

Speech: Lord Ahmad addresses Amnesty International

Good afternoon Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, friends and colleagues – and indeed I see many familiar faces from both Houses of Parliament around the room – Ann Clwyd who as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group has worked tirelessly to advance human rights; my predecessor Baroness Anelay, who was strongly committed to this area of work. I am pleased to see many colleagues from the House of Lords, who consistently hold me and this Government to account on this critical agenda.

I would like to start by thanking the All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights and Amnesty International for organising today's event, and for all the valuable work they do, including highlighting the important role of Human Rights Defenders.

I would also like to thank Amnesty International and many of you here who have helped us revise the guidance for our diplomats. Our diplomats play a key role across the world and by supporting human rights defenders, especially many tragically facing prejudice and oppression in their front line work, it is important the British Government, wherever we have representation in the world is a voice advocating for those human rights defenders.

Let me assure you that that guidance has now issued to our staff around the world, and will inform their work in 2018 – the year which marks the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

And in that context, next year I am also mindful of the fact that that the UK will host the Commonwealth Summit Heads of Government meeting. Working through the agenda with the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and indeed across government, we want to ensure that whilst there will be challenges, we bridge those challenges, as we see 52 Heads of Government assemble right here in London.

I know we are today joined by many human rights defenders and advocates, brave and courageous people who defend human rights across the world. We are joined by Issa Amro, whose work as a human rights defender in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is well known to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Issa, I know you have recently discussed your experiences with my colleague Alistair Burt, our Minister for the Middle East.

Human Rights Defenders – UK Support

I am sure no one here underestimates the contribution of brave human rights defenders like Issa and others who are advancing human rights internationally.

By speaking truth to power and helping individuals understand and exercise their rights, they act as custodians, guardians of our freedoms, our democracies, and of good governance. But they are also acting because it is the right thing to do.

And it is a tragedy, ladies and gentlemen that these very same people frequently come under attack. Unsurprising, they come under attack from the very powerful voices those seeking to protect their own influence, to whom human rights are an obstacle and an inconvenience, not something every citizen should enjoy.

This is why our government, why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, champions human rights defenders around the world. This year we have been working to uphold and strengthen the protections afforded to them by the international human rights system. Just last month we helped forge consensus on a UN General Assembly Resolution on Human Rights Defenders. Indeed only yesterday I returned from Geneva where the UK supported a Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the plight of the Rohingya .

As part of our commitment to human rights defenders, the UK is a powerful advocate of journalists and programmes to build their capacity. That's why ladies and gentlemen on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists in November, our Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson committed to spending £1 million over the next financial year on projects that will enable journalists and media professionals to promote their own free press and uphold human rights. And let me be clear, this is one area amongst others prioritised by our Secretary of State. He talks very passionately about human rights, in particular the issues of press freedoms and protection of journalists, and LGBT rights, all of which are very close to the Foreign Secretary's heart.

Write for Rights Campaign – Detentions in Turkey

Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign is another powerful way in which we can support those whose basic human rights are under attack. This year's campaign is particularly poignant. As we stand here today, Amnesty International Country Chair Mr Tanner Kilic – who has worked tirelessly to defend the rights of others – remains behind bars in Turkey.

The UK Government is deeply concerned by these detentions in Turkey. But let me assure you, the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary and Ministers have all raised the issue with their Turkish counterparts. We continue to encourage Turkey to work towards the full protection of fundamental rights for everyone, particularly with regard to free speech.

The Write for Rights campaign again shows us that human rights defenders have their rights violated all too often:

In China – Ni Yulan has been harassed and attacked for supporting people faced with forced evictions. We have raised her case with China on numerous occasions and continue to be concerned about her treatment. I again urge the Chinese authorities to ensure that Ni and her family are free from

harassment; and that she is able to access the medical treatment she needs.

In Egypt – Human Rights Defenders like Azza Soliman and Ibrahim Metwally face arrest and mistreatment, and are subjected to asset freezes and travel bans. We continue to raise our human rights concerns privately with the Egyptian authorities, but also let me assure you in public, including at the UN. On 3 November our joint statement with Canada, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands set out our concerns about the detention of Ibrahim Metwally.

In Bangladesh, human rights defenders – and I talked to some of you before we got going this afternoon – like the LGBT activist Xulhaz Manan have been attacked for their campaigning, as I heard during my visit in August. This is why Bangladesh remains a human rights priority country for the UK and why we raise our concerns at all levels with the government there.

Standing up for human rights defenders is a regular part of the work of so many of our Embassies as I have already said. Let me take this opportunity to highlight the work that two of them are currently doing.

In Bogota, our Embassy lobbies on behalf of many individual human rights defenders, and we coordinate the work of other concerned members of the international community.

This year, David Ravelo, Huber Ballesteros and Miguel Beltran were released from prison, and we have helped ensure their personal safety on release.

The Embassy also funds a project that is developing self-protection strategies for social leaders in the regions of Colombia most affected by conflict.

In Bangkok, Thailand our Ambassador and his team worked closely with partner countries to support three human rights defenders who on 26 July 2016 were charged with criminal defamation for reporting allegations of torture.

The Embassy stood by them in public and importantly in private to provide the support they needed. We took to social media to say that it is not a crime to report torture. We used our contacts to raise the case in a range of forums and thankfully, on 24 October this year the charges were dropped.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are but two examples. I am proud to say that there are many more. Indeed in virtually every country with human rights challenges you will find that our Head of Mission is in contact with the main civil society actors and leading human rights defenders, and of course the governments themselves, promoting the importance of the work of human rights defenders and defending their right to carry it out.

Conclusion

If I may in conclusion, I would like to end by directly addressing individuals in this room and beyond. Selfless individuals around the world who are willing to speak out and be counted, who are willing to speak out and defend the human rights of others, who are willing to speak out and stand up often at the risk of their own safety or freedom.

Your and their courage and commitment are a shining example to us all. Sometimes you speak for those with no voice and give them that voice. You stand up for the downtrodden; you bring us a step closer to freedom, equality, and justice. Therefore we not only commend you, we salute you. From my heart and on behalf of the Government we thank you. And let me assure you ladies and gentlemen, wherever, whenever we can, Her Majesty's Government will continue to stand with human rights defenders in solidarity.

Speech: Sajid Javid's speech to the Federation of Master Builders

Good evening everyone, it's great to see so many familiar faces and it's a real pleasure to have you all here in Parliament.

As you know, the Palace of Westminster is beginning to show its age, we really do need to get the builders in.

I'm pretty sure I saw some of you pricing the job up on the way here!

And if you want to send your quotes to the Speaker, tell him Sajid sent you!

You are all, literally, master builders.

The FMB does great work in recognising that, certifying it.

Raising and maintaining standards.

And of course providing clients with the reassurance they need.

It's a vital task.

After all, none of us are immune from the kind of shoddy workmanship the FMB protects against.

Even Winston Churchill.

When he was Prime Minister he complained that 10 Downing Street was, and I quote, "shaky and lightly built by the profiteering contractor whose name the street bears".

Today, of course, the centre of government is strong and stable!

Although I'm sure John will take issue with that!

I want to start this evening by saying thank you to everyone in this room who helped us do something amazing last year.

217,000 net additions to the housing supply. The highest level in a decade, and an increase of 70% on what was achieved in 2009/10.

There's still a long, long way to go but thanks to your hard work we're certainly heading in the right direction.

Almost 40,000 of those net additions came about from change of use, including taking spaces above shops and turning them into homes.

This government has, quite rightly, put a lot of time and effort into regenerating high streets and strengthening local economies.

That has generally focussed on the retail side of things, but as the report you're publishing today shows there is no reason why commercial and residential cannot coexist happily together.

I grew up in the flat above the family shop, so I've seen for myself how it can work not just in theory but in practice too.

That's why last month's [Budget](#) set out plans to make it easier to create quality homes in empty spaces above high street shops. And tonight is the first time I've heard John back the Budget, so well done to FMB for their lobbying!

So, [Homes on our High Streets \(PDF, 2.1 MB\)](#) isn't just a fascinating report, it's also very timely contribution to the debate.

It puts forward some very interesting ideas and proposals; I was going through a draft this weekend.

And we'll be looking at it very closely to see how it can help us to fix this country's broken housing market.

Let me also take the time to thank Mark Prisk for all the work he has done, and for being the genesis of this report.

To do that, to fix the market, we're going to have to create at least 300,000 homes each year.

And small and medium-sized builders are going to have big role to play in making that happen.

Our [housing white paper](#) was very clear on this.

Ever since the recession, the market has been dominated by a handful of very large developers.

It used to be the case that more than 60% of new homes were delivered by small firms.

Today the figure is half that, and that's a tragedy.

I want to turn that around, to see more of you building more homes.

And we're backing that with more funding – an additional £1.5 billion of short-term loan finance for SMEs, custom builders and innovators announced in the Budget.

We're doing this because smaller firms are skilled at developing small sites, great at building out quickly, and have a strong track record of innovation.

And you also put a great premium on standards.

On quality.

When my dad was running his shop he had to make sure the clothes he was selling were of the highest quality...

...because he was selling them to the local community, to people he'd see every day.

And it's the same for SME builders.

When you operate locally, your reputation is just as important as the work that you do.

That's why membership of the FMB is such a badge of honour, it shows that you're only happy with the best.

And it's not just the quality of work that matters.

Quality of design is crucial too.

That's not just my opinion – it's something the great British public agrees with.

You know as well as I do that getting local communities onside is crucial to getting planning permission.

Well, almost three-quarters of people say they would support the building of more homes in their area if they were well-designed and in keeping with the local style.

People don't like looking at identikit red-roofed boxes that could be basically anywhere in the country.

And nor should they.

Just because we need to build more homes it doesn't mean we need to build ugly homes. Last month I was looking at RIBA's House of the Year.

Make no mistake, the winner was undoubtedly a stunning piece of architecture.

But I'm not sure your average new-build 3-bed home has space for an art gallery, performance area and 27,000 fruit trees!

Good design doesn't have to mean Grand Designs.

To be beautiful, to win that local support, new homes don't have to make bold statements.

They just need to be an appropriate addition, something that local people want to live in and live next door to.

Last week we [invited bids for our new fund](#) that will help local authorities plan for growth and improve design.

But I want to go further.

So, in the spring, we will be working with the sector and with local government to host a national housing design conference.

It will be a showcase for ideas, insights and best practice from across the country and across the world, kicking off a real debate about how we can raise the design bar for everyone.

But I want you to be building houses that are worthy of your skills as master builders.

And this conference will go a long way to help making that happen.

As I said, there is still much to be done.

Still a long way to go to fix our broken housing market.

But with the FMB's support, with your commitment to quality and innovation, I know that we can get there.

And I'm looking forward to making that journey with you.

Thank you.

[News story: Health secretary urges people to talk to each other about organ donation](#)

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has asked people to overcome their reluctance to talk about organ donation with relatives, as he launches [a public consultation on a new opt-out system](#).

Figures from NHS Blood and Transplant show that in the past year around 1,100 families in the UK decided not to allow organ donation because they did not know whether their relatives would have wanted it.

In October, the Prime Minister announced a change to an 'opt-out' system, that would shift the balance of presumption in favour of organ donation.

At present, 80% of people say they would be willing to donate their organs, but only 36% register to become an organ donor.

It is hoped that changing the system to an opt-out model of consent will mean more viable organs become available for use on the NHS, potentially saving thousands of lives.

Over the next 3 months, the government is asking for comments on the defining questions of the new system:

- How much say should families have in their deceased relative's decision to donate their organs?
- When would exemptions to 'opt-out' be needed, and what safeguards will be necessary?
- How might a new system affect certain groups depending on age, disability, race or faith?

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Every day, 3 people die for want of a transplant, which is why our historic plans to transform the way organ donation works are so important. We want as many people as possible to have their say as we shape the new opt-out process.

But as well as changing the law, we also need to change the conversation. It can be a difficult subject to broach, but overcoming this fatal reluctance to talk openly about our wishes is key to saving many more lives in the future.

Only about half of adults on the current organ register say they have discussed their wishes with a relative.

Simon Gillespie, Chief Executive of the British Heart Foundation, said:

The government's commitment to an opt-out system is a commitment to ending the pain felt by families who risk losing a loved one while they wait for an organ. There is a desperate shortage of organ donors in the UK, but around 8 in 10 of us say we do want to donate our organs.

Introducing an opt-out system in England will mean more people get the life-saving heart transplant they need. In the meantime, it's still important for all of us to have conversations with our loved ones about organ donation so our wishes can be met if the worst should happen.

Fiona Loud, Director of Policy at Kidney Care UK, said:

With 8 out of 10 people on the transplant list hoping for a kidney and at least one person dying every day while waiting, this consultation is a unique chance to change this. Whatever your views are on organ donation, please share them.

It's a good time to make sure your loved ones know how you feel too because currently we have one of the lowest rates of consent to donation in Europe.

Speech: David Currie on why competition matters to the whole of the UK

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to talk to you this morning as the outgoing Chairman of the Competition and Markets Authority (or CMA). The Whitehall and Industry Group provides an important forum where business and government can interact and debate key issues facing the country.

And I firmly believe that my topic today is one such issue: what is the importance of competitive markets to our economy and our society, and to us all as consumers, citizens and taxpayers? And how are they best achieved in our rapidly changing times?

A historical perspective

Let me start with a historical perspective. If we go back nearly 50 years, the competition regime was very different from today. The CMA's predecessors, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC), though very influential, had essentially advisory, not decision-making, powers. Ministers were the ultimate decision-makers, forming a judgement about the "public interest", not always very clearly specified, mirroring a wider tendency for government to intervene in economic matters.

The Thatcher and Reagan years saw a steady retreat from such state intervention. Increasing disillusionment with the performance of the British economy, a growing realisation of the failures of state planning in the Soviet Union and eastern bloc, growing frustration with nationalised industries all combined to bring about an increasing withdrawal of government. In the competition sphere, we had the Tebbit Doctrine, forswearing ministerial intervention in merger decisions, leaving it to the competition agencies to decide on the merits of the case on competition

grounds, not wider public interest considerations. This represented the start of a trend to take ministers out of competition policy.

The decisive reinforcement of that trend came with the change of government in 1997. The Labour government not only maintained this vow of abstinence, but hard-wired it into legislation. The Competition Act of 1998 aligned UK competition law with European law (which had itself been shaped in large part by British influence); and then the Enterprise Act of 2002 transformed the MMC into the Competition Commission, and made it the sole arbiter in merger and market inquiries, subject only to judicial review.

Ministerial intervention was limited to 3 highly specific areas of public interest: national security, media plurality, and, from 2008, financial stability. For the rest, competition considerations determined the outcome through an increasingly refined and defined calculus. An important benefit for international businesses was that this approach was increasingly converging across the major world economies.

However, a separate and distinctively British feature has been the market investigation regime, established by the Enterprise Act. This allows the CMA to investigate whole markets – not just individual companies – that are perceived not to be working well for consumers and intervene directly to make the market work better. In contrast to competition enforcement, these powers may be deployed even when no one is breaking the law. Indeed, that provides the unique aspect of this regime, which has been copied by only a handful of countries around the world. And the exercise of these powers is subject only to judicial review, though that represents a significant, necessary and appropriate restraint on their use. Crucially for my theme this morning, the market investigation regime is wholly independent of ministers.

The basis of an independent competition regime

There is [considerable empirical evidence](#) that effective competition, encouraged by the appropriate use of competition tools, is crucial for economic performance and productivity growth, and acceptance of that linkage is a key reason why competition policy has been at the heart of industrial policy over the past 25 years. That it should be very largely independent of democratically elected politicians may therefore seem surprising. So it is worth recapping the reasons why ministers and Parliament, across party lines, agreed largely to vacate the field.

The first was the learning from the 1960s and 1970s that government intervention often misfired, with unintended and undesirable consequences. Markets don't always work well, due to a variety of market failures. The CMA can and does advise government at all levels on how to intervene in ways that do not harm consumers' interests. But even with good intentions, government can easily make matters worse by stepping in. That is especially the case if such interventions are driven by short-term political pressures, not on well thought-through analysis of the problems in a market and what can be done to address them.

The second is that ministers may well wish to tie their hands. If they have

the powers to do anything, then they will inevitably be subject to acute lobbying on all sides. And when in this climate they do intervene, they assume ongoing responsibility when things have to be changed. Better that an independent regulator makes the judgements, based on a clear framework set by Parliament.

The third is that there may be real economic benefit from putting in place a regime where political influences do not have an undue impact on market outcomes. Long term investors welcome the greater certainty that this brings, minimising the political risk premium.

For those of my generation, these were lessons well learnt, and they explain the evolution of the system towards a largely minister-free competition regime. But I think it is very possible that we have seen the high-water mark of this independence.

The financial crash, growing unease about globalisation, large swathes of people who have missed out on any rise in income and are struggling to get by, and concerns about the impact of technology and digitisation particularly on the vulnerable – all these concerns have weakened confidence in the efficacy of markets. This has been reflected politically, with Donald Trump advocating protectionism and Theresa May expressing concern about those left behind and the fairness of “untrammelled free markets”. And we hear increasing calls for government to step in to make sure markets work well and fairly for everybody.

My proposition today is that competition still matters and that it is a key part of making markets work well for everyone, including vulnerable consumers. It is vital that we do not give up on the idea that competition, and competition-based solutions, are a force for good and can help to address the issues that concern politicians and people across the country.

It is true that competitive markets do not serve us all equally. Some groups in society, particularly the more vulnerable, do not always reap the rewards from an economically well-functioning market that others enjoy. It is important that the CMA and other competition authorities reflect on this and do what we can do address it, and I will come to this shortly. But let me first set out why competition really does matter.

How does competition benefit us?

Some might argue that practices that dampen competition are victimless. Well, the reality is that such practices do real harm to the public.

Adam Smith called such practices “a conspiracy against the public”. David Lewis, the first head of South Africa’s post-apartheid Competition Tribunal referred to a cartel that was raising the price of bread beyond the reach of many millions of the poorest South Africans as “thieves at the dinner table”.

So anti-competitive practices, mergers and market structures or features that harm competition are not victimless. They are bad for our society and therefore bad for us all.

Let us turn it around – how does competition benefit us?

Competition law and policy help us all – as customers and taxpayers – by giving businesses the incentive to improve on price, quality, and service standards, to innovate, to treat customers fairly and to become more efficient and therefore more productive. In a virtuous circle, well-informed and engaged customers then distinguish between good and bad products and services, switch away from poor providers and spur businesses to innovate and to compete. New entrants emerge with fresh ideas and fresh offerings to satisfy customers and keep incumbent firms on their toes.

And all these spur efficiency, quality and innovation benefiting us all.

Businesses and the economy also benefit. Competition drives efficiency and productivity. It ensures a level playing field for firms that put their customers first. Businesses – especially smaller businesses – benefit from better upstream competition. Government benefits from buoyant tax revenues. And open and competitive markets supported by robust competition policy promote innovation and long-term growth.

So vigorous competition matters for us all – as shoppers, as taxpayers and as citizens.

Competition isn't everything

However, as I mentioned earlier, that competition really matters isn't everything. The outcomes from the workings of competitive markets often serve some groups of customers better than others.

In many markets, prices are higher to some than others – that has always been true, but may be accentuated in the online world where sophisticated algorithms based on large quantities of data can drive pricing tailored to individuals. And unfortunately those who lose out can be the most vulnerable – the elderly, the less well-off, the less-educated, among others. Vulnerability has many dimensions and we are all at risk of becoming vulnerable at some stage in our lives regardless of whether or not we are young, healthy, well-off, able-bodied, well-educated. Unsurprisingly, therefore, this is seen as unfair, and 'fairness' and 'treating people fairly' is a major part of the current political lexicon.

Fairness, trust and vulnerability

And competition authorities around the world are increasingly talking about fairness. [Renata Hesse of the US Federal Trade Commission](#) spoke last year of how "companies [that] harm competition ... infect the economy with unfairness". [Margarethe Vestager, the European Commissioner for competition](#), said last year "we have to show that competition makes markets work more fairly for everyone". And her [Director General, Johannes Laitenberger](#), said earlier this year: "There are too many people out there who feel the turn that the economy has taken in the past few decades has left them behind ... People end up feeling excluded. They may lose trust in the system altogether."

That link to trust in markets is critical: a well-functioning market system depends on trust in markets, trust in business, and trust in competition. If a widespread perception of unfairness erodes that trust, then the market system will work less well and we will all be the losers.

There is, however, a problem with fairness: there are often very different views on what is fair and unfair in a range of situations. Easier to define and operationalise is the associated concept of vulnerability, which has many quite clearly-defined dimensions. The UK competition agencies have a long record of focusing on markets that matter for ordinary citizens, and of taking an interest in those who are struggling to get by. And in its various reports, the OFT expressed concern about market outcomes that, while benefiting consumers overall, made vulnerable consumers worse off. So although concern for vulnerable consumers has especial resonance now, it is not new to us.

So competition authorities need to be sensitive to the question of fairness and vulnerability, and I will illustrate in a moment how the CMA does this. We have a clear primary statutory duty, given to us by Parliament, to promote competition for the benefit of consumers. This means, as I just said, that while we need to be sensitive to concerns about unfairness and vulnerability, that cannot drive us. Our interventions to make markets work therefore may well contribute to spreading wealth or making outcomes feel fairer, as I will explain below, but there are other parts of government and other policy instruments more specifically set up for tackling issues of inequality and public welfare.

With that important proviso, how do we in practice address questions of fairness and vulnerability in what we do?

First, the overall enforcement of the competition regime helps.

When companies abuse their market power, when they fix prices with their competitors, or when a merger significantly reduces competition, we all lose out. Wealth and power moves from the consumers to the owners of assets, and inequality in society deepens. [Empirical evidence](#) shows that the exercise of market power, which competition policy restrains, works to the benefit of the minority of the very asset-rich, and to the disadvantage of most others.

I, like many others, would regard this as unfair and we are all potential victims. And while it is true that competition does not always benefit the most vulnerable in our society, it is also the case that anti-competitive practices frequently work against them.

Therefore, our core work – to stamp out anti-competitive practices, to prevent mergers which harm competition, to make sure that companies do not abuse their market power – is critical in preventing vulnerable consumers and the population at large from actions and from outcomes that many would consider to be unfair.

Second is through the selection of the cases that we pursue and markets that we investigate, taking actions whereby vulnerable people are protected. Take,

for example, our markets regime. Many of us experience forms of vulnerability in the market for legal services: indeed some would argue that this very important market is one where most are essentially excluded, unless either very well-off or poor enough to qualify for the limited legal aid regime. Our [market study in legal services](#) identified a whole set of measures that aim to help make this market work better for people.

We recently announced the conclusions of our [market study into care homes](#), a market which many encounter for the first time when they are elderly and at their most vulnerable and where family support is difficult because of lack of knowledge and experience.

We have proposed a set of reforms to how this market works, but also launched an enforcement investigation against what we see as crucial breaches of consumer law that work to disadvantage vulnerable people.

In our [energy market investigation](#), we identified the fact that customers on prepayment meters suffer particularly adverse terms and lack the same ability to switch as other customers. The price cap that we have imposed with effect from April 2017 is already saving those customers money – £300 million a year in total and an average of £75 per customer. Whilst there were other reasons that these prepayment meter customers couldn't get as good a deal as direct debit customers, they are typically the poor and disadvantaged. We were open to a wider price cap that widens the coverage to other vulnerable people who are not on prepayment meters, if we could find a reliable way of identifying them. But the conclusion of our report was that a much wider price cap of the kind now being considered by government would damage competition and harm consumers in the long term.

And in our enforcement work, we have chosen cases that also bear on the question of fairness and vulnerability. The most high-profile of these are the cases that the CMA is pursuing against pharma companies involving major price hikes on drugs that are out of patent that may have cost the cash-strapped NHS several hundreds of millions of pounds. This may therefore affect the service that can be delivered to those needing NHS treatment – including many vulnerable people. If we decide that the law has indeed been broken, we will have to see if those decisions stand up to legal appeal. If they do, the NHS will be entitled to seek appropriate compensation from the companies in question.

And alongside our competition powers, we exercise our consumer protection powers in support of our statutory competition duty. In consumer law there is a specific concept of unfairness, in cases where contract terms are unfairly tilted in favour of the business at the expense of the consumer. Using this and other consumer laws, we are investigating suspected illegal practices by [secondary ticketing websites](#), against [care hire intermediaries](#), and against [care home providers](#) and [online hotel booking sites](#) following our recently concluded market studies. And we're also investigating issues in other markets for goods and services that matter to millions of people, some of them vulnerable, including [online dating](#) and [online gambling](#). In another market, that for [online games for children](#), we clamped down on purportedly 'free' games that directly and inappropriately encouraged children to make

in-game purchases.

And we know we have more to do. So in our [draft Annual Plan](#), published for consultation last week, we have proposed taking a particular interest in vulnerable consumers, including reaching out to those groups who regularly deal with people in vulnerable circumstances to understand more about how we can help them through our work. We also recognise that there is an important debate taking place about issues like fairness and vulnerability, and we intend to encourage and play a full part in that discussion.

So to conclude, our primary purpose, given to us by Parliament, is to promote competition to the benefit of consumers. In this, we can do a great deal to help ordinary people get a good outcome in their dealings with businesses.

History suggests that we can be most effective in ensuring competition works to the benefit of consumers and the economy if government gives us the space to carry out our work and is mindful of the risks of stepping in – even if it is with the best of intentions. We are not competition zealots – we recognise that on occasions, take for example the market for payday loans, greater competition alone does not always work to benefit all consumers and direct protections are sometimes necessary. Vulnerable consumers deserve particular focus and wider considerations of fairness and inequality are legitimate, though often a matter for other parts of government to address. We don't have all the answers, but will continue to work to advance our understanding and help drive the debate.

And we do believe that on the whole vigorous competition works to the benefit of consumers, spurring businesses to be more efficient, to innovate, and to make better offerings at keener prices to entice customers from their competitors. The result is that as customers we enjoy better quality goods and services and better value for money. As taxpayers we benefit from better value for money in the delivery of goods and services to government if anti-competitive practices that raise prices are stamped out. And as citizens we benefit if the economy performs well because of the higher productivity that results from more vigorous competition.

Statement to Parliament: EU Transport Council 5 December 2017

I attended the only formal Transport Council under the Estonian Presidency (the Presidency) in Brussels on Tuesday 5 December.

First, the Council noted the Presidency's progress report, summarising discussions to date at official level, on Phase One of the Mobility Package. Work has focused on proposals designed to improve the clarity and enforcement of the EU road transport market (the 'market pillar') and proposals on the

application of social legislation in road transport (the 'social pillar'). I broadly supported the progress made, emphasised the UK's commitment to a constructive safety-first approach to updating the rules, but also registered concerns over the proposed extension of scope of part of the regulations to small vans.

Following this, the Council adopted 3 sets of Council conclusions:

- on progress in Trans-European Network-Transport (TEN-T) and Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)
- the Digitalisation of Transport
- the mid-term evaluation of Galileo, EGNOS and European GNSS Agency

Next, the Presidency held a policy debate on the 'road charging pillar' of the Mobility Package. The proposals to amend the existing Directives on HGV road tolls and user charges ('Eurovignette') and the interoperability of electronic road toll systems ('EETS') set out rules for charging vehicles using the road (but do not mandate such charging) and promote better functioning of charging across national barriers. The UK broadly welcomed provisions on improving the functioning and enforcement of electronic road tolling systems. However, the UK said we were opposed to proposals to broaden the scope of EU charging rules to include cars, and had concerns about the proposed phasing-out of time-based road charging and measures mandating hypothecation of revenues from congestion charging.

Following this, the Council noted the Presidency's progress report on official level discussions on Safeguarding Competition in Air Transport. The UK did not dispute the need for fair competition but urged caution on proposals for regulatory measures; it was important to avoid potential negative impacts on the liberalised aviation market, connectivity, consumers, and member states' bilateral aviation agreements with third countries.

Under Any Other Business, several items were discussed. Notably:

- Commissioner Bulc presented the Commission's recently published second phase of the Mobility Package, provided an update on the implementation of the extensive Aviation Strategy, alongside a Communication on Military Mobility, and noted progress on rail passenger rights negotiations
- Finland called for reconsideration of the Summertime Directive
- Germany updated on the second high-level group on automated and connected cars
- Poland drew attention to the 2018 International Maritime Days
- France promoted her proposed declaration at the upcoming 'one planet' summit calling on the IMO to adopt an ambitious strategy for the decarbonisation of international shipping
- Bulgaria presented transport plans for her incoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union