

[News story: PM calls with European Leaders: 28 March 2017](#)

The Prime Minister called the German Chancellor, the President of the European Council, and the President of the European Commission earlier this evening to update them ahead of the letter giving notification of the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Union being delivered tomorrow.

In separate calls, they agreed that a strong EU was in everyone's interests and that the UK would remain a close and committed ally.

They also agreed on the importance of entering into negotiations in a constructive and positive spirit, and of ensuring a smooth and orderly exit process.

The Chancellor, the European Council President, and the European Commission President thanked the Prime Minister for her calls.

[Speech: PM speech to the UK-Qatar Business and Investment Forum](#)

I am delighted to be able to join you here in Birmingham for this prestigious conference which comes on the eve of one of the most significant moments that the United Kingdom has faced for many years.

Tomorrow we begin the negotiations to secure a new, deep and special partnership with the European Union.

As we do so, I am determined that we should also seize this historic opportunity to get out into the world and to shape an even bigger role for a global Britain.

This means not just building new alliances, but going even further in working with old friends who have stood alongside us for centuries.

That is the spirit in which I welcome you all here today.

When I had the privilege of addressing the Gulf Co-operation Council in December, I said that the relationship between the United Kingdom and our allies in the Gulf is not just of great historic value – but also fundamental to our shared future.

It is fundamental to our shared security because Gulf security is our security, and together we face the same global threats from terrorism and

extremism, [as we saw again so tragically in London](#) just last week.

And it is fundamental to our shared prosperity – for Gulf prosperity is our prosperity – and by growing our trade and investment we can create new jobs and new opportunities for all our people.

So I am delighted to welcome His Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah – with whom I have worked on security co-operation for many years – and to see him here today with one of the broadest and most senior delegations that Qatar has sent anywhere in the world, including several Qatari ministers, leaders of industry and the Qatari Investment Authority.

The strength and seniority of the delegations here from both the UK and Qatar are a testament to the importance we both place on our bilateral relationship and the scale of our shared ambition to develop it.

Already the United Kingdom is Qatar's number 1 destination for foreign direct investment, with investments worth over £35 billion ranging from the iconic Shard to new housing in the Olympic Village in East London.

And Qatar is already the third largest market for UK exports across the Middle East and North Africa, with over 600 UK companies already benefitting from the opportunity to support your growing infrastructure and provide goods and services to your people.

But this week I hope that we can go further, by laying the foundations for a bold new chapter in this partnership between our nations.

Last night we signed an historic Memorandum of Understanding to support Qatar's 2030 National Vision.

This will deepen the co-operation between our governments and our businesses across a wide range of vital areas including education and healthcare, science, research and innovation, tourism and culture, transport, energy, financial services and the development of small businesses.

We will also deepen our co-operation on defence, where I hope the UK can be Qatar's partner of choice; on cyber, where the UK will support Qatar to shore up its cyber defences; and on sport, where the UK will continue to share our expertise on managing major events as part of our support for Qatar as it prepares for the 2022 World Cup.

And as we support Qatar with British expertise, so today I am delighted that Qatar is pledging major new investment which will play a significant role in shaping a brighter future for Britain too.

For my [Plan for Britain](#) is not just a plan to leave the EU, but a plan to build a stronger economy and a fairer society, underpinned by genuine economic and social reform to make Britain a country that works for everyone, not just a privileged few.

And a critical part of this plan is developing a [modern industrial strategy](#) that can help secure my vision of a high-skilled, high-paid Britain where

opportunity is spread across every community, not just the most prosperous areas like London and the South East.

Qatar's new investment today will help to make this a reality by providing new support for regeneration projects outside London, here in Birmingham and in other regions across the country.

It is a bold statement of continued confidence in the British economy from long-term investors committed to prosperity in every part of our United Kingdom.

So I look forward to sitting down with Qatari investors this afternoon to discuss some of the many attractive commercial opportunities that a global Britain has to offer.

These include those opportunities arising from our own long-term investment in infrastructure – such as High Speed 2, which will be transformative for this region and in turn create many exciting, new opportunities for investment in all the parts of the country that it travels through.

These investments will play an important role in helping us to shape the forces of globalisation so that everyone shares in the benefits of economic growth.

They will also provide the foundation from which we can take our trade and investment to the next level. So I am delighted that we are also establishing a new Joint Economic and Trade Committee. And as I said at the [Gulf Co-operation Council in December](#), I hope we can pave the way for an ambitious trade arrangement for when the UK has left the EU, including exploring whether we can forge a new trade arrangement for the whole of the Gulf area.

As a global Britain, I am determined that we will be the most committed and most passionate advocate of free trade in the world – and I look forward to continuing these vital discussions on growing our trade and investment as part of hosting the Gulf Co-operation Council in London later this year.

So thank you once again for your support today, for your investments in our country and for the continued partnership that we are building together.

Through this enduring commitment between our countries and our peoples, let us meet the shared challenges to our security; grasp the shared opportunities for our prosperity; and build a brighter future for the United Kingdom and Qatar, today and for generations to come.

[Press release: Return of full](#)

democratic accountability to Tower Hamlets confirmed

This follows a 2-year intervention by central government after an independent inspection found the accountability issues at the council.

While the team of commissioners will leave, new directions will be put in place for 18 months that require the council to report progress to Mr Javid every quarter.

This will allow him to keep a close eye on the borough to ensure taxpayers' money is put to best use and improvements continue.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I'm confident that Tower Hamlets council is on the right track to provide the services their residents deserve and rightly expect. That's why I have decided to return all powers to the council.

I want to make sure that taxpayers' money is put to the best use, in an open and transparent way. So I will want to hear from Tower Hamlets every three months on the progress they're making.

Communities Secretary to continue 'close eye'

Since 2014, government-appointed commissioners have been overseeing key functions at Tower Hamlets.

This followed an independent inspection by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, which warned of a breakdown in democratic accountability and a significant misuse of public funds.

Since the commissioners were appointed, a new Mayor has been elected, a top officer team has been put in place, and an improvement plan is being implemented.

Following continued improvement by the council, particularly over the past year, Mr Javid has confirmed that commissioners will leave the council from the end of March 2017.

However, directions will remain in place so that the Mayor and the council report progress directly to him every 3 months. A Best Value Improvement Board, including councillors and independent representatives, will oversee this work.

Further information

Three commissioners have been working with Tower Hamlets council. They are:

- Sir Ken Knight (lead commissioner)
- Max Caller CBE
- Chris Allison CBE

A fourth, Alan Wood, stepped down in January 2017.

[News story: New hub for UK data science opens at Office for National Statistics](#)

The Campus has been established to harness new data sources and technologies to provide statistics for policy makers and businesses about the fast-moving UK economy and society. Creating this resource for the nation is part of the ONS's ongoing programme of work to meet the challenge of providing richer and more real-time statistics to inform decision makers.

Speaking at the Campus launch, National Statistician John Pullinger said:

The Data Science Campus will innovate with new methods and data sources providing opportunities to improve existing statistics and develop new outputs by working across government, industry, academia and charities in the UK and internationally. The wide range of training and learning programmes which the Campus will offer will also be central to building data science capability across the UK. Through these actions, the Campus will help us realise our vision of better statistics for better decisions.

Minister for the Cabinet Office Ben Gummer, who opened the new facility on behalf of the UK Government, said:

I have been very pleased to see how the ONS is busy transforming itself into a twenty-first century data-driven organisation which serves as a focal point for UK data science and an important provider of skilled jobs in South Wales. Efficient and effective

government needs precise economic data, and it is encouraging to see how the ONS and its people are rising to meet that challenge.

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, said:

The expanding ONS centre at Newport is great news for the area with a new campus at the heart of it. We now have in Wales a cutting edge facility can serve not only the public sector but private businesses and entrepreneurs. ONS has a long-term future in Newport, and I look forward to it providing high-quality jobs and remaining a major feature of our digital economy in Wales.

Campus Managing Director Tom Smith said:

We are excited about creating a UK centre for data science here in Newport, building on this as the home of economic statistics. Like every organisation, the ONS needs to develop to meet the demands of a changing world. We are investing in present and future jobs here, building data analytics expertise to produce even better statistics that inform decisions affecting everyone, from how governments spend taxpayers' money to the services we receive. Our Newport HQ which, shared with the IPO is Newport's single largest employer, is getting a £10m modernisation, reflecting our ongoing commitment to making Newport the home of world class statistics.

Formally opening the new facility, Cabinet Office Minister Ben Gummer MP, said:

I have been very pleased and impressed to see how ONS is busy transforming itself into a 21st century data-driven organisation, a focal point for UK data science and an important provider of skilled jobs in south Wales. Now more than ever the UK needs fast, precise economic data and it is encouraging to see how ONS and its people are rising to meet that challenge.

Plans for the Campus were announced last spring as part of ONS's ongoing plans to develop the statistical information it provides. The Campus will work on projects within five themes, under the collective title of People, Planet and Prosperity: • Evolving economy • Urban and rural • Society • Sustainability • UK in a global context.

The Data Science Campus will work with national and international partners from academia, government and business to deliver joint research programmes and to build UK data science capability, including providing funding

opportunities for PhD candidates. As part of this the ONS set up the first UK Data Analytics apprenticeship scheme and are planning more opportunities to train people in these skills that are so important for the UK's decision-makers. Guests at the launch had the opportunity to explore the new Data Science Campus building and to hear from data scientists across ONS, including the apprentices, about the initial projects being carried out, work on understanding the economy and financial sectors, international trade, population flows, and the environment. Guest organisations (Warwick Business School, Stats Netherland, Flowminder and the Met Office) will talk about projects they have worked on that demonstrate what can be achieved with new data sources for the public good.

[News story: RAF Akrotiri opens newly-renovated runway](#)

The success of the 21 month, £46m project has now secured RAF Akrotiri, on the southern tip of Britain's Sovereign Base Area on the island of Cyprus, as a first class operating base.

The investment means that the base will continue to support the full complement of current and future RAF aircraft, and those of our coalition partners.

Night time work on the RAF Akrotiri runway.

The work however did not hinder Britain's campaign to defeat Daesh, with the RAF playing a leading role in the Coalition, striking over 1200 Daesh targets since the campaign began in 2014. Engineers completed the work around the intense pace of air operations, with the RAF working at the highest operational tempo in a quarter of a century.

Minister for the Armed Forces Mike Penning said:

This project has taken a tired and battered runway and transformed it into a modern, safe, 21st Century facility, capable of supporting operations for the next 20 years and beyond.

This has been a unique and remarkable achievement. RAF Akrotiri is not just a refuelling spot or training base. This airfield matters. It has been at the forefront of supporting our most important military operations over the last decade and more, including the current campaign against Daesh.

The project, which saw 55,000m³ of earth excavated and 44,000m³ of high-quality concrete laid, was led by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO).

A Typhoon takes off as building contractors look on.

DIO's Chief Executive Graham Dalton revealed at today's opening how proud he was of the achievements of everyone involved in upgrading the runway, without affecting operations.

Defence Infrastructure Organisation Chief Executive Graham Dalton said:

I am delighted that the upgrade to the runway at RAF Akrotiri is complete. This is a crucial asset for Defence and this project has been a huge success. DIO has worked with our customers and contractors to successfully carry out this critical work while minimising the impact on operations.

In 2019, British Forces Cyprus will become the largest Permanent Joint Operating Base and permanent deployment of British troops overseas and this latest upgrade has ensured it is more than ready.