



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

**SUB-COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRATIC  
GOVERNANCE (CDS DG) AND  
SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSATLANTIC  
RELATIONS (PCTR)**

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**MISSION REPORT**

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**LONDON AND YORK,  
UNITED KINGDOM**

24 – 27 APRIL 2017

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The delegation of the Assembly's Sub-committees on Democratic Governance and on Transatlantic Relations, led by Lord Jopling (United Kingdom) and Øyvind Halleraker (Norway), was comprised of 19 legislators from 12 Allied nations, and visited London and York from 24 to 27 April 2017. Foreign Office Minister Sir **Alan Duncan**, MP, reassured the delegation of NATO member country parliamentarians that the United Kingdom remains an outward-looking, trading nation determined to continue playing a major role in Euro-Atlantic security. UK government officials stressed the need for all NATO allies to meet the 2% GDP defence spending target, with at least 20% thereof dedicated to defence investment.

2. Britain is highly concerned about Russia's provocative stance towards Allies, including its hostile use of the cyber-domain, the delegation heard. The UK contributes substantially to reassuring eastern European Allies, including by leading NATO's enhanced forward presence in Estonia and deploying military assets near the Polish-Lithuanian border, in what is known as the Suwalki gap. Host country speakers also criticised Moscow's aggression against Ukraine and its acts of intimidation against NATO partner countries.

3. During the four-day visit to London and York, NATO Parliamentarians also received briefings on, inter alia, the challenge posed by Daesh<sup>1</sup>, instability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, counter-terrorism, as well as UK civil protection and emergency relief approaches. Briefings in London took place in the House of Commons and at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In York, the delegation visited the Emergency Planning College, the UK's leading training centre for organisational resilience, the headquarters of the 1st (UK) Division, and the University of York, one of the preeminent research universities in the UK.

## II. FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN THE CONTEXT OF BREXIT

4. The future of the United Kingdom's foreign and security policy after its impending departure from the European Union was obviously high on the agenda. Host country officials repeatedly assured the delegation that the UK will continue to be a reliable and active partner determined to actively contribute to Euro-Atlantic security. Sir Alan Duncan stressed that "we are leaving the EU, we are not leaving Europe" and that "the UK will continue to look outward and remain "global Britain"". As an example, he mentioned that the UK contributes substantially to reassuring eastern European Allies, including by leading NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Estonia and deploying military assets near the Polish-Lithuanian border in the Suwalki gap.

5. Sir Alan affirmed that the UK will be leaving the European Union and that the process might take two years or perhaps longer. Many details still need to be hammered out, including between the various parts of the UK. British officials were convinced that Scotland will remain a part of the UK.

6. Sir Alan expressed the hope that the UK and the EU-27 will still share the same objectives and work together very closely. In this context, **Neil Basu**, Deputy Assistant Commissioner and Senior National Coordinator for Terrorist Investigations, Metropolitan Police Service, referred to the European arrest warrant. He noted that the UK will want to maintain cooperation that has been established, and particularly maintain the ability to exchange information. Mike Penning, Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence, noted that the UK is in favour of stronger NATO-EU cooperation but would not support the creation of parallel EU defence structures.

7. With regard to NATO, Sir Alan reassured the delegation that the United Kingdom's resolve to fulfill its commitments to NATO remains unbreakable. He elaborated by highlighting British priorities

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic acronym of the terrorist organisation "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria"

for NATO – the three “Rs”: Resources, Relevance and Russia. As to resources, he and other UK government officials underlined the need for all NATO allies to meet the 2% GDP defence spending target, with at least 20% of it dedicated to defence investment. The UK will abide by these commitments, Sir Alan stressed. He encouraged the members of the delegation to champion increased defence spending in their national parliaments. In a similar vein, Mike Penning reminded the delegation that NATO soldiers need to be as operational as possible. It was therefore important for the member states of the Alliance to train as much as possible together and to achieve the highest degree of weapons compatibility in Allied arsenals as possible.

8. With regard to the bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States, **Nick Ritchie**, lecturer in International Security at the University of York, noted that a close relationship with the US is a vital interest for the UK. A free trade agreement with the US is crucially important, especially in the context of Brexit. However, as one delegate noted, a trade deal between the US and the UK may be very difficult to achieve as London is very interested in including financial services into TTIP, which the US does not want. More generally, the foreign policy approach pursued by the current US administration of President Donald Trump could pose a challenge, Mr Ritchie suggested. He elaborated by arguing that the Trump administration deviates from, and even rejects, the traditional, “globalist” foreign policy approach pursued by previous US administrations. By contrast, the foreign affairs narrative of the Trump administration is “anti-globalist” and “nativist”, and guided by “economic nationalism”, he suggested. To support his argument, he reminded participants that President Trump had publicly declared that he wants to “protect American workers from the negative impact of globalisation, and particularly from “cheaters” like China, and from illegal immigrants”.

9. More generally, judging by his public declarations, President Trump appears to have a more transactional attitude towards other countries in general, and Allied countries in particular. At least in his public pronouncements, the US President appears to be less concerned about common values and has repeatedly emphasised that America’s allies should pay for the privilege of being protected by the United States. By contrast, UK Prime Minister Theresa May has pursued a liberal, international narrative, even in the context of Brexit. Therefore, while the narrative of a “special relationship” is likely to be employed in the future as it has been in the past, Mr Ritchie anticipated challenges for the bilateral UK-US relationship in the future. Mr Ritchie concluded by saying that it is still too early to have a clear and comprehensive view of President Trump’s foreign policy and that a “trend to moderation in US foreign policy” in the new US administration is possible.

10. The briefings the delegation obtained on UK and NATO issues were complemented by a visit to the Headquarter of the UK’s 1st Division in York, which is spearheading the British Army’s Light Role Adaptable Force. The Members received a comprehensive set of briefings about the role of the Division and its deployments throughout the world. The delegates were also briefed by officers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Signal Regiment, whose mission is to provide broader tactical picture to the troops.

### III. THE UNITED KINGDOM AND RUSSIA

11. As far as Russia is concerned, host country officials commented that the approach that NATO Heads of State and Governments had agreed upon at the 2016 Warsaw Summit remains the right one, namely that the Alliance needs to strengthen its eastern frontier while trying to establish a political dialogue with Moscow. However, dialogue with Russia is problematic because the country does not act as a rational interlocutor. Despite Brexit, the UK is determined to continue aligning to the EU’s policy of sanctions towards Russia.

12. **Andrew Monaghan**, Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs), argued that Moscow has a clear agenda of modernising their country and making it an important global player in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The mobilisation of resources and capabilities for this purpose had started even before the conflict with Ukraine, at least since 2012. It is a comprehensive programme, Mr Monaghan noted, that involves not only purely military but also

civilian institutions. The transition of Russia's security architecture should be completed by 2020. This trajectory of profound transformation is not fully understood by the West, the speaker stressed. At the same time, he pointed out that Russia's state system is not very functional, which impedes the pace of modernisation.

13. Another Chatham House expert, **James Sherr**, argued that Russia has traditionally perceived itself as a "land empire" with its own unique civilisation. This empire does not have clear borders and its policies have been both offensive and defensive at the same time. Russia's security culture emphasises the concepts of the control of its periphery or "near abroad", spheres of influence, client states and buffer zones. As long as the West expands into Russia's perceived sphere of influence (with the Euro-Atlantic integration of Eastern Europe), Russia will do what it can to resist and cause difficulties for the West, Mr Sherr warned.

14. British officials and experts acknowledged that Russia is using a number of hybrid techniques, including propaganda, cyberattacks and intelligence activities, against their country. UK institutions are increasingly alert about these threats. Sir Alan Duncan said that cyberwarfare needs to be fully integrated in the defence of NATO Allies as cyberattacks are increasing. The UK has highly sophisticated intelligence agencies and is therefore off to a good start in this domain. However, if NATO Allies do not invest resources in this area, they will likely encounter increasing security challenges.

15. **Ewan Lawson**, Senior Research Fellow for Military Influence at RUSI (Royal United Services Institute), noted that Russia is conducting large scale cyber-espionage, sabotage and subversion activities against the West. Russia does not even particularly try to hide its hostile cyberactivity, which is in itself a message to the West. Apart from using state resources, Russia also employs or encourages independent hackers or "hacktivists", thereby ensuring plausible deniability for the Russian government. Western nations should continue improving cyber resilience, keeping up with technological developments, Mr Lawson suggested. He doubted if an international convention on cyberspace would be practical and implementable.

16. **Nina Caspersen**, professor of politics at the University of York, discussed the developments in the frozen conflict zones of Eastern Europe in the context of US-Russia relations. She noted that the change of the US administration did not alter the US non-recognition policy of the breakaway regions. She argued that the frozen conflicts are becoming increasingly entrenched as the new generation has no memory of living in a common state. She also stressed that most of the breakaway regions are more than just Moscow puppets and that political dynamics in these regions merits greater attention.

#### IV. THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE MENA REGION

17. Mike Penning stressed the importance of combatting Daesh simultaneously on all fronts, so that defeated in one country it does not resurface in another. British officials also stressed the importance for NATO to continue assisting Iraq with defence capacity building and expertise.

18. **Crispin Blunt**, MP, and Chairman of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, stressed that all major world powers should pressure their clients in Syria to terminate the conflict and find a political solution. He suggested that Turkey should assume the role of protector of the Kurdish culture and identity. He criticised some of the Western approaches towards the MENA region, including the intervention in Libya and support for dictatorships in the region. Mr Blunt urged the Euro-Atlantic community to be consistent and support democracy in the region, promote dialogue with all political stakeholders, focus on addressing poverty and lack of opportunities – the root causes of the conflict and extremism – and avoid shortcuts, including supporting strongmen such as the head of the Libyan National Army, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, or labelling Muslim Brotherhood-type movements as terrorists.

## V. UK'S COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY

19. Neil Basu noted that the threat of jihadist terrorism has increased considerably in recent years in Five Eyes countries. Most of the attacks are not sophisticated, but they are increasingly numerous. He suggested that social media was a major instrument allowing mobilisation and radicalisation of would-be terrorists.

20. The UK strategy to combat terrorism is called Contest, and it consists of 4 major elements: Pursue (activities aimed at identifying, investigating and disrupting terrorist acts), Protect (strengthening protection of public figures and places), Prepare (mitigating the impact of a terrorist attack) and Prevent (prevention of radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts). The latter programme is transitioning from a police-led effort to a more comprehensive programme involving a number of local actors and civilian institutions. According to Deputy Assistant Commissioner Basu, the British counter-terrorism system may seem complex, but it is largely successful, facilitated by the fact that the UK is an island, that it has gun control policies and that law enforcement institutions are respected and supported by local communities. The speaker warned, however, that the terrorist threat is here to stay for the foreseeable future, including due to the problem of returning fighters from the conflict zones.

21. Mr Basu also stressed that UK counter-terrorism institutions have significant powers to monitor potential terrorist activity, including combing through terabytes of data, but these powers have been used responsibly and with due respect for privacy and human rights. The democratic oversight system is robust and includes a system of warrants and parliamentary scrutiny via a designated parliamentary committee.

## VI. OTHER ISSUES

22. In Yorkshire, the delegation visited the Emergency Planning College (EPC), a unique institution committed to helping public and private organisations in the field of crisis management and emergency planning. EPC experts provide a wide range of dynamic and diverse training courses, seminars and workshops for public and private sector clients across the UK and overseas, thus contributing to worldwide resilience against natural disasters, major incidents and malicious attacks. The EPC is an example of an effective public-private partnership: whilst under the UK Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat, the EPC is operated by Serco - a private company.

23. According to Major General **Michael Charlton-Weedy**, Director of Resilience Training, Doctrine and Standards in the Cabinet Office of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, the UK model of emergency planning and response is a success, because: 1) it is bottom-up; 2) it is based on a single system for all types of emergencies, 3) command and control are exercised at the lowest possible level; while 4) coordination takes place at the highest possible level; and 5) emergency response is multi-agency and joint at every level, with one of the agencies clearly in the lead or in charge. The UK's risk management assessment mechanism is also widely admired, Major General Charlton-Weedy said.

24. Developments in the Arctic, and particularly Russia's increasing activities in this region, also featured on the agenda of the visit. **James Rogers**, associate lecturer in International Politics at York University, noted that there is not only one but "many Arctics" as ice levels vary from region to region. Whereas the region around Canada and Greenland is likely to remain "ice heavy", the Arctic region north of Russia will experience virtually ice-free periods. This will make the Russian Arctic accessible for resource exploration while the opening of the Northern Sea route is expected to reduce shipping routes between Asia and Europe significantly, thereby leading to the emergence of a "New Suez", he explained. For an economically challenged Russia, this is deemed important for future prosperity. Russia is therefore modernising existing infrastructure in its Arctic region and building new on. To that end, it is establishing high-tech bases, such as the Arctic Trefoil on Franz Josef Land, which enables Russia to protect both border and airspace, and to service the Northern

Fleet. This base is one of more than 13 sites that Russia plans to have operational after 2030, Mr Rogers said. To improve its ability to control the situation in the Russian sector of the Arctic, Moscow is also investing in drones and has announced the creation of a drone division in 2014 that will operate from four to six bases, delegates learned. As climate change leads to increased activity in the Arctic, the demands on SAR, supply and servicing, but also security are increasing. Russia is also concerned that the Arctic may become an operation zone for terrorists and has therefore recently established an anti-terrorism centre in the North. In addition, Russia plans to expand its fleet of icebreakers, which is already the largest in the world. Taken together, these investments underline the importance that Moscow has assigned to the Arctic after it has neglected the existing infrastructure for many years. If implemented, they will provide Russia with the infrastructure to secure and control passage and trade between Europe and Asia, according to Mr Rogers. However, it remains to be seen if Russia can afford to finance its plans in the Arctic, the speaker cautioned.

25. The United Kingdom is following developments in the Arctic closely, and particularly those in the security realm, the delegation was informed. Though it is not an Arctic littoral state, the UK has some capabilities and would like to continue to train in the Arctic, according to Mike Penning, MP and Minister of State for the Ministry of Defence.

26. **Marcus Schulzke**, lecturer at the York University, discussed the strategic implications of communication and social media in conflict resolution and management. He noted that traditionally outward-facing communications operations have been studied in terms of a top-down propaganda model. However, strategic communication is changing in response to new strategic challenges and new communication technologies, particularly social media. The shift from mass media to social media means lower entry costs for producing media content, more user interaction and the emergence of new elites that host information but deny responsibility for content. As a result, certainty about message sources decreases and leads to the rise of phenomena such as fake news. The security implications include the elites losing some framing power as well as uncertainty about facts surrounding security issues. Confusion hinders effective response, leaving vulnerabilities, the speaker warned.

27. Mr Schulzke stressed the need to build content standards into social media and educate audiences about the change in quality between mass media and social media. He also noted that security institutions must adjust media strategies to the new realities.