

Press release: British Foreign Secretary and Polish Foreign Minister Waszczykowski on joint trip to Ukraine

The two ministers will hold a series of high-level meetings with President Poroshenko, Prime Minister Groysman, Deputy Prime Minister Klymush-Tsyntsadze and Foreign Minister Klimkin.

The visit marks 25 years of diplomatic relations between both the UK and Poland with Ukraine. It is also three years since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its flagrant breach of international law with its illegal annexation of Crimea. The UK and Poland fully support Ukraine's sovereignty. Crimea is Ukraine and Russia must return it.

The UK and Poland are also two of the largest contributors to the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which monitors the ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons in eastern Ukraine.

Ahead of his visit, the Foreign Secretary said:

"I am delighted to be visiting Ukraine again so soon and I am particularly pleased to be joined by Foreign Minister Waszczykowski. Poland is a close UK partner and we work closely on a range of foreign policy issues, including Ukraine. The UK will continue to play a full part on European security questions as we prepare to leave the EU.

"This visit reinforces our unwavering support for Ukraine. The UK remains committed to defending Ukraine's sovereignty. We are adamant that Russia's annexation of Crimea is illegal and we urge Russia to return it.

"I welcome the progress made on implementing reforms and tackling corruption. The UK-Ukraine reform conference in July will enable us to showcase the great work that is being done in Ukraine."

Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski said:

"Poland and the UK since the beginning of Revolution of Dignity have supported Ukraine on its pro-European path. I'm extremely happy that together with Minister Boris Johnson we will be able to reiterate our commitment to Ukraine's European choice, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"Poland was the first country to recognize Ukraine's independence. Since then we consider Ukraine as our strategic partner. We will continue to support Ukrainian reform process."

Further information

[News story: East Midlands rail franchise: 3 firms make the shortlist](#)

The names of the 3 train operating companies in the running for the next East Midlands franchise competition were [announced today](#) (1 March 2017) by the Department for Transport.

After submitting an expression of interest, the following have been successfully shortlisted:

- Arriva Rail East Midlands Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Arriva UK Trains Limited
- First Trenitalia East Midlands Rail Limited, a joint venture company wholly owned by First Rail Holdings Limited and Trenitalia UK Limited
- Stagecoach East Midlands Trains Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Stagecoach Transport Holdings Limited

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

A flourishing rail network brings real growth and prosperity to the region it serves. That is why we are making the biggest investment in the national rail network in more than 100 years to deliver the safer, faster and more comfortable journeys that passengers want.

At the same time, Network Rail is working on improvements which by 2019 will enable the next East Midlands franchise to deliver more carriages and faster journeys over the whole route, including almost twice as many seats into London St Pancras in the peak hours.

I am delighted that all these first-class companies have demonstrated their confidence in our vision for the future of the rail industry in Great Britain by bidding for this key franchise.

The new franchise is vital in supporting government ambitions to make the Midlands region an engine for growth by improving connections within and outside the region and supporting the East Midlands industry and leisure economy.

In particular, ministers want to improve the quality, frequency and timings of journeys on the east of the franchise network and to seek to develop new services and connections.

The new franchisee will also be expected to satisfy predicted growth in demand, in particular into London St Pancras, but also for local crowded services like Derby-Crewe.

Though the current franchise, operated by East Midlands Trains Limited, is due to end on 4 March 2018, the Secretary of State has used his powers to extend it further by up to a year.

[Press release: Prime Minister hosts reception in Downing Street to celebrate St David's Day](#)

Prime Minister Theresa May is hosting a reception to celebrate St David's Day in Downing Street today where she will welcome guests from the worlds of business, media, tourism, sport and the charity sector.

A number of companies will be showcasing their products at the event including Welsh whisky, beer and wine as well as cheese from Snowdonia and Welsh cakes. There will also be a performance from the Welsh choir, Côr Heol y March.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

I am pleased to be celebrating St David's Day with a reception in Downing Street.

Our precious Union is at the heart of everything my government does, which is why [Wales was one of the first places I visited](#) when I became Prime Minister.

And, today, as the Welsh flag flies high alongside the Union flag over Downing Street, we are reminded of the huge part Wales has played in our history and the crucial role it will play in the future prosperity of the UK.

I wish you all a very happy St David's Day.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Today, we have a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our national day amongst the people making their indelible mark in their communities, their country, and across the world.

From our brave service men and women to our great figures from the arts, business, culture and sport, these are the people helping to make Wales' future as glorious as its rich and illustrious history.

I send my warmest wishes to everyone celebrating St David's Day at home and around the world.

Press release: Trade Union Act measures come into force to protect people from undemocratic industrial action

Measures coming into force today (1 March 2017) will protect millions of people from the effects of undemocratic strike action

- Tougher ballot thresholds will reduce industrial action in important public services like transport, health and education by 35%
- 1.5 million working hours a year will be saved from strike action
- Measures will provide a £100 million boost to UK economy over 10 years

Trade Union Act measures come into force today (1 March 2017) to protect millions of people from the effects of undemocratic strike action.

The Act will ensure that if strikes do go ahead it will only be as a result of a clear democratic decision from union members thanks to the introduction of tougher ballot thresholds.

From today, fresh ballots will have to achieve at least a 50% turnout of eligible union members, with a majority voting in favour of strike action. In important public services – including in the health, education and transport sectors – an additional threshold of 40% of support from all eligible members must be met for action to be legal.

The Act will also:

- reduce strikes in important public services by 35%

- prevent more than 1.5 million working hours a year from being lost to strike action
- boost the economy by £10 million a year

Business Minister Margot James said:

“The public has a right to be protected from unsupported disruption being caused by a small proportion of union members and that’s exactly what the Trade Union Act will do.”

From 1 March, the Act will also require unions to:

- give employers a minimum of 14 days’ notice before industrial action rather than the previous seven days
- set a six-month time limit – which can be increased to nine months if the union and employer agree – for industrial action so that mandates are always recent
- provide a clearer description of the trade dispute and the planned industrial action on the ballot paper, so that all union members know what they are voting for
- provide more detailed information to union members about ballot results, including how many union members were entitled to vote and whether the relevant thresholds have been met
- report more detailed information on industrial action, ballot results and expenditure of political funds to the Certification Officer, the unions’ regulator, which will then be made public
- ensure supervision of picket lines to ensure they are peaceful
- implement an opt-in system for new members on contributing to political funds within 12 months

Notes to editors

1. From today, unions have until 1 March 2018 to ensure all new members joining will have to make an active choice to opt into their union’s political fund. Previously new members would have to opt out of contributing to a union’s political fund.

2. The [Codes of Practice on Picketing](#) and [Industrial Action Ballots and Information to Employers](#) have been updated to reflect these legal changes and come into effect on 1 March 2017.
3. The Trade Union Act also introduces new measures in relation to the Certification Officer who will be given new enforcement powers, a financial penalties scheme, and a cost-recovery levy scheme. The Government will consult on proposals for the financial penalties and levy schemes in due course.
4. Sir Ken Knight will today begin gathering evidence for his independent review of electronic balloting for industrial disputes

[News story: Double penalties for motorists using mobiles](#)

New drivers face losing their licence if they use their phones at the wheel under tough measures coming into force today (1 March 2017), warned Transport Secretary Chris Grayling.

Motorists using a phone while driving will receive [6 points on their licence and a £200 fine](#) – up from the previous 3 points and £100 penalty.

Motorists caught using their mobile twice or accruing 12 points on their licence will face magistrates' court, being disqualified and fines of up to £1,000. New drivers, within 2 years of passing their test, risk having their licence revoked and lorry or bus drivers can be suspended if caught.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Our message is simple and clear: do not get distracted by your mobile phone while driving. It may seem innocent, but holding and using your phone at the wheel risks serious injury and even death to yourself and other road users.

Doubling penalties will act as a strong deterrent to motorists tempted to pick up their phone while driving and will also mean repeat offenders could find themselves banned from our roads if they are caught twice.

Everyone has a part to play in encouraging their family and friends not to use their phones while driving – it is as inexcusable as drink driving.

Police forces across the country will be taking part in a week's enforcement from 1 to 7 March. This will see extra patrols and an increased focus on cracking down on people using their phones while driving. About 3,600 drivers were handed penalties in the last co-ordinated enforcement week from 23 to 29 January this year.

[The Carvin family case study film](#)

The government has launched a powerful and thought-provoking [THINK! campaign to warn drivers of the new penalties and the dangers of using mobiles while driving](#). The campaign will see adverts on billboards, radio and social media as well as a hard-hitting video in cinemas, which was developed in partnership with The AA Charity Trust. Stickers and other in-car merchandise that encourage motorists to put their phone away and out of reach while driving will be distributed through partnerships with driving schools and car rental companies.

[Designated Driver – Don't text and drive](#)

Britain has some of the safest roads in the world but the government is determined to make them safer. The Department for Transport announced in 2015 it was exploring whether to increase the penalties for using a mobile phone while driving. This received almost unanimous support during [last year's consultation](#). The Ministry of Justice has recently finished a [consultation on increasing the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving from 14 years to life imprisonment](#) in an additional crackdown on reckless drivers.

Chief Constable Suzette Davenport, National Police Chiefs' Council roads policing lead, said:

These new penalties reflect the seriousness of the offence and will strengthen the deterrent against using a mobile phone at the wheel. We need people to understand that this is not a minor offence that they can get away with.

Across this week officers will continue to use innovative and intelligence-led tactics to catch and penalise people who are driving while distracted by a mobile phone. However, this is an attitudinal problem that we cannot simply enforce away by putting more officers on the roads.

This issue has to begin with personal responsibility by drivers. We know that people are more likely to report other drivers using a phone than to view themselves as guilty of it. That has to change.

Tougher penalties are a step in the right direction, but police forces and partners are working this week to make it socially unacceptable to use a mobile phone at the wheel. It's about more than what you might have to pay as a penalty – you could hurt or kill an innocent person on the roads by checking a text or taking a call.

Don't do it – and don't let others take the risk either.

Edmund King, president of the AA, said:

Too many drivers are addicted to their phones. Half of young drivers can't bear to turn them off in the car. If they don't switch off their phones they could lose their licence with the new 6 penalty points.

We need to break this addiction and the best way is for drivers to go cold turkey – turn off the phone and put it in the glove box. We are delighted THINK! will be supporting our radical new advert and believe it will begin to make text driving as socially unacceptable as drink driving.

RAC road safety spokesman Pete Williams said:

Our latest report on motoring highlighted that the use of handheld mobile phones is at epidemic proportions and sadly the attitudes of many drivers have relaxed towards this illegal and dangerous activity. The new tougher penalties will therefore be welcomed by law-abiding motorists as a better deterrent.

The change in the law is one important step in helping make using a handheld phone at the wheel as socially unacceptable as drink-driving. The fact that it is joined by a new high profile THINK! campaign which will also focus on the dangers of using a handheld phone when driving, targeted enforcement by the police to let offenders know they will be caught and the RAC's BePhoneSmart.uk 'make a promise' website, means there is now real momentum in getting drivers to change their behaviour for good.

The new penalties come into force in England, Scotland and Wales.

Members of the public can report repeat offenders to Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111 and information will be passed on to police forces.