

Press release: FCO statement on the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination in Ukraine

The United Kingdom is concerned by Russia's decision to withdraw from the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC) in Ukraine.

This decision risks severely undermining the Minsk peace process, in which the JCCC has a specific role to play. It will also have significant consequences for those in the area, including the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, as the JCCC has facilitated numerous local ceasefires in eastern Ukraine.

An FCO spokesperson said:

We are concerned by Russia's withdrawal from the JCCC. The JCCC plays an important role in facilitating local ceasefires in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's withdrawal casts doubt on their commitment to a lasting ceasefire in eastern Ukraine and to the safety and security of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. It also heightens the risk of ecological disaster in the Donbas given the JCCC's role in facilitating repairs to critical civilian infrastructure such as the Donetsk Water Filtration Station, which houses large amounts of chlorine gas.

The humanitarian situation in the Donbas is growing ever bleaker and civilians continue to bear the brunt of this conflict. The UK calls on all parties to do all they can to alleviate humanitarian suffering and commit to a lasting peace.

Further information

Speech: A letter from the Prime Minister to UK nationals living in Europe

From the very beginning of the UK's negotiations to leave the European Union

I have been consistently clear that protecting the rights of both EU citizens living in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU was my first priority. I know that the referendum result has caused considerable anxiety for many of you and your families.

That is why, at the beginning of the negotiating process, I made it clear that any deal guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens living in the UK would be dependent on such an offer being reciprocated for our UK nationals in the remaining Member States.

So I am delighted to announce that in concluding the first phase of the negotiations that is exactly what we have achieved.

From speaking to my counterparts across Europe, I know that they hugely value the UK nationals living in their communities. We have worked hard to address the very complex and technical issues that needed working through before a formal agreement could be reached. The details are set out in the [Joint Report agreed by the UK Government and the European Commission](#), as published Friday 8 December.

This agreement guarantees that your rights as residents in the EU will be protected in the Withdrawal Agreement, so you can have certainty that you will be able to receive healthcare rights, pension and other benefits provisions as you do today. You can also benefit from existing rules for past and future social security contributions.

Furthermore, we have agreed that close family members will be able to join you in the Member State where you live, after the UK has left. This includes existing spouses and civil partners, unmarried partners, children, dependent parents and grandparents, as well as children born or adopted outside of the UK after 29th March 2019.

While I hope this agreement will bring you some reassurance, I know there are a few important issues that have yet to be concluded. We raised these concerns, including the ability of UK nationals living in the EU to retain certain rights if they move within the EU, but the EU was not ready to discuss them in this phase of the negotiations. We will continue to raise these issues with the EU in the New Year.

I will continue to push for the best possible deal for our nationals across the EU, but in the meantime, [please do sign up for the latest updates on gov.uk](#).

The constructive way in which these talks have been conducted gives me confidence that we will achieve a final deal that reflects the strong partnership between the UK and our European partners, and is in the mutual interest of citizens living across the continent.

I wish you and your families a great Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Press release: Latest economic figures show Wales was the fastest growing UK nation in 2016

- Cardiff was the capital city with the highest growth increase in the UK in the value of its goods and services

The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show Wales was the fastest growing country in the UK in 2016 for the value of its goods and services.

Gross Value Added (GVA) is a measure of the value of the economy due to the production of goods and services.

The figures show that Wales' GVA was estimated to have increased by 1.9% in 2016, while England's increased by 1.6%, Scotland by 1.2% and Northern Ireland by 1.1%. This year's national figures were adjusted to incorporate the value of inflation for the first time.

Cardiff experienced the highest growth increase amongst all UK capital cities, growing by 5.7% in 2016.

While Wales as a whole indicated positive signs of growth, the nation still has the lowest GVA per head of population, showing that more needs to be done to close the gap with the other UK nations in this field.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Today's figures prove that in 2016 Wales outperformed England, Scotland and Northern Ireland in GVA growth.

On top of this, it's great to see Cardiff out in front of the rest of the UK's capital cities, strengthening the Welsh economy with its compound semi-conductors, financial services expertise and innovative technologies in healthcare.

However, Wales does continue to have the lowest GVA per head in UK. All our efforts – both within the UK and Welsh governments – must be focussed on changing that trend and maximising the economic growth potential of our nation.

ENDS

News story: Defence Secretary meets Canadian counterpart to further strengthen ties

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has met with Canada's Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan, to further strengthen the historic relationship between the UK and Canada. Crown copyright.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has met with Canada's Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan, to further strengthen the historic relationship between the UK and Canada.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The UK and Canada have enjoyed a close-knit relationship for more than a century and we we have further reinforced this bond, discussing the wide range of issues we face today.

At a time when our nations battle intensifying threats on numerous fronts, we must continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Canada and all of our allies, to ensure the safety of our people.

The two nations have maintained a close alliance on a wide range of security issues for decades, and are uniquely linked. Both are members of G7, the Five Eyes Intelligence Community, NATO and the Commonwealth.

At the forefront of this bond is the posting of UK troops at British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS), in Canada, which will celebrate 50 years of operation in 2021.

Both countries have also expressed a desire to further reinforce their commitments to international diplomacy, and co-hosted the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in Vancouver last month.

The UK Defence Secretary also praised Canada for tripling its training effort in the fight against Daesh, as well as increasing their surveillance and intelligence in support of the counter-Daesh coalition, which both countries are key members of.

Along with the Netherlands and France, the UK and Canada also worked together to form the Multinational Caribbean Co-ordination Cell during Operation Ruman, providing aid to those caught up in the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria in September.

News story: Multimillion-pound contracts awarded for apprenticeship training

Hundreds of training organisations across the country are being given a boost as government begins awarding contracts tomorrow (21 December) worth nearly £500m to provide apprenticeship training for learners and small businesses.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is awarding contracts to hundreds of organisations to provide apprenticeship training to non-levy paying employers. Each of these employers does not pay the apprenticeship levy because they have an annual pay bill of less than £3million.

This will ensure all businesses have a real choice of high quality apprenticeship training provision, no matter where they are in the country or what sector they operate in. It will also mean that more people of all ages and backgrounds will have the opportunity to get into skilled employment. Employers looking to find an apprenticeship provider can do so through find apprenticeship training, which will be updated in early January.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

We are investing in our workforce to make sure there is no barrier on anyone's ambition and that employers have the skilled workforce they need. The investment announced today will ensure that all businesses are able to benefit from high-quality apprenticeship training provision.

The awards follow a rigorous procurement process, designed to ensure the sustainable, ongoing provision of apprenticeship training for employers and learners over the next 15 months. Over 1,000 providers submitted bids.

The initial awards for this procurement total £485m, with successful providers able to bid for more funding over the contract period if they can demonstrate evidence of demand, and subject to the ESFA funding rules and affordability.

In cases where providers have been unsuccessful in the procurement, we are extending contracts by three months so businesses and apprentices have stability while completing existing training.

Contracts for the non-levy funding will run between January 2018 and April 2019.