

Joint Statement by the Prime Minister and the President of the European Commission: 3 October 2020

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen made a joint statement.



The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, spoke today about the state of play in the negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

They agreed on the importance of finding an agreement, if at all possible, as a strong basis for a strategic EU-UK relationship in future.

They endorsed the assessment of both Chief Negotiators that progress had been made in recent weeks but that significant gaps remained, notably but not only in the areas of fisheries, the level playing field, and governance.

They instructed their Chief Negotiators to work intensively in order to try to bridge those gaps.

They agreed to speak on a regular basis on this issue.

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Royal Navy seize £160 million worth of

drugs in the Caribbean

News story

A Royal Navy task group has prevented drugs worth more than £160 million from potentially reaching the UK on two daring operations in the Caribbean.



UK forces are operating in the Caribbean to assist with humanitarian missions. Crown copyright.

RFA Argus, alongside her Wildcat and Merlin helicopters, Royal Marines and US Coast Guard teams, worked with Dutch Navy ship HNLMS Groningen to seize 1.7 tonnes of cocaine and 28kg of amphetamines.

The bust was the second in two days after seizing 264kg of cocaine in a separate operation in the region just 48 hours before.

Minister for the Armed Forces, James Heappey said:

The Armed Forces are committed to tackling organised crime, both at home and overseas, and work with our allies around the world to help protect our people and interests.

The Royal Navy has once again demonstrated its professionalism and tactical operational capability in an international effort to stop illegal drug-smuggling. It is with thanks to their efforts that £160 million worth of drugs will never reach the streets of the UK.

The first of the two recent busts came when two suspicious vessels were spotted near RFA Argus and patrol ship Groningen. A Wildcat helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron was launched with a Royal Marine sniper team from 42 Commando on board. Using advanced sensors and cameras, the helicopter team stopped the suspect vessels before a team made up of Royal Marines from 47 Commando, the US Coast Guard and personnel from HNLMS Groningen boarded the vessels to undertake the search.

Just two days later, RFA Argus was conducting routine training when one of its Merlin helicopters spotted a suspicious craft. The 28,000-tonne vessel changed course to give chase and the Merlin and Wildcat helicopters worked with HNLMS Groningen to allow the US Coast Guard to intercept the craft.

Commanding Officer of RFA Argus, Captain Kevin Rimell said:

This recent interdiction is yet another example of multi-national co-operation in the Caribbean.

I am proud that the team of RFA Argus, utilising 815 and 845 Naval Air Squadron helicopters, boats crewed by RFA personnel and Royal Marines from 47 Commando, were able to take the lead in an operation alongside our US Coastguard and Dutch Navy colleagues.

The Royal Navy Caribbean task group have now prevented nearly a quarter of a billion pounds worth of drugs reaching the UK after three separate drugs busts also took place last month.

RFA Argus is in the Caribbean as part of a Royal Navy task group with HMS Medway providing support to British Overseas Territories during hurricane season. Both ships also continue to carry out maritime security and counter-narcotics operations in the region. The UK works in partnership with allied nations in the Caribbean as part of the Joint Interagency Task Force South, which detects and monitors activity to support security operations from its base in Florida.

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[PM launches review to boost connections across the UK](#)

Faster road and rail links to Scotland, upgrades to Welsh railways and new connections between Great Britain and Northern Ireland are among the range of potential projects to be considered in first of a kind study into improving transport infrastructure across the United Kingdom, launched by the Prime Minister today.

Led by Sir Peter Hendy CBE, chair of Network Rail, the independent review will look at how to boost transport infrastructure across Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England – improving connections, creating new ones, and bringing communities closer together to level up access to jobs and opportunities.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The United Kingdom is the greatest political partnership the world has ever seen, and we need transport links between our nations that are as strong as our historic bonds.

Quality transport links are the key to making sure everyone can access education, jobs and housing, helping businesses to grow and thrive and rebalancing opportunity fairly across our country.

As we build back better from the pandemic, Sir Peter's review will help make sure we have the right connections to support, sustain and strengthen our communities – to truly level up across the UK.

Working closely with the Devolved Administrations and local authorities and set to cover road, rail, air and sea links, the study will provide independent, honest advice on a wide range of possible options to improve the quality and availability of transport links across the UK, including by looking at the potential feasibility and economic case of options for:

- Reviewing air links within the UK
- Exploring the cost, practicality and demand for a new fixed link between Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Boosting road and rail links to Scotland
- Cutting journey times to North Wales by reviewing the Welsh railway network
- Improving major road links across the country, like the A1

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Connecting our towns, cities and communities through better transport links is at the heart of this Government's work to fuel our economic recovery.

That's why we need to look at how we can improve the transport landscape across the UK, levelling up people's access to work and education, and bringing communities closer together.

I'm pleased Sir Peter Hendy will be leading this important review, using his years of knowledge and experience to help us assess how we can boost key transport links to strengthen ties across the UK.

Sir Peter brings extensive experience and knowledge to the role with over 45 years working in the transport sector – including as Chair of Network Rail and successfully running London's transport network during the Olympics.

Sir Peter Hendy CBE said:

Connectivity drives economic growth, jobs and housing.

Improving links across the UK on the basis of the wider economic benefits that increased investment will deliver will be of benefit to everyone in the UK, and I'm thus very pleased to lead this work.

The review will also look to the future – considering the role of future technologies and assessing environmental impacts of current and future infrastructure. Sir Peter will be expected to publish his final recommendations in Summer 2021, to include advice on how best to improve connections, and whether that includes the need to invest in additional infrastructure by the UK Government.

Today's announcement follows a recent pledge by the UK Government to bring forward funding to accelerate infrastructure projects in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – working with the devolved administrations, the UK Government will identify opportunities for 'spades in the ground' ready projects to help build up communities and create jobs quicker for people across the United Kingdom.

Global Ocean Alliance: 30 countries are now calling for greater ocean protection

30 countries have now joined the Global Ocean Alliance championing an international commitment for a minimum 30% of the global ocean to be protected through Marine Protected Areas by 2030.

At the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, the UK again reiterated its commitment to protecting the environment and halting biodiversity loss.

The UK's global leadership on ocean protection has seen it on track to establish a 'Blue Belt' of marine protected areas spanning 4 million square kilometres across its Overseas Territories and a £500 million Blue Planet Fund, to be launched next year, that will protect marine resources from key human-generated impacts, including climate change, plastic pollution, overfishing and habitat loss.

The UK is celebrating 30 countries joining the Global Ocean Alliance in support of the UK-led 30 by 30 initiative, an international commitment to protect at least 30% of the global ocean in Marine Protected Areas by 2030, through the UN Convention on Biodiversity in 2021.

The Global Ocean Alliance has grown from 10 to 30 members in just 12 months, and the countries which alongside the UK have committed to trebling existing targets are: Belize, Belgium, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia,

Ecuador, Finland, Fiji, Gabon, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Kenya, Luxembourg, Maldives, Monaco, Nigeria, Palau, Portugal, Seychelles, Senegal, St Kitts, Sweden, Spain, United Arab Emirates and Vanuatu.

International Marine Minister, Zac Goldsmith, said:

I thank and commend the 30 countries that have now joined the Global Ocean Alliance. Our shared ocean is facing unprecedented pressures, and together we are making a powerful case for increased protection.

I encourage other nations to join us in this campaign. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, we have an opportunity to make sustainability and resilience the lens through which we map our respective recoveries, and that is what we should commit ourselves to doing.

Without a healthy ocean there would be no life as we know it. The ocean generates 50% of Earth's oxygen and it is our planet's climate regulator, absorbing 93% of the additional global heat as well as 25% of human-driven CO2 emissions.

With 12 million tonnes of plastics entering the ocean every year, the UK Government is also working to tackle the scourge of plastic waste globally and through the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance and the Commonwealth Litter Programme, which are driving forward ambitious action to reduce plastic pollution in the ocean in support of meeting Sustainable Development Goal 14: 'Life Below Water'.

The UK is also taking action to protect the ocean with 36% of UK waters protected in a network of marine protected sites; a ban on plastic straws, stirrers, and cotton buds [which has come into force in England this week](#); a pioneering ban on microbeads in rinse-off personal care products; and the 5p single use bag charge [extended to all retailers from April 2021](#) with the charge increasing to 10p – taking over 15 billion plastic bags out of circulation.

[How to save our ocean #30by30 – narrated by Sting](#)

[**The UK in Cuba: creating alliances in response to COVID-19**](#)

Small-scale project interventions with funds from the International Programme

(IP) of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in Cuba, will contribute to increase the country's sanitary resilience, support research into vaccines and therapeutics, and mitigate the domestic economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

British Ambassador to Cuba, Dr Antony Stokes LVO said:

Cooperation between countries is essential in responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19. In addition to putting the world's health systems under pressure, the pandemic has impacted our economies. The projects drive bilateral collaboration in these two key areas.

The Embassy is assisting the Cuban Centre for Neurosciences (CNEURO) in its effort to optimize the diagnosis and treatment approaches that minimize brain damage in patients. The institution also works on improving the treatment of COVID-19-related respiratory deficits and will implement a protocol for the assimilation and use of non-invasive Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) devices, based on a design by University College London.

Dr Mitchel Valdés-Sosa, Director of CNEURO said:

Non-invasive ventilation implies a significant improvement in the recovery of patients. Both projects are innovative within the portfolio of projects aimed at combating COVID-19 in Cuba, and an important resource to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of current and future diseases.

The British Embassy is also collaborating with the Cuban Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) in several areas of research, related to: the clinical trial of an immune enhancer, the development of diagnostic tests for serological antigen detection and the effect of an existing antiviral in COVID-19 positive patients.

Dr Eulogio Pimentel, Director of CIGB, said:

In facing the pandemic in Cuba, the possibility of developing specific and effective drugs against this disease has been essential. In this sense, we appreciate the contribution of the United Kingdom, to be able to acquire multiple reagents and materials necessary to ensure the progress of the three mentioned actions.

On mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 in Cuba, the Embassy is supporting research that will bring about concrete proposals to transform the fresh food commerce in Cuba. Equally, it will support the Cuban private sector in its discussions on how to strengthen the sector despite the

devastating consequences that the outbreak has had for them.

Since 2016, the FCD0's International Programme has provided financial support for events, research, workshops, visits and other interventions that support development projects and exchange between the UK and Cuba.

The Embassy works with the Cuban government, academia, international organisations and civil society to support the country's development in areas such as: economic reform, global health threats, biotech and life sciences, public governance, financial and professional services, higher education and English Language teaching, renewable energy, creative industries, and the media, among others.

Examples of this past work are:

- Training workshop on accessing climate finance for mitigation in energy and transport.
- Workshops on potential value and impact of a stronger Creative Industries sector in the Cuban economy.
- Training to the Cuban banking sector by several institutions from the City of London on issues such as: digital banking and Fintech, strengthening governance and strategic leadership in banks, building a future-proof financial technology programme, retail banking & SME lending, among others.
- Assisting Cuba in the development of a National Public Procurement Strategy
- Assessing the role and value of energy storage in Cuba.
- Technical assistance by Public Health England (PHE) for training and implementation of immunological assays for improving vaccine evaluation at the Cuban Finlay Vaccine Institute.
- Supporting the reshaping of the policy for English Language teaching at Cuban universities.
- Workshops and visits on entrepreneurship and its role within the Cuban economy.

For the Financial Year 2020-21, the British Embassy in Havana has been forced to suspend the call for projects bids to be supported by the International Programme. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 the British government is focused on its response to the global pandemic.