

Meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee

News story

Written Ministerial Statement following the meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee, 19 October.



The Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee met on 19 October 2020 in London, with delegations attending in person and by video conference.

The meeting was co-chaired by the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP and European Commission Vice President, Maroš Šefčovič, and attended by the alternate Joint Committee co-chairs; the First Minister and deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive; and Member State representatives.

The Committee undertook a stocktake of Specialised Committee activity since the last meeting on 28 September. The Committee also updated on implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, with particular focus on the Northern Ireland Protocol and citizens' rights.

The UK reiterated its commitment to upholding obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement and protecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all respects. The UK further emphasised commitment to EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU, ensuring they have their rights under the Withdrawal Agreement protected.

The Committee adopted the citizens' rights joint report on residency and agreed to its publication.

The UK reiterated its commitment to implementing the Protocol in full so the people of Northern Ireland can be given the fundamental legal assurances they need, and will not face the damaging prospect of the unmitigated defaults of the Protocol under any circumstances.

The Committee considered the remaining WAJC tasks during the rest of the transition period.

The UK took the opportunity provided by this meeting to underline its commitment to continued constructive engagement with the EU through Joint Committee processes.

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Ensuring long-term stability in the Central African Republic

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you also to our briefers for their valuable insights. I was struck today as ever by the consensus in the contributions, both in terms of analysis but also in their prescriptions.

Madam President, I wish to begin by paying tribute to the dedication and courage of all the women and men serving in MINUSCA and to the memory of all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. We condemn, in particular, the deadly attack against MINUSCA personnel in July of this year, just as we condemn attacks on all peacekeepers. And I also reiterate our solidarity with the government and the people of the Central African Republic in their pursuit of peace, stability and development.

Madam President, as we have said time and again, the 2019 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation is the only viable framework for sustainable peace in the Central African Republic. The agreement must be protected, including through this Council's continued imposition of sanctions against violators. We call on all armed groups to end their violence against civilians. In particular, Madam President, we condemn the scale of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls. Impunity for sexual assault, and all human rights abuses, must end.

Madam President, elections in the Central African Republic later this year offer a significant opportunity to consolidate constitutional order. All stakeholders have a role to play in supporting peaceful, inclusive and free elections. While we welcome the preparations made to hold elections on time in December, we regret that provision has not been made for all Central Africans to participate. All citizens deserve the right to be heard in both these and subsequent elections, including those internally displaced persons and refugees. We are trying to help, as announced by the UK's Minister for Africa at the Secretary-General's recent high level event, the United Kingdom is contributing well over \$500 million to the UNDP Elections Fund to promote the participation of women, youth and underrepresented groups, and we urge others to contribute to this fund.

Madam President, as others have said today, the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic underlines just how vital it is that

all stakeholders fulfil their responsibilities in the coming months. Humanitarian needs have been exacerbated, as we heard again today, by Covid-19 with more than half the population now facing food insecurity. This year, the United Kingdom has committed approximately \$35 million to the humanitarian effort in the Central African Republic, including extra funding towards famine prevention and Ebola preparedness. We will continue to play our part and we join Germany in calling on others to do the same.

As we look ahead to the renewal of MINUSCA's mandate next month, highlighted by the Ambassador from France, I want to voice the United Kingdom's support for maintaining a robust mandate with protection for civilians at its heart, alongside the provision of support to the peace agreement and the electoral process. A sustainable peace will not be won by MINUSCA alone, however, nor only through humanitarian support. The recommitment of all parties to full implementation of the peace agreement and to fair, inclusive and peaceful elections is the only way to assure long-term stability.

Thank you, Madam President.

UK exposes series of Russian cyber attacks against Olympic and Paralympic Games

Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU, conducted cyber reconnaissance against officials and organisations at the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games due to take place in Tokyo this summer before they were postponed, the UK has revealed today.

The targets included the Games' organisers, logistics services and sponsors.

The attacks on the 2020 Summer Games are the latest in a campaign of Russian malicious cyber activity against the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The UK is confirming for the first time today the extent of GRU targeting of the 2018 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea.

The GRU's cyber unit attempted to disguise itself as North Korean and Chinese hackers when it targeted the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Games.

It went on to target broadcasters, a ski resort, Olympic officials and sponsors of the games in 2018.

The GRU deployed data-deletion malware against the Winter Games IT systems and targeted devices across the Republic of Korea using VPNFilter.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) assesses that the incident was intended to sabotage the running of the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, as the malware was designed to wipe data from and disable computers and networks.

Administrators worked to isolate the malware and replace the affected computers, preventing potential disruption.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The GRU's actions against the Olympic and Paralympic Games are cynical and reckless. We condemn them in the strongest possible terms.

The UK will continue to work with our allies to call out and counter future malicious cyber attacks.

The UK has already acted against the GRU's destructive cyber unit by working with international partners to impose asset freezes and travel bans against its members through the EU cyber sanctions regime.

Today (Monday 19 October), the US Department of Justice has announced criminal charges against Russian military intelligence officers working for the GRU's destructive cyber unit – also known by the codenames Sandworm and VoodooBear – for conducting cyber attacks against the 2018 Winter Games and other cyber attacks, including the 2018 spear phishing attacks against the UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL).

The UK attributed the attacks against DSTL, which followed the Salisbury poisonings, to Russia in 2018.

These cyber attacks were committed by the GRU's Main Centre for Special Technologies, GTsST also known by its field post number 74455 and known in open source as:

- Sandworm
- BlackEnergy Group
- Telebots
- VoodooBear
- Iron Viking
- Quedagh
- Electrum
- Industroyer
- G0034

The UK government is today confirming for the first time that the GRU unit known as GTsST or by its field post number 74455 were responsible for:

	GRU action	UK government response
Winter Olympics, February 2018	GTsST actors launched a significant campaign against the Winter Olympic games, which included the use of Olympic Destroyer malware. This malware targeted the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. NCSC assess that the intent behind the incident was almost certainly sabotage as the malware was designed to wipe data from and disable computers and networks. Disruption to the Winter Olympics could have been greater if it had not been for administrators who worked to isolate the malware and replace affected computers. More broadly, the GTsST actors targeted multiple entities across South Korea (and the world) which were linked with the Winter Olympics. This activity utilised a range of capabilities known to be used by the GTsST. This includes targeting of: officials, sponsors, a ski resort, official service providers, and broadcasters	The UK government is publicly exposing this attack as the work of the GRU for the first time today

The UK government has previously publicly exposed that this unit of the GRU was responsible for:

	GRU action	UK government response
BlackEnergy, December 2015	Shut off part of Ukraine's electricity grid, with 230,000 people losing power for between 1 – 6 hours	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in February 2020
Industroyer, December 2016	Shut off part of Ukraine's electricity grid, also known as CrashOverride. It resulted in a fifth of Kyiv losing power for an hour. It is the first known malware designed specifically to disrupt electricity grids	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in February 2020
NotPetya, June 2017	Destructive cyber attack targeting the Ukrainian financial, energy and government sectors and affecting other European and Russian businesses	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in February 2018. EU sanctioned the GRU unit for this attack in July 2020
BadRabbit, October 2017	Ransomware encrypted hard drives and rendered IT inoperable. This caused disruption including to the Kyiv metro, Odessa airport, Russia's central bank and two Russian media outlets	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in October 2018

	GRU action	UK government response
VPNfilter, October 2017	VPNFILTER malware infected thousands of home and small business routers and network devices worldwide. The infection potentially allowed attackers to control infected devices, render them inoperable and intercept or block network traffic	In April 2018, the NCSC, FBI and Department for Homeland Security issued a joint Technical Alert exposing that the GRU was responsible
DSTL, April 2018	The GRU attempted to use its cyber capabilities to gain access to the UK's Defence and Science Technology Laboratory (DSTL) computer systems	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in October 2018
FCO, March 2018	The GRU attempted to compromise the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) computer systems via a spearphishing attack	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in October 2018
Georgia, 28 October 2019	The GRU carried out large scale disruptive cyber-attacks against Georgian web hosting providers that resulted in widespread defacement of websites, including sites belonging to the Georgian Government, courts, NGOs, media and businesses, and also interrupted the service of several national broadcasters	UK government publicly exposed this attack as the work of the GRU in February 2020

The National Cyber Security Centre has assessed with high confidence that all of these attacks were almost certainly (95%+) carried out by the unit known as the Main Centre for Special Technologies (GTsST) also known as Unit 74455 of the GRU.

See further details on the [framework used by the UK government for all source intelligence assessments](#), including the probability yardstick.

[New Board of Trade holds first meeting featuring Welsh tech entrepreneur Anne Boden](#)

- It will produce a series of reports looking at the major issues facing international trade and how trade can help deliver government priorities.
- The refreshed Board will help the government make the case for rules-based free trade abroad and domestically.

Today (19 October) International Trade Secretary Liz Truss convened the first meeting of the revamped Board of Trade. The Board will advise the UK

Government and Department for International Trade (DIT) on its trade strategy, provide intellectual leadership on trade policy, and help Britain make the case for free and fair trade across the world.

The Board met to agree and discuss the principles underpinning its work – which include a commitment to free enterprise, the rule of law and high-standards trade – and agree its future programme of activity.

It will produce a series of reports looking at the vital issues facing international trade and Britain at the moment. These will include:

- The role of trade in levelling-up Britain
- Combatting digital and data protectionism
- How trade can deliver an industrial revival
- Reform of the WTO and the global trading system
- Commonwealth trade
- How trade can help deliver the government's green objectives

The reports will be published quarterly from 2021 on key trade issues and interests for the UK. Domestically, the Board will advise how trade policy can help deliver on the government's commitment to level-up the country and 'build back better' from coronavirus. Internationally, it will look at Britain's role in reshaping the rules-based global trading system and how the government could work with like-minded allies to dismantle long-standing barriers to trade.

It will also work with businesses and communities across the United Kingdom to help them identify and seize new opportunities internationally as we make the case for the importance of international trade in delivering increased prosperity and opportunity. At a time of heightened protectionism, it will sell the benefits of trade across the UK, including the north of England and devolved administrations.

The revitalised Board will become an intellectual lodestar for the department, generating advice and providing expertise to influence government trade policy.

Secretary of State for International Trade, Liz Truss, said:

This is a critical moment for the UK and our trading relationships with the rest of the world. Our re-emergence as an independent trading nation is an enormous opportunity, but it also comes at a time of rising protectionism amidst the challenges posed by coronavirus.

The revamped Board of Trade will play a critical role in helping us navigate and shape the new global trading environment. Just as great British reformers helped drive trade and prosperity in the nineteenth century, we want the new Board of Trade to become the Cobden, Peel and Bright of the twenty first century and push new frontiers in areas like digital trade and the green economy, and

ultimately help Britain unleash its full potential post-Brexit.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The Board of Trade will play a crucial role in shaping our future trading relationships and forging a stronger global consensus for free and fair trade. It will also represent the interests of organisations who trade globally from the UK.

I'm delighted that Anne Boden, CEO and Founder of Starling Bank and tech entrepreneur from Swansea has joined the Board as one of its advisers. Anne will act not only as an ambassador for Wales, but also for our thriving FinTech sector in demonstrating how expanding trade links can empower and benefit communities across the whole of the UK.

Dr Linda Yueh, economist at Oxford University, London Business School and LSE IDEAS, said:

As the Board of Trade meets for the first time, I look forward to contributing to trade policy at a critical time.

The 21st century global economy offers both opportunities and challenges. It will be important to position the UK optimally amidst these changes and to craft policies that will generate benefits across the UK.

ENDS

Further information

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