compete based on merit.

And in growing, dynamic democracies throughout Asia, we see like-minded countries who share that outlook.

OECD analysis has estimated that substantial liberalisation of market access

barriers by the G20 countries alone could boost UK exports by around £75 billion a year.

A truly colossal sum that would mean growth, jobs and prosperity right across the UK. So, together, the UK intends to work with our Asian friends and partners to ensure nations play by the rules, to tackle the increasing, systematic use of market distorting practices, such as harmful industrial subsidies, unfair practices by state-owned enterprises and forced technology transfer.

We want to help create modern, fit-for-purpose WTO rules accounting for the seismic shifts in the global economy which have occurred in the more than 25 years since the Uruguay round.

We must ensure that the economic constraints of Covid do not become the chains that manacle the global trading system to a new and devastating round of protectionism, but rather a springboard towards a liberal, outward looking, free trading future. As an independent, free trading nation, the United Kingdom has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to grasp new opportunities – with the dynamic economies of South and South East Asia foremost amongst these.

By removing unnecessary barriers to free and fair trade, and ensuring that we are not strategically dependent on fair-weather friends.

Working with strategic partners across Asia and beyond to make the global trading system fit for the 21st century, we will strengthen our trading relationships and build better, greener and more resilient global supply chains.

This will help unleash Britain's potential to power our economic recovery, making our businesses more dynamic, and levelling up our country as we build back better from Covid-19.

2022 is Global Britain's five-star moment to write a new chapter in our illustrious history, pioneering the future of international trade. And I intend to seize it.

Thank you.