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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 16 November 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Child Sexual Exploitation

1. **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to protect 16 and 17 year olds who are victims of child sexual exploitation. [902147]

6. **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to protect 16 and 17 year olds who are victims of child sexual exploitation. [902152]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Before I answer the question, may I say that later this afternoon I shall of course make a statement on the Paris terrorist attacks? I am sure that the thoughts of the whole House are with the people of France, particularly with the victims—and their friends and families—of those terrible and horrific attacks.

Tackling child sexual exploitation is a top priority for this Government. We have already prioritised child sexual abuse as a national threat in the strategic policing requirement, and made significant progress since the “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation” report in March 2015.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I am sure that all of us in this House want to concur with the sentiments expressed by the Home Secretary and send our condolences and very best wishes to the families and friends of all of those who were killed or injured in the dreadful terrorist attacks on Friday night.

I hear what the Home Secretary says about sexual exploitation, but, according to the Children’s Society, more than three quarters of reported sexual crimes against 16 and 17 year olds result in no police action against the perpetrator. How does the Home Secretary feel that her proposed cuts to policing will impact on those figures?

Mrs May: We should all welcome the fact that more people, including young people and children, now feel able to come forward and report when abuse or exploitation has taken place, but, as the hon. Lady will be aware, the

question of how the reports are then dealt with is not to do with police numbers. We saw that in the Rotherham report. Sadly, reports came through that police and others had been aware of the child exploitation that was taking place, yet appropriate action was not taken. Following the “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation” report in March this year, there will be a requirement that all police officers are trained in raising their response to child sexual exploitation. We have also revised the guidance, so that we provide clear information about how to identify child abuse and neglect and what action to take.

Caroline Nokes: May I also associate myself with the comments made earlier by my right hon. Friend?

The recent report “Old Enough to Know Better?” by the Children’s Society has recommended that, when the victim of a sexual offence is 16 or 17 years old, it should be considered an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that would send a very strong message to perpetrators and build on the work already done by this Government to protect the victims of sexual exploitation?

Mrs May: I agree that we always need to send very clear messages to the perpetrators about how seriously we take this crime and the intent to deal with it. The courts will always consider a case more seriously when the victim is a child, and that includes 16 or 17 year olds. The Sentencing Council’s definitive guidance on sexual offences came into effect in April last year, and it provides for the courts to sentence more severely individuals in cases where victims are particularly vulnerable, as will often be the case with sexual exploitation involving 16 or 17 year olds.

22. [902169] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that a really quite frightening proportion of the 16 and 17-year-old girls who are victims of sexual exploitation have been in the care of the local state. What action is she taking to prevent the grooming of such vulnerable young women into sexual exploitation?

Mrs May: Sadly, the right hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that a shocking number of those who find themselves being exploited and subjected to child sexual abuse will have been in the care of the state. That is an appalling record for the state, and it has gone on for many years. It is one reason why the Justice Goddard inquiry will look at how institutions have, or have not, undertaken their duty of care. As part of the work that we did following the Rotherham report, we are working with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Education to see exactly what approach should be taken at local authority level with those in care and others who report abuse to the local authority.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if 16 and 17 year olds are given the vote, it increases the likelihood that they will be regarded and treated as adults and that they will therefore become the victims of sexual exploitation?

Mrs May: I would not link the voting age with child sexual exploitation. In the Home Office, we have included 16 and 17-year-olds in our consideration of a number

of areas, including this issue and domestic violence. We recognise the vulnerability of those who are 16 and 17, who are sometimes treated as and considered as adults but are equally as vulnerable as younger people and need the protection and care we should be giving them when we deal with these difficult issues.

Passport Applications

2. Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of complaint procedures in respect of rejected passport applications. [902148]

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): Her Majesty's Passport Office takes complaints seriously and has a robust process to examine customer concerns. Ultimately, complaints can be referred to the independent Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman for adjudication.

Greg Mulholland: I thank the Minister for that answer. May I bring to his attention the case of Muhammad Ifran Ayub, who is seriously ill awaiting a heart transplant and has been trying for two years to get a visa for his two-year-old son, who is currently in Pakistan away from both parents? There have been a series of failures in dealing with this case. Will the Minister meet me and the family to discuss it?

James Brokenshire: I will always consider representations made by right hon. and hon. Members. It is difficult for me to comment in detail on the Floor of the House on the individual circumstances of the case, but HM Passport Office has to examine documentation very carefully and, sadly, fraud and other criminality can at times be involved. It needs to consider cases dispassionately and, when there are compelling circumstances, reflect them in the decisions it takes. I will look at the facts that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Hate Crime

3. Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): What assessment she has made of the performance of the police in tackling hate crime. [902149]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): The police continue to make significant progress on tackling hate crime. The recording of hate crime has improved and the True Vision website was launched in 2011. Guidance for officers was published in 2014 and there is improved training on the handling of hate crime cases and support for victims.

Stuart Andrew: I am grateful for that answer and associate myself with the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Given the horrific attacks in Paris at the weekend, many Muslim communities are concerned about the potential increase in anti-Muslim hate crime in this country. Can my hon. Friend reassure those communities in my constituency and across the country that the Government are committed to tackling such hatred in all its forms?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. It is absolutely clear that there is no excuse for hatred—no religious excuse and no other excuse. Hatred will not be accepted by this Government. We work closely with community organisations such as Tell MAMA to ensure that we are aware of community work to stop hate crime and to ensure that we increase reporting of it. We have also announced that Muslim hate crime will be recorded separately by the police to ensure that we have a full assessment of its levels.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Further to the comments of the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), these terrible events in Paris mean that it is very important that police officers engage fully with local communities. The Government were right to suspend the operation of the police funding formula, which deals with frontline policing. Although the counter-terrorism budget has been protected, dealing with such offences means that we need bobbies on the beat. Will the Minister speak to the Home Secretary and see whether we can present an argument to the Chancellor to protect front-line policing so that the police can deal with such issues, which impact on local communities?

Karen Bradley: I am not sure that I need to speak directly to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, as she heard what the right hon. Gentleman said. It is important to point out that the proportion of police on the frontline has gone up and it is incredibly important that we work with communities to ensure that we root out these crimes.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that ISIL has sought to justify its attack on the Bataclan theatre by saying that it was an attack on promiscuous youth and the perversion of French homosexuals? Does she agree that that is the worst of all hate crimes and would be condemned by all decent people?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend sums it up perfectly and I do not think that there is anything I can add.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Merseyside police have done fantastic work over the past decade or so in tackling hate crime. Does the Minister understand that there is real concern that the likely impact of spending cuts in the spending review could make it a lot harder for Merseyside police to maintain that brilliant work?

Karen Bradley: I commend the work of Merseyside police, and police across the country. Hate crime has been coming down, and there has been increased reporting of it, which means that more victims are prepared to come forward. That is due to the excellent work of the police and the criminal justice system, and we should all congratulate them on that.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Building on earlier comments, and noting that prevention is better than cure, may I ask the Government what extra measures they are taking to prevent hate crime, rather than tackle it once it has occurred? Also, I offer a reminder: Ministers should always be temperate in their language.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman will, I am sure, be aware of the launch of the counter-extremism strategy. We have also committed to a new, cross-Government hate crime action plan to make sure that we tackle this crime at source, and prevent it.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): But it is about resources. The Merseyside police and crime commissioner has said that proposed cuts

“will affect the teams which fight serious and organised crime, investigate rape and sexual violence and tackle hate crime.”

The chief constable of that service asks if he should take resources out of teams dealing with child abuse, gun crime, hate crime, or online fraud. What is the Minister's answer?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady, who was a member of a Government who saw increases in crime, should congratulate this Government on reductions in crime, and on the fact that hate crime is going down. That is down to the excellent work of our police, and we should commend them for that.

Syrian Refugees

4. **Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** What progress her Department has made on the resettlement of Syrian refugees. [902150]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out on 19 October, our intention is to welcome 1,000 Syrian refugees before Christmas. The Government are working closely with others to put in place the plans and structures to deliver this. Details of numbers will be published in the regular quarterly immigration statistics.

Jeff Smith: My city of Manchester is very willing to take its fair and equitable share of refugees, but has not had a fair share of local government funding cuts in recent years. In the light of that, will the Home Secretary commit to funding the resettlement scheme fully, and extend local authority funding to support refugees beyond one year to a minimum of three years?

Mrs May: The costs for the first year of resettlement will be met in full; that is possible under the official development assistance budget. The Treasury is looking at what funding will be made available for subsequent years.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): On behalf of my constituents, may I associate myself with my right hon. Friend's remarks concerning events in Paris at the weekend? Our sympathies are with those who suffered. We want to see the Prime Minister's objectives met. The events of the weekend have verified that he is right to seek refugees who have UN approval, but, given those events, will the Home Secretary go further and make sure that the credentials of every refugee coming to this country are double-checked?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. We want to ensure that we can put into action our undertaking to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees over this Parliament. As he implies, we take them directly from

camps, so that we are able to take the most vulnerable, but we also ensure that there are proper security checks. In fact, at the moment, there are two levels of security checks: the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees undertakes security checks that involve biometrics, the checking of documents and interviews; and further checks, including further biometrics, are undertaken by the Home Office once people have been referred to it for resettlement in the UK.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary will know that many of the Syrian refugees whom Britain expects to help over the coming months are fleeing exactly the same terrible ISIS brutality that we saw on the streets of Paris this weekend. Does she agree with me that, as we stand in solidarity with Paris, it is important that we both strengthen our security against such barbarism and continue to give sanctuary to those fleeing it, so that we ensure that the terrorists cannot win?

Mrs May: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right: many of those refugees will be fleeing ISIS. Of course, some will be fleeing the actions of the Syrian Government. It is important that we provide sanctuary to those who have been displaced by conflict in Syria, partly by resettling a number of refugees here in the United Kingdom. As the right hon. Lady will know, we are also the second biggest bilateral donor to the region of funds to support refugees; a very important contribution of £1.1 billion is made by the UK taxpayer.

21. [902168] **John Howell (Henley) (Con):** What steps the Government is taking to tackle people smugglers in the Mediterranean. Prior to resettlement, a mechanism needs to be established through which refugees can claim asylum. What is the impact of this on the overall progress towards resettlement?

Mrs May: Refugees who are resettled under the scheme for resettling Syrian refugees are provided with five years of humanitarian protection. Of course, there are also individuals who will come here and claim asylum and who will be dealt with under the normal asylum processes, but those who are resettled under the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme are given five years' humanitarian protection here in the UK.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): On behalf of representatives from Northern Ireland, may I associate myself with the comments of the Home Secretary and commend her for the stance she took during the weekend? Had someone suggested a week ago that the refugee crisis was being abused by terrorists, they could have been set aside as a heartless xenophobe. I fear that the public will not be as resistant to that message as they would have been a week ago. How do we ensure that the compassion of this country is kept to the fore, while recognising that there will always be a few who abuse our good will?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. The British people showed huge compassion and there was an outpouring of offers of help for those who would be resettled from Syria. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Refugees is looking at how we can ensure that those offers of help can be turned

into practical assistance. That generosity of spirit will, I am sure, continue. There has been quite a lot of speculation in the press about the potential abuse of the route for refugees to come into Europe. It is important not to make judgments until the full facts are known.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Many local authorities, including my own, wish to resettle some of the Syrian refugees who may come into the country. If the refugees are dispersed around the country, some families will inevitably lose contact with loved ones and will wish to get in touch. Will a database be available to them as a means of communication?

Mrs May: Obviously, records of where the Syrian refugees are resettled will be maintained. If I understand my hon. Friend's question, it was about Syrian refugees who may wish to access information about others who may have come to the country. As she will have noticed, the Minister is here and will have heard that, and he will consider the point she has made.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, may I associate myself with the comments of the Home Secretary in relation to the terrible events in Paris on Friday night? With the first 100 Syrian refugees due to arrive in Scotland for resettlement this week, does the Home Secretary agree that it is imperative to make it clear to the public that these refugees are fleeing the same evil forces as were behind the attacks in Paris? Will she work with the Scottish Government and local authorities throughout the country to make sure that communities are supported to understand that and to make the vulnerable refugees feel as welcome as possible?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her remarks. It is one of the reasons why I was very clear yesterday when I did a television interview and set out the security arrangements that we have in place in relation to refugees, so that people can set aside concerns and understand that there are proper security arrangements. These individuals have been fleeing evil of various sorts, including the very evil that led to the attacks in Paris on Friday, and we wish them to be welcomed and to be able to reach sanctuary here and get the assistance that they need for their particular concerns, medical or otherwise. So it is right that the whole House should send out a message that we welcome and open our arms to those who have fled for their lives from the terrible evil of what is taking place in Syria.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Like colleagues across the House, I have received many generous offers of support from my constituents for refugees fleeing unimaginable violence in Syria. Will the Home Secretary join me in thanking Dartington Hall in my constituency, which is offering not only to house refugees, but to provide them with valuable support? Will she assure me that everything is being done to make sure that such clear and credible offers of support are generously followed up?

Mrs May: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in welcoming the offer that has been made by Dartington Hall in respect not just of accommodation, but of support for refugees. That has been mirrored by organisations around the country. It is right that the Under-Secretary

of State for Refugees has been working with charities, faith groups and other organisations to make sure not only that all the offers of help are listed and looked at, but that we can turn them into practical help for Syrian refugees, depending on what support is appropriate in the circumstances of the refugees that come to any particular region, such as my hon. Friend's constituency.

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. and learned Lady is welcome to have a second bite of the cherry, on the assumption that the bite is small.

Joanna Cherry: I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. We are all aware that the Syrian refugees who are coming to the United Kingdom are particularly vulnerable individuals. They will need time and privacy to settle and integrate into the communities that they go to. Will the Home Secretary tell us what work the Home Office is doing to support local communities to give the refugees the time and privacy to integrate?

Mrs May: I am happy to tell the hon. and learned Lady that a considerable amount of work is being done by the Home Office, primarily with the local authorities that are receiving the Syrian refugees, to discuss the sort of support that is available to them. That links in to the last question I answered from my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston): it will often be possible for charities and other organisations to provide support and help for refugees in settling into life in whichever part of the United Kingdom they come to.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I, too, join the Home Secretary in the comments she made at the beginning of Question Time? In the light of the terrible events in Paris this weekend, which we in this House are united in condemning, it is vital that the first refugees to arrive in the UK from Syria are properly supported and welcomed. As the Prime Minister has said, those who will be brought here are among the most vulnerable men, women and children in the refugee camps. What steps have been taken to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to provide not only the necessary accommodation, but the care and support that will be needed? What messages are planned to ensure that they are welcomed when they arrive here?

Mrs May: The considerable amount of work that the Under-Secretary of State for Refugees has been doing with teams from the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for International Development is about ensuring that those refugees who are referred to the UK and accepted for resettlement here are given the right package of support. It is not simply a case of allocation; there is careful consideration of what is available in any particular local authority in terms of accommodation or to meet the medical needs that individuals have. A considerable amount of work goes into ensuring that people are given the right support when they come to whichever area they come to. It is also important to recognise that individuals and families should be given a degree of privacy. They are making a huge move in coming to the UK, so it is right to give them not just the right support, but the time and space to settle into the UK.

Violent Crime

7. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What steps she plans to take to reduce the level of violent crime. [902153]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): According to the crime survey for England and Wales, violent crime is 27% lower than in June 2010. We are taking effective action, including our ongoing action to tackle gang and youth violence, and our work to end violence against women and girls.

Angela Crawley: The Minister will be aware that the violence reduction unit in Scotland has taken an innovative approach to tackling violence by working with dentists, hairdressers, vets and others to identify domestic abuse. It has also successfully carried out work among gangs on promoting positive alternatives. What lessons can her Department learn from the success of Scotland's violence reduction unit in its first 10 years of existence to reduce the level of crime?

Karen Bradley: We of course look at what is happening across the whole United Kingdom and work with the devolved authorities and others to ensure that we are using the very best practice.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): The weekend before last, three young men were murdered in three separate incidents in north-west London alone, demonstrating that gang and serious youth violence remains a genuinely serious problem on the streets of London, as it is elsewhere. Next spring, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime funding for the gangs project is due to end. Will the Minister speak with the Mayor of London to ensure that that necessary funding to tackle the threat of gangs continues after next May?

Karen Bradley: It is clearly important that we tackle gang violence and look at the exploitation within gang culture, which sees very vulnerable young people exploited and forced into gangs. I will of course be working with all to ensure that there is appropriate support for combating that.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): The British crime survey shows an 87% rise in the reporting of rapes between October 2012 and March 2015. Sexual violence investigations need specialist expertise and supervision to ensure that cases are handled correctly and prosecutions are brought. What assurances can the Minister give that the proposed police cuts will not impact on the training and supervision of officers working on sexual violence cases?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady, who has significant experience and expertise in this area, will know that the increased recording of violence against women and girls is good news, because it means that more victims are prepared to come forward. I am very impressed by the work that I have seen police forces doing across the country to ensure that victims come forward and receive the right specialist and multi-agency support that they need.

Investigatory Powers: Police/Security Services

8. **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that investigatory powers used by the police and the security services are defined in a legal framework. [902154]

10. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps she has taken to ensure that the powers proposed for the police in the draft Investigatory Powers Bill are transparent and subject to oversight. [902156]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Government have been clear about the need to provide law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies with the powers they need to protect the public in a clear and transparent legal framework. The draft Investigatory Powers Bill was published on 4 November and will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses.

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer, particularly in the light of the terrible events in Paris, which continue to unfold. Can she confirm that the new investigatory powers commissioner will have greater resource and technical expertise than is currently available in the rather fragmented arrangements?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I can confirm that the new investigatory powers commissioner will have the necessary resources, and they will have increased resources, including technical expertise, within their remit to ensure that they have that support and advice. Indeed, their budget will be such that it will also be possible for them to buy further technical expertise, should they need it.

Huw Merriman: Some constituents have asked me to write to the Home Secretary and state that intercept warrants should be granted by a judge, rather than by the Home Secretary. Does she agree with me that, on the contrary, the accountability for and the scrutiny of her decisions in this place are more transparent than a judicial judgment?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. What we have proposed in the draft Bill is a double lock, so there will be the necessary accountability—because the decision is made by the Secretary of State—on whether the use of these intrusive powers under warrant is necessary or proportionate, and then there will be consideration by a judicial authority. We will therefore get that independent consideration by the judicial authority and the accountability of a Secretary of State signing the warrant.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The dreadful events in Paris make it even more important that the draft Investigatory Powers Bill is subject to full and proper scrutiny by the Joint Committee to ensure that it provides both maximum security for our citizens and the toughest protection of our civil liberties. Can the Home Secretary confirm that it will get that full and proper scrutiny and that it will not be fast-tracked?

Mrs May: As the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, we consider all counter-terrorism legislation carefully and review the necessary timetables, but this is a significant Bill and I think that it is important that it receives

proper scrutiny. As he has said, we have put in place important safeguards and enhanced oversight for the Bill, and greater transparency in the powers that the security and intelligence agencies and the police and law enforcement agencies have available to them. It is right that it gets proper scrutiny.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): A combination of technological evolution and a lack of transparency meant that we ended up in a position where the British people had no idea of the way in which legitimate investigatory powers were being used. Given the ongoing fast evolution of technology applications, what steps is the Home Secretary taking to make sure that we do not end up in that position again? There is no reference to future applications in the Investigatory Powers Bill.

Mrs May: One of the aims of the Bill is to be more transparent so that people can clearly see the powers that are available to the authorities. There is a balance to be struck by drawing the Bill up in such a way that we do not have to keep returning to new legislation as technology advances, and, on the other hand, not drawing it so widely that we do not have the necessary transparency and there is not foreseeability in terms of the use of powers. I think we have that balance right, but of course the scrutiny process will look at it.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): GCHQ and our other security agencies have, unfortunately, all too much to do without delving into the personal communications of innocent citizens, but will the Home Secretary reassure the House that any abuse that occurred of such intrusive powers would, under the new legislation, constitute a criminal offence?

Mrs May: Yes, I am happy to give my right hon. Friend the reassurance that he requires in relation to including within the Bill offences that would apply were abuse to take place in the use of the powers. He is absolutely right in saying that of course the security and intelligence agencies do not have the time, the effort or indeed the intention or desire to look into the communications of everybody in this country; they are focusing very clearly on those who are suspected of wanting to do us harm.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): As we have heard, the whole House is united in sending its sympathy and solidarity to the people of France following the terrible events on Friday. These callous attacks confirm the ability of ISIL to hit at the heart of Europe and place an obligation on us all to redouble our efforts to protect the safety of our country and that of our neighbours. We welcome the Government's response to the weekend's events and reaffirm today our commitment to work constructively with them, including on modernising legislation with regard to the powers of the police and security services. But of course, alongside the powers, we need the people to put them into practice. Will the Home Secretary say more about the funding announced today by the Prime Minister to recruit 1,900 extra officers for the security services and whether that funding is additional to the counter-terrorism budget?

Mrs May: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks about the attacks that took place in Paris. It has been clear from statements made by a number of

Members of this House that there is a very clear message from this House of our utter condemnation of the brutality of those attacks.

In relation to the announcement, I was going to refer to that in the statement that I will be making later on. It is right that earlier this year the Chancellor made it absolutely clear that he was looking at the whole question of the funding that was available for security, particularly that for counter-terrorism. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the funding for the security and intelligence agencies is a matter that is dealt with separately from other Departments' funding, and it has been, and will be, possible to provide the funding for these extra 1,900 officers.

Andy Burnham: I thank the Home Secretary for what she has said and appreciate that she will say more shortly. Let me also say that the united message coming from this House today is that ISIL will not prevail in this attack on our values. We welcome the action that the Government are taking in respect of the security services, but I am sure she will agree that the threat we face cannot be tackled by counter-terrorism operations alone—it also depends on the capability of the police to respond to an emergency and, as Sir Ian Blair said this morning, on effective neighbourhood policing to provide early intelligence. She will be aware of concerns within the police about the forthcoming spending review. In the light of the events in Paris, are the Government looking again at the requirements of the police and revisiting their assumptions on the police budget going forward?

Mrs May: As the right hon. Gentleman would expect, and as I have made clear over the past couple of days, following the events that took place in Mumbai in 2008 we enhanced and broadened the capabilities of the police to deal with the sort of marauding firearms attack that we saw there. We are looking at the attacks that took place in Paris on Friday to see whether there are any further lessons that need to be learned. It is absolutely right that we review the preparations that we have in place to see whether any changes are needed in relation to the capabilities of the police, or indeed the training of the police. The right hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues tend to think simply in terms of questions of money and numbers, but very often it is about training and preparation for the sorts of attacks that might take place.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As Members know, it is my usual practice to run exchanges on important ministerial statements very fully, and therefore I simply signal to those who have not been able to catch my eye at this time, on account of constraints of time, that if they are here at 3.30 there will be a very full opportunity to explore these matters at that point.

Frontline Policing

9. Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): What recent discussions her Department has had with police and crime commissioners on the future of frontline policing. [902155]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I made a statement to this House last Monday, and since then, as Members can imagine, I have had lots of good working relationships with police and crime commissioners. Frontline policing is a matter for frontline police, chief constables and their PCCs; it is not a matter for Ministers to interfere with.

Ruth Smeeth: I thank the Minister for that answer, but the issue of frontline policing relates to the budget awarded to each police and crime commissioner. Staffordshire has already lost 447 warranted police officers since 2010 and we are looking at losing a further 300 under the current funding settlement. Given the importance of policing to the Prevent agenda—it provides a vital resource for Prevent—can you assure me that you will work with police and crime commissioners to review the budget?

Mike Penning: I am not sure that Mr Speaker is going to be reviewing the budget, but I certainly will be looking very carefully at the budget. The number of frontline police officers in the hon. Lady's constituency is up in percentage terms compared with what was there before, and crime is massively down. No one knows what the budget will be, because I have not announced it yet.

20 [902167]. **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): Technology is increasingly playing an important role in tackling crime. Given the encouraging results from body-worn video cameras, what steps is my right hon. Friend taking, and what plans does he have, to work with police and crime commissioners to enable more frontline police officers to benefit from this technological advance?

Mike Penning: A lot of new technology is coming into force, along with different crimes—we have a completely different crime pattern these days from what we have inherited over the years. Body-worn video cameras in particular are transforming frontline policing. They are a wonderful asset. If police and crime commissioners and their chief constables are not looking at them now, I fully expect most of them to do so in the very near future.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I am confused. If the Minister's decision to suspend the imposition of unprecedented cuts on Cumbria's police force because he wants them to be £5 million greater is not interfering with frontline policing, I am not sure what is. Will he at least reassure my worried constituents and those across the county that he will not go ahead with the £31 million of cuts, which he somehow managed to forget to announce when he said the figure would be £26 million?

Mike Penning: I stood at this Dispatch Box last week and announced that we would stick with the existing funding formula for 2016-17. I did not forget anything—I announced it and was questioned very fully. Crime has fallen in Cumbria, which the whole House will welcome.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): What particular discussions does the Minister plan to have with the police and crime commissioner for Devon and Cornwall about the future funding formula for policing, given that the majority of demand on police time now comes from non-crime activities and the current formula is based purely on crime?

Mike Penning: The police and crime commissioner for Devon and Cornwall found a mistake we had not noticed in the funding matrix and I fully apologised for that in the House last week. I will work very closely with the PCC for Devon and Cornwall, not only on the new policing formula, but on the nature of crime, which is changing around this country on a daily basis.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I strongly agree with the statement made by the Home Secretary earlier in solidarity with the French people, the victims of barbarism—a barbarism that will never be allowed to triumph.

Neighbourhood policing is the bedrock of policing yet, despite promises to the contrary, 12,000 police have gone from the frontline in the past five years. From Cornwall to Cumbria, police and crime commissioners of all parties are expressing concern. Does the police Minister agree with the Conservative PCC for Thames Valley, where the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister live? He says that the cuts have "gone too far", run the risk of reversing a generation of progress on crime and will endanger investment such as that for combating child sexual exploitation. Is he right?

Mike Penning: What the police and crime commissioner of Thames Valley should be congratulated on is cutting crime by 31% in the past five years, with a very difficult spending round. As we develop the new funding formula, I am sure there will be lots of conversations across the House about how the process should be taken forward. There will be winners and losers, but at present it is suspended. I congratulate Thames Valley on the work it has been doing.

Cybercrime

11. **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the ability of each police force to tackle cybercrime. [902157]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): Cybercrime is a threat that the Government take very seriously. In the last Parliament, the Government committed £860 million to the national cyber-security programme, and we will continue to invest in that programme.

Steve McCabe: It is estimated that cybercrime is costing the UK at least £34 billion annually. If we add computer crime to October's headline crime figures, we see that they more than double to over 14 million offences. Yet the City of London police, one of the lead forces, argue that less effort should be put into solving crimes against victims whom they judge not to have taken sufficient precautions. Does the Minister share my concern that this amounts to a charter for criminals?

Mike Penning: No, I do not. I think that our personal security is a very important thing. We also have responsibilities as citizens to make sure that our computers in particular have the right software so that it is more difficult—not to stop it completely, but to make it more difficult—for cybercrime to take place. We are taking cybercrime very seriously, which is why we have put it in the crime statistics for the very first time.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Norwich airport in my constituency suffered a minor cyber-attack on its website last week. First, will the Minister join me in encouraging businesses to check their defences? Secondly, will he redouble his efforts to ensure that we are safe from cyber-terrorism in the light of the callous attacks, about which we are all agreed?

Mike Penning: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. As I said, we have a responsibility personally, but so do companies. We are working very closely with the banks in particular, but all companies have a responsibility to protect the data they hold, particularly individuals' personal data.

Syrian Refugees

12. **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): What timetable she has set for resettlement of Syrian refugees; and whether she plans to increase the number of such refugees that the UK will accept. [902158]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees (Richard Harrington): The Government have committed to resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees in the lifetime of this Parliament. The Prime Minister has said that we want to see 1,000 brought to the UK by Christmas. We have no plans to increase this number. It is now important that we focus on bringing these vulnerable people to the UK.

Tommy Sheppard: In refusing to assist refugees already in Europe, the Secretary of State has given great support to the creation of hotspots to fast-track registration. May I bring to the Government's attention the recent report from International Rescue? The report says that "the way hotspots are currently being rolled out is causing chaos, increasing tensions and violence, and leaving more people without basic shelter."

In the light of that, will the Government stay on the sidelines in respect of helping refugees in Europe?

Richard Harrington: The hon. Gentleman will be fully aware that our taking 20,000 refugees on the grounds of vulnerability is only a part of our efforts for refugees. The Government are spending more than £1.1 billion on helping refugees in the countries adjacent to Syria. I think he will agree that our record is second to none in that respect.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on tackling the problem at the Syrian end of the continent. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways in which the Government can tackle people smugglers and their awful business model is by breaking the link between getting on a boat or lorry in one part of the world and getting settlement in Europe?

Richard Harrington: My hon. Friend makes a very good point; I could not have put it better myself.

Topical Questions

T1. [902197] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The whole House has expressed its shock at the appalling attacks in Paris on Friday night, and earlier today people from around the world took part in a minute's silence to remember the victims. As I said earlier, I will give the full details of the Government's response to the attacks in a further statement this afternoon. While the terrorists tried to instil fear, the people of Paris have shown that they will not be cowed into submission. The same is true here in the UK as we stand shoulder to shoulder with the French.

The business of the Home Office, of keeping people in the UK safe from all threats, continues. Today the British Government are being represented at the WePROTECT summit in Abu Dhabi by the Minister for Internet Safety and Security. WePROTECT was launched by the Prime Minister a year ago as a global alliance to combat online child sexual exploitation—a terrible crime that respects no borders. The event builds on the commitments made a year ago, extending the reach of the WePROTECT initiative, with more countries from Latin America, Africa and Asia joining us to combat that threat. While we build such global alliances to tackle international threats, it is also important to remember the tireless work of the police and security services to keep us safe at home.

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to the police constable who was seriously injured responding to a call-out in east London last night. Our thoughts go out to him and his family.

Jeff Smith: May I endorse those comments?

The Home Secretary referred earlier to the double lock process in the Investigatory Powers Bill, but the wording of the Bill appears not to deliver that safeguard. Will judges review the process undertaken by the Home Secretary, in the same way as applies in a judicial review, or the evidence itself?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman raises a point that has been made by the shadow Home Secretary. I suggest that he reads the article in *The Times* a few days ago, written by Lord Pannick.

T2. [902198] **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): More than 1,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors have arrived in Kent this year, putting immense pressure on local services. Kent welcomes the Government's commitment to increased funding, but foster homes are full so we need to find homes for those young people around the country. What steps are the Department taking to create a dispersal system for unaccompanied asylum seekers?

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): I commend Kent County Council on the work it has done in dealing with the pressures of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We continue to work with Kent, the Department for Education and the Local Government Association to ensure a more equitable dispersal of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and we hope to come to the House shortly with further details on such schemes.

T6. [902202] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Despite the fact that we have the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Data Retention

and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the Government are pushing through yet another Investigatory Powers Bill. Will the Home Secretary let us know whether commercial virtual private network providers will be classed as telecommunications operators under the Bill?

Mrs May: I have to say to the hon. Lady that she needs to have a conversation with her Front-Bench spokesman on those matters, because I seem to recall that she welcomed the fact that we were pulling the various powers together in one Bill.

T3. [902199] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): On behalf of my constituents, may I express our gratitude for the work of the security and intelligence services in protecting us from the sort of evil attacks that we have seen in Paris this weekend? Will the Minister for Security join me in publicly thanking those authorities whose work is usually done out of the public eye but is so important to our everyday lives?

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): My hon. Friend does the House a great service in drawing attention to that work. It is true that much of the work of our security services is, by its nature, secret and therefore they are not often enough given the sort of praise he has given them today. In what they do, they stand between us and chaos, and their work—alongside that of the police—is vital to our communal wellbeing and our personal safety.

T7. [902203] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): In its inadequate judgment, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary found that Humberside police are not prepared to face their future financial challenges. Can the Home Secretary guarantee that there will be no more cuts in Humberside police's funding that would further jeopardise their ability to deliver safety and security for my constituents?

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and make any guarantees, as the funding formula beyond 2016-17 has yet to be debated and the Chancellor has not made his autumn statement. I praise the work of Humberside police. They have developed some really interesting innovations and collaborative work, but obviously more needs to be done nationally as well.

T4. [902200] **James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): A marauding terrorist firearms attack of the type we saw in Paris is a scenario the security services, police forces and others have trained and exercised for over a number of years. Will the Security Minister update the House on what lessons we might be able to learn from the terrible incidents in Paris to further protect the people of Great Britain?

Mr Hayes: There is always more to be learned from such events. The threat we face is dynamic, not static. France is one of our closest allies and we are working closely with it. The UK has a comprehensive approach to preparing for such tragic incidents, as demonstrated by the firearms exercise Strong Tower. As soon as the attacks happened, the police and agencies took steps to maintain the security of the UK. Prepared, fearless and certain: that is how we stand.

Mr Speaker: How fortunate that the Minister of State has contributed! I should have been greatly saddened, and the House not inconsiderably impoverished, if a Home Office questions had passed without an intervention from the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): Is the Home Secretary confident, given the limited budget, that the security services have the resources they need to keep us safe?

Mr Hayes: It is critically important that they have the resources, but they also need the right powers. That is precisely why we are bringing together those powers—they have been mentioned several times during this question session—in a clear, transparent and comprehensive way. This is a balance between giving those who are missioned to keep us safe what they need to do the job, and having the right checks and balances in place to maintain the role of this House in holding Ministers to account for the exercise of those functions.

T5. [902201] **Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): One of the more irritating crimes is antisocial behaviour. Will the Government send a very positive message to the police community support officers who do so much to deal with this problem?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): It is incredibly important that the police tackle antisocial behaviour. It makes a difference to so many of our constituents and is an issue that comes up in our postbags.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary accept the word of the police and crime commissioner for Merseyside, Jane Kennedy, when she says that proposed budget cuts will affect the ability of the police to deal with serious and organised crime, sexual crimes and hate crimes? Does she not think that the police and crime commissioner is in a better position to know this than she is? If not, why did she create the position in the first place?

Mike Penning: We created police and crime commissioners because they are locally accountable, which is exactly what happened in the May elections. PCCs were opposed by the Labour party. There are excellent police and crime commissioners out there, but at the end of the day the Government have to decide police funding. We have not come to a conclusion yet. The House will have to wait.

T8. [902204] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Following a recent stabbing in Basildon, there is increased concern about the devastating effect of knife crime. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what more she can do to deter young people from carrying knives? Will she give her support to organisations such as Only Cowards Carry, which works with schools and other local organisations to highlight this issue?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. Overall, knife crime has fallen since 2010, but I am aware that there have been particular instances, including in my hon. Friend's constituency, that give rise concern.

We are working hard to deter young people from carrying knives and taking such steps as introducing a new minimum custodial sentence for repeat knife possession. I am aware of the group Only Cowards Carry and I absolutely commend its work. It is very important that it brings to the attention of young people the dangers of carrying knives and what can happen when knives are used in attacks. Sometimes being very graphic can get a message across to young people. It is difficult, but it is an important message.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): About a fortnight ago, with the competence for which it is renowned, G4S placed dozens of asylum seekers in two unsuitable hotels in my constituency, with no prior liaison with the council. Will the Minister assure me that in future, not only in Wolverhampton but around the country, there will be liaison by agencies such as G4S before asylum seekers are placed?

James Brokenshire: I will certainly look into the facts the hon. Gentleman has brought to the House's attention. Sadly, when there are pressures, asylum seekers sometimes have to be placed in temporary accommodation, such as hotels, but we are absolutely clear that it should be for the shortest time possible, and liaison with local authorities is clearly an important part of that.

T10. [902206] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Following the pause in developing a new funding formula, will my right hon. Friend assure me that the Department will work with PCCs and chief constables to find a formula that works for my constituents in Avon and Somerset?

Mike Penning: It is important that chief constables and PCCs buy into the new formula, which they asked for when they said the existing formula, which had been around for a very long time, was opaque and complicated. So of course we will work with chief constables and PCCs from around the country. They welcomed that in respect of the initial funding formula, and I am sure they will do the same now.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): With the massive cuts to police forces, my local police force, Humberside, is now judged to be inadequate by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and has the lowest level of officers since 1979. On that basis, my constituents would like to know this: how it is that the Home Office can fund 42 press officers but not police officers on the beat?

Mike Penning: I answered that question, up to the last part, earlier on. Humberside has done really well over the last five years—the level of crime is falling massively—but we will all have to wait for the autumn statement, although I have acknowledged that the existing formula will be used through to 2016-17, which was welcomed in the House last Monday when we paused the process.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): According to statistics released over the summer, many areas of Rochester and Strood, in common with many urban

areas, continue to see incidents of serious crime, which is a major concern to my constituents. Will my right hon. Friend assure them that police forces such as Kent will still be able to field effective front-line services under revised funding formulas?

Mike Penning: Kent has been at the front line of innovation, in particular through the piloting of things such as body-worn cameras. It is doing remarkably well, but we must ensure a fair and transparent funding formula that everyone can understand. That way we can move forward.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): In his statement the other week, the police Minister kindly agreed to reconsider police funding for Cardiff, given how other capital cities across the UK are funded. Given the tragic events in Paris and the particular challenges faced by cities hosting major sporting and cultural events, will he meet me to discuss how to ensure the resources are there for cities such as Cardiff?

Mike Penning: I remember last Monday very well. I promised I would consider carefully how Cardiff was funded, and we will do so as part of the funding formula as we go beyond the 2016-17 formula.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Large sums of money have been spent on PCC by-elections since their introduction in 2012. Have any discussions taken place about changing the law to require deputies to be elected alongside commissioners and remove the need for a by-election, and to divert that money to front-line policing?

Mrs May: Obviously, the legislation on PCCs caters for situations where a PCC is removed from office or resigns close to an election. These individuals are elected to be directly accountable, and it is right that when there is a vacancy, a by-election is held.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against all travel to Yemen and says that anyone in Yemen should leave immediately. Why, then, does the Home Office think it appropriate to deport my constituent there?

James Brokenshire: We keep our country guidance up to date, and it is reviewed in the light of circumstances, but, ultimately, decisions on whether people should be removed to particular countries are determined by the courts.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is now quite clear that the hundreds of thousands of migrants who have entered Europe over the last few months have not undergone basic security checks. Is now the right time for the EU to reconsider the principles of free movement of people and labour?

James Brokenshire: It is clear that significant lessons need to be applied and examined. We are clear, from our perspective, about the checks we put in place at our borders, and in the light of the weekend's events, Border Force has strengthened its activities at the channel ports, which is the right thing to do.

Paris Terrorist Attacks

3.34 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the terrorist attacks in Paris, our response and the threat we face from terrorism in the United Kingdom.

The full details of last Friday's horrific attack in Paris are still emerging, but at least 129 innocent people, including at least one British national, have been killed, with more than 352 injured and 99 of those declared critical. As the names of those brutally murdered become known and we learn more about the appalling events of that night, our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have lost loved ones, suffered injuries or are affected by these horrific events. These were co-ordinated attacks, designed to inflict the maximum number of casualties on people who were simply enjoying their daily lives—our way of life. Those killed and injured include people from many countries across Europe and other countries around the world.

The international investigation into the attacks is ongoing, but we know that Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant has claimed responsibility. This is not the first time ISIL has struck in Europe. We have seen attacks either inspired or directed by the group in France, Belgium and Denmark, as well as attacks in Lebanon, Turkey and Kuwait, and the ongoing devastating violence in Syria and Iraq. And in June, 30 British nationals along with others were killed by a gunman at a tourist resort in Tunisia. It also looks increasingly likely that the Russian Metrojet plane that crashed two weeks ago in Egypt was brought down by a bomb. The scale of this latest attack and the degree of co-ordination and planning leave us with little doubt that the threat is evolving.

In the UK, the threat level, set by the independent Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, remains at "severe", meaning that an attack is highly likely and could occur without warning. In the past months, a number of serious plots have been disrupted here in the UK. Over 750 people are thought to have travelled to Syria and Iraq, and approximately half of those have returned.

Our law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies are working constantly day and night to keep the people of this country safe and secure, and the Government are taking all necessary steps to make sure they have the powers, the capabilities and resources they need. As soon as the attacks took place, we took steps to maintain the security of the UK. The police have increased their presence on some streets and at some locations, and they will be intensifying their approach at events in big cities. Officers are working closely with London's communities and businesses to provide advice and reassurance.

Border Force has intensified checks on people, goods and vehicles entering the UK from the near continent and elsewhere. Additionally, in order to help the French authorities secure their own border, Border Force and the police have been undertaking additional and targeted security checks against passengers and vehicles travelling to France via both maritime and rail ports and a number of airports across the country.

Yesterday I chaired a meeting of Cobra to review the situation and our response. As I said in a statement afterwards, UK police and security services are working extremely closely with their French and Belgian counterparts to identify all those involved and pursue anyone who may have been involved in the preparation of these barbaric attacks. Members will be aware that a number of arrests have been made in Belgium and France in the last 24 hours.

As I informed the House following the events in Paris in January, we have long had detailed plans for dealing with these kind of attacks in the UK. Since the attacks in Mumbai in 2008, we have improved our police firearms response, building the capability of our police and the speed of our military response. The emergency services have also improved their preparedness for dealing specifically with marauding gun attacks. Specialist joint police, ambulance and fire teams are now in place at important locations across England, with equivalents in Scotland and Wales. This summer, the police and the emergency services tested this response as part of a major counter-terrorism exercise. As I have told the House previously, the police can call on appropriate military assistance when required across the country.

Nevertheless, in the light of events in France, it is right that we should review our response to firearms attacks, and we are doing so urgently to ensure that any lessons are learned. The UK has some of the toughest firearms laws in the world. The sort of weaponry used in the attacks in Paris in January, and those that appear to have been used last Friday, are not readily available in the UK. We must therefore focus on tackling firearms entering and moving throughout the EU, and ensuring that we have the right capabilities at the UK border to detect firearms being smuggled in.

This Friday I will attend an extraordinary meeting of the European Justice and Home Affairs Council, where I will press the need for greater information-sharing, passenger name records, and action on firearms. In the United Kingdom we have seen tough legislation work, so we want to see action taken to make a difference to the availability of firearms in Europe, particularly assault rifles.

It is imperative that Europe pulls together to defeat this threat. France is one of our oldest allies, and we work very closely with it on matters of national security and counter-terrorism. Yesterday I spoke to my counterpart Bernard Cazeneuve, the French Minister of the Interior, to offer our deepest condolences to France, and to make it clear that the United Kingdom stands ready to provide any additional support and assistance. I am very grateful to Minister Cazeneuve and to the French for maintaining a police presence at Calais during a very difficult time. I have also spoken to the Belgian Interior Minister, Jan Jambon, to offer our assistance. Today, as the House will know, the Prime Minister is at the G20 in Turkey, where he is discussing the crisis in Syria urgently with other Heads of State. He will make a statement to the House tomorrow.

Since 2010, the Government have undertaken significant work to strengthen our response to the threat that we face from terrorism. In 2014, we passed legislation to ensure that law enforcement and the security and intelligence agencies could continue to access the information that they needed. Although that legislation will not expire until the end of 2016, last week we published a draft Investigatory Powers Bill. The Bill will improve the

[Mrs Theresa May]

oversight and safeguards of the police and agencies' use of investigatory powers, while also ensuring that they have the tools that they need to keep us safe. Following any terrorist attack, we always consider the legal powers that we have to keep our country secure, but it is important that this landmark legislation undergoes proper parliamentary scrutiny.

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 includes measures to deal specifically with the problem of foreign fighters, and to prevent radicalisation. It includes a power to seize, temporarily, the passports of people suspected of travelling to engage in terrorism overseas, extends our ability to refuse airlines authority to carry people who pose a risk to the UK, and introduces a statutory Prevent duty for a wide range of public bodies. Through our existing Prevent and intervention programmes, we identify people at risk and work to help them to turn their lives around. Our Channel process, in particular, engages vulnerable people in conversations to prevent them from being drawn further into extremism or violent acts.

The police and the security and intelligence agencies do an incredible job to keep the people of this country safe. Their work often goes unseen and unrecognised, but we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude. We have protected the counter-terrorism policing budget since 2010, and earlier this year, in his Budget speech, my right hon Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed that counter-terrorism spending across Government would be protected over the course of the spending review. Today we have announced that we will go further. Through the strategic defence and security review, we will make new funding available to the security and intelligence agencies to provide for an additional 1,900 officers—an increase of 15%—at MI5, MI6 and GCHQ, in order to respond better to the threat that we face from international terrorism, cyber-attacks, and other global risks.

We will also boost aviation security. The Prime Minister has ordered a rapid review of security at a number of airports around the world, and aviation specialists will conduct assessments over the next two months at locations in the middle east and north Africa in particular. That follows additional measures that the UK and the United States have introduced at a number of potentially vulnerable airports over the past year. Those steps will be reviewed to establish whether they go far enough. Tomorrow, at the National Security Council, we will discuss the Government's policy on aviation security, and we will present a proposal to more than double Government spending on aviation security over the current Parliament.

The events in Paris have shocked and appalled people around the world. In France, people have queued up to donate blood, lit candles, and laid flowers. In Britain, Australia, America, Mexico, Canada, Brazil and many other countries, iconic landmarks and buildings have been lit in the colours of the French tricolour. People of all faiths have condemned the violence, and British Muslims—indeed, Muslims worldwide—have said very clearly that these events are abhorrent. The attacks have nothing to do with Islam, which is followed peacefully by millions of people throughout the world. The terrorists seek to divide us and destroy our way of life, but theirs is an empty, perverted and murderous ideology. They represent

no one, and they will fail. France grieves, but she does not grieve alone. People of all faiths, all nationalities, and all backgrounds around the world are with her, and together we will defeat them.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the shadow Home Secretary, the House will wish to know that on behalf of the House of Commons I will be conveying our heartfelt sympathies to my colleague Claude Bartolone, the President of the Assemblée Nationale. Our thoughts today are with our colleagues in Paris.

3.44 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I strongly welcome the Home Secretary's statement and many of the steps she has just announced? As we have come to expect, she has acted quickly and with clarity, and she will have our support in taking the action needed to protect the public here and across Europe.

Our thoughts today are primarily with the friends, the families and the loved ones of those killed or injured in Paris. These horrific attacks on innocent people—as the Home Secretary said, many were young people, enjoying a night out—were an attack not just on France but on the way of life we all share, on our freedoms, our multicultural societies and our shared values. Those responsible want to intimidate us; we will not let them succeed. We stand in solidarity with the people of Paris and all the citizens of France.

The Home Secretary was right to praise the British intelligence and security services who work so tirelessly to keep us safe. Much of what they do goes unseen and unreported, but, as we know, they have foiled many attacks here in recent times. They deserve our support and our gratitude.

Two things are apparent from recent events. First, ISIL has now demonstrated that it has the capacity to hit mainland Europe and cause widespread casualties. Secondly, this is evidence of an escalation of intent, as alongside the Paris attacks we have seen the downing of the Russian airliner and the bombings in Beirut, and victims of both of those atrocities should be in our thoughts at this time. This requires the international community to formulate an urgent and effective response.

Let me start with the circumstances of the attack. What this atrocity reveals is how an attack on one member state can be planned and co-ordinated in another, and by individuals who may not be known to the domestic security services of the state where the attack took place. What arrangements are already in place for co-operation between security services across Europe? Can those arrangements be strengthened in the light of what has happened, and is there greater assistance that can be provided across Europe between security services?

Let me turn to border security. The Schengen agreement is of course primarily a matter for the countries who are participants in it, but it does impact on our own border security. While any changes remain a matter for the participants, do the Government have a view on the way Schengen is operating, and are they making representations to those member states? Can the Home Secretary say more about what she thinks the impact of the Schengen agreement is on UK borders?

Concerns have been raised in recent days about people travelling across Europe in cars in the light of these attacks, and that becomes particularly relevant in respect of the measures at the Channel tunnel. The Home Secretary said security there will be strengthened. Can she assure the House that lorries and cars coming through the Channel tunnel will be subject to the same security checks as passengers travelling through airports and using Eurostar? Is she confident that proper arrangements are in place at all regional airports? We welcome what she said about improving airport security, but are regional airports in a strong enough position to deal with the challenges they face?

Let me turn to refugee policy. It is of course essential to remember that many of the people fleeing are fleeing the horrors of ISIL themselves. It is possible of course that one of the attackers in Paris came through the refugee route, and the idea cannot be dismissed that this might have been an attempt to undermine public confidence in Europe in welcoming genuine refugees to our country. The fact that Europe is prepared to welcome people is a wonderful validation of our values, and we must not be deflected from that, but the policy raises certain issues. First, will the Home Secretary tell us what can be done to strengthen the processing and documentation of refugees as they arrive in Europe, so that an up-to-date database can be maintained? Secondly, would it be helpful if that information were to be shared quickly across the security services of Europe, so that individuals who might pose a risk can be identified?

In regard to the high-profile events that are coming up, particularly the football match between England and France this week, can the right hon. Lady reassure the public that the necessary security measures will be in place to ensure that those events can take place safely? She mentioned the Muslim community, and she was absolutely right to say that ISIL's evil ideology is not a true reflection of Islam; indeed, it is a perversion of it. However, the Muslim community in this country will be feeling an extra sense of nervousness right now. What more can she say to reassure law-abiding members of the Muslim community that they will have our full support in dealing with this threat?

Finally, let me turn to the powers and the funding of the intelligence and security services and the police. Given the Prime Minister's comments earlier today, does the Home Secretary anticipate a need for the Investigatory Powers Bill to be expedited? We welcome her announcement of money for counter-terrorism, but I urge her not to view counter-terrorism in isolation from the general policing budget. She will know that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, said last week that cuts above 10% to the police budget would hamper his ability to fight terrorism on the streets of London. Today, Ian Blair has said that the loss of police community support officers from our streets would be a "disaster".

Responding to questions earlier, the Home Secretary said that it was not about the numbers of police but about the quality of the policing. Of course it is about the quality, but it is also about coverage on the ground. The Government have been talking about a 25% cut to the police budget. Can the right hon. Lady assure the House today that she and the Chancellor will revisit those assumptions about the police budget in the light of what has happened, to ensure that the police have the funding they need to do the job?

This is the single biggest challenge of our generation. We need to avoid a knee-jerk reaction, but we must not shy away from taking decisive action. We must act with resolve, with strength and with judgment, and we must build consensus, because the stronger we are together, the sooner we will defeat this threat. ISIL's aim is to divide our communities, to divide us politically and to divide us from our European partners, with whom we share common values. The message must go out today that we will not let ISIL prevail. Let us say clearly that it will not succeed and that we will stand as one in our communities and as a country, united with our European partners.

Mrs May: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support for the steps that the Government have taken so far, and for the clear message, which goes out from the whole House, that we condemn the attacks that took place in Paris and that the terrorists will not win. We will defeat them. I also thank him for his support for the security and intelligence agencies. As I said earlier, they are unseen and unrecognised, but they do an important job for us day after day.

The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that although we are currently focusing on the attacks in Paris, a number of terrorist attacks have been conducted in the name of ISIL around the world, and our thoughts are with all the victims. He mentioned the Muslim community in the UK, and we should never forget that the largest number of people killed by terrorists around the world are themselves Muslims. Islam is a peaceful religion that is practised peacefully by millions of people around the world, and many of them have already risen up in communities here in the UK, in France and elsewhere to say that these attacks were not perpetrated in their name. We look forward to working further with people in the Muslim communities around the United Kingdom to help those mainstream voices to be heard.

As the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), said in Home Office questions, we have asked the police to identify anti-Muslim hate crime separately so that we can see the nature and extent of it. It has been increasing in recent years, as has the number of anti-Semitic incidents.

There is already a considerable amount of co-operation between intelligence services and police across the European Union. We will be looking at what further can be done. I have offered extra assistance, in the wake of the attacks, to both my French and Belgian counterparts, but I expect that we will consider the question of co-operation and sharing of intelligence at the Justice and Home Affairs Council.

Of course what happens in Schengen is predominantly a matter for those countries that are in Schengen; we are not in Schengen, nor will we be. None the less, we have been working with countries that are in Schengen to strengthen our external borders, and to look at ensuring that the necessary processing and documenting of people coming in as migrants take place at those external borders. That is important, because, as we know, many coming through are not refugees, but illegal economic migrants, and it is doubly important to ensure that people can be returned when they have no right to be in Europe.

We are working on the hotspots at the external borders, and have also provided some capability from the UK to help debrief migrants coming through on those routes

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so that we can get a better understanding of the criminal gangs that are operating and what is happening at the borders.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the England-France football match. It is important that the match goes ahead; it is a sign and a symbol of the two countries coming together in a friendly activity. I have spoken to the police and they will ensure that appropriate security measures are in place for that match. Those are operational decisions for the police to take.

On the question of the draft Investigatory Powers Bill, it is right that, at all times, we review the timing of our legislation. That is a significant Bill and it is right that it should be given proper scrutiny in Parliament. On the issue of national security and policing, let me say this: very often people think of national security in terms of just the security and intelligence agencies, but there is also counter-terrorism policing, and policing more generally. Other areas of work include border security, which also comes under the Home Office and which is an important part of our national security. We will look at all of those issues in the round.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Events in Paris have exposed the truth about ISIS and its fellow jihadists, which is that they hate us not because of what we do, but because of what we are. They hate our history, our identity and our values. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who say that we will be left alone if we leave them alone are peddling a dangerous and deadly deception?

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. It is quite clear from those who attacked in Paris and those who have attacked elsewhere that their poisonous ideology is against the way in which the west conducts its life—the sort of lives that we lead and the sort of structures that we have in the west and elsewhere in other parts of the world. He is absolutely right that it is not the case that if we take no action, they will take no action against us. It is clear that they have evil intent and, sadly, as we saw on Friday, they have put that evil intent into practice.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I welcome the tone of the Home Secretary's statement and thank her for advance notice of it. I also wish to associate myself and my party with the comments of others about the gratitude that we all feel to those who keep us safe, whether it be the police or the intelligence services. I also wish to add the condolences of Members on these Benches to those of the rest of the House.

I reiterate the comments that Scotland's First Minister made at the weekend. Our thoughts, prayers and solidarity are with the people of Paris and France after this "unspeakably awful" and deeply shocking event. It is only right that we should review matters in the light of such events, and we should be in a position to give people the assurances that they require about their safety. However, it is important that we do not turn on each other. I welcome what the Home Secretary has already said about the Muslim community, who are a highly valued and integral part of Scottish and United Kingdom society. Will the Home Secretary assure me that she will stand alongside the Scottish Government in preventing these events from destroying or affecting that feeling of unity?

I also applaud the fact that the Home Secretary seems determined not to make a knee-jerk or ill-considered response to these atrocities and is approaching matters in her usual measured fashion. This morning, we heard the Prime Minister hint at the possibility of speeding up the passage of the draft Investigatory Powers Bill following this atrocity. I hear what the Home Secretary has said about that already, but will she confirm that there will be no curtailment of the necessary time already allocated for pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill, and will she stand by her previous assurances to this House that adequate parliamentary time will be allocated for its passage?

As regards refugees fleeing the barbaric war in Syria, will the Home Secretary confirm that the Home Office already has in place robust and thorough screening processes and that she will remain resolved to protect and give refuge to these people? Finally and briefly, she mentioned increased security at a number of airports. Will she confirm that all airports with external flights are subject to such measures?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for joining the condemnation of the attacks that took place last Friday, as she did earlier. She is right to say that we should stand united across the United Kingdom in condemnation of those attacks and that we should be united one community with another. None of us wants to see any sort of backlash against any part of the community in the United Kingdom as a result of the attacks. It is important that we give the reassurance that we are one nation, the United Kingdom, standing together against the terrible barbarity of these terrorists.

On the subject of the draft Investigatory Powers Bill, as I said in my statement, as we consider terrorism legislation, we review at every stage what is necessary as well as the timing. The Bill is significant and it is right that it should be given proper parliamentary scrutiny.

There are processes in place for the screening of refugees, and the process is twofold. The UNHCR, which refers refugees to the Home Office for resettlement here in the UK, undertakes screening that includes taking biometrics, interviews and looking at documentation. A further level of screening is undertaken by the Home Office that involves further biometrics and looking at security checks for the individuals concerned.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): This threat and its underlying ideology will have to be combated for many years, but the task will be much more difficult if the ideology continues to have territory under its control from which to project attacks on us and other countries. As the Prime Minister made clear this morning, defeating ISIL in Syria requires a transition out of the Syrian civil war. Does my right hon. Friend welcome the fact that during the talks in Vienna over the past three weeks the international community has seemed finally to be getting its collective act together?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right that we need a solution and resolution to the conflict in Syria. The transition to which he referred is important and I am pleased that talks are progressing in Vienna. I am sure that everybody in the House wants those talks to be successful and wants an end to the conflict and barbarity in Syria and being carried out by ISIL elsewhere.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement and the unity of those on the Front Benches. We are the most multicultural country

in the world and we should be proud of that, which is why engagement with communities is so important. The question of airport security concerns not just our airports. British citizens travel to north Africa and other holiday destinations, so if there is a request from those countries to supply equipment to help them, will we be willing to do that? As for the sharing of information, which country is preventing the use of passenger name recognition and how can we convince them to change their minds? When will we be ready to join the I-Checkit Interpol system?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman is obviously right that security at airports around the world from which British citizens travel is important to us. On a number of occasions, we have done exactly what he has said and either offered equipment or made equipment available to other airports around the world to help them increase their level of security. As I said in my statement, an exercise is being undertaken to look at the security arrangements at a number of airports, particularly in the middle east and north Africa. It is absolutely right that we do that to ensure that we have confidence in the level of security being provided for those travelling through those airports.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): No coherent military strategy against Daesh/ISIL in Syria can be formulated unless and until the Government face up to the unpleasant fact that they will have to co-ordinate their efforts with those of Russia. Would a useful first step be co-operation between the Russian security services and ours in this field, despite our reservations and concern about Russia's behaviour in other parts of Europe?

Mrs May: Of course, talks have been taking place in the G20 with a number of international leaders about Syria, what action needs to be taken about it, and its future governance. Obviously, I look forward to the outcome of those talks. It is important to ensure that every effort is made to bring about a resolution to the conflict in Syria, not only because of the impact that that could have on ISIL, but because of the many millions of Syrians who have been displaced from their homes as a result of the conflict.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement of solidarity with the people of Paris in the face of such terrible losses and this barbaric assault on all our values. I welcome the increase in resources and staffing for the intelligence and security agencies, which do so much work to keep us safe. I urge her to apply the same approach to core policing work, particularly around neighbourhood policing. She will know that the work that those teams do on prevention and local intelligence, which helped stop the killer of Mohammed Saleem, is immensely important. That is because this is a battle for hearts and minds, as I am sure she knows.

Mrs May: As the right hon. Lady says, this is indeed a battle for hearts and minds. As she will be aware, we have launched a counter-extremism strategy. We wish to work in partnership with mainstream voices in communities across the country to ensure that we promote the values that we share, and that we challenge the ideology that

seeks to divide us. It is important that that work is undertaken in a variety of ways. A concern that people in many communities have had about some of the Prevent work is that it has been too much in the security space, and not enough about the integration and cohesion of communities. It is absolutely right that our counter-extremism work is done in partnership with people in communities, so that we work together to promote cohesive communities and mainstream voices.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend explain why the Government have, for four months, blocked debate on the Floor of the House on the European agenda on immigration and refugee smuggling and relocation—a debate that has been demanded by the European Scrutiny Committee? Will she meet me and other MPs to review the Government's rejection on 6 January of my amendments to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill, which would have prevented UK jihadists from returning to the UK? Could we also discuss the disproportionate legal protections conferred through human rights legislation, including the charter of fundamental rights, which can and do endanger human life, and override the Supreme Court and our Parliament? The European Union, far from enhancing national security, often undermines it.

Mrs May: I understand that it should be possible, in the not-too-distant future, to debate on the Floor of the House the matters that my hon. Friend raised. Of course, in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, we took in hand a number of powers relating to those who would travel to Syria, or are returning from it. That has increased the powers available to the police, and to security and intelligence agencies.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Accommodating all interested colleagues will require great brevity, in which exercise we can, as so often, be led by Gisela Stuart.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Further to the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the Home Secretary knows better than most people in this place that successful counter-terrorism depends on information gathered through neighbourhood policing. If she cuts that extremely important link, her increase in intelligence officers will not bring about the result that she desires.

Mrs May: Of course, counter-terrorism work depends on the gathering of intelligence. That intelligence is gathered in a variety of ways. As the hon. Lady will be aware, and as we indicated in Home Office oral questions earlier, the percentage of police officers who are now involved in front-line policing has gone up over the past five years.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Nick Alexander from Colchester, who was tragically killed in the Bataclan? Will she assure this House that she will do all she can to work with the French authorities to bring the perpetrators of this heinous crime to justice?

Mrs May: I join my hon. Friend in sending our condolences to the family and friends of his constituent, Nick Alexander, who was brutally murdered in the attacks that took place in Paris on Friday night—somebody just going about his business, a business that was about providing enjoyment and fun to other people, particularly to young people; yet he was mown down. I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that we are giving every assistance that we can to the French authorities and others in Europe to ensure that we bring to justice those who were any part of the preparation of that attack.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): For 10 years I lived near Paris and spent many evenings in the area that was desecrated on Friday night. To our French friends I state: *le Royaume-Uni est en deuil avec la France et les Français et nous allons combattre le terrorisme ensemble*. I am sure the Secretary of State will join me in stressing that Europe's response to the actions of a small group of fanatical murderous terrorists must not be to pull up the drawbridge on the hundreds of thousands of genuine Syrian refugees who are fleeing terror similar to that which was inflicted on Paris on Friday.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman is right. In a number of questions this afternoon, I have responded in relation to the United Kingdom's plans to bring in a number of Syrian refugees. It is right that we continue doing that. As I have indicated, we have security-check arrangements, but there are many people who have been displaced from their homes as a result of the barbarity that has taken place in Syria and who need protection and assistance, and we stand ready to play our part, as indicated, in providing that.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I, too, welcome the meeting that took place earlier today between the Prime Minister and President Putin as a constructive contribution towards the resolution of the civil war in Syria which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, said, is at the heart of this crisis. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the events in Paris illustrate to us the need to provide our security and intelligence services with all necessary powers in order to keep us and our people safe from these depraved Islamic fundamentalists?

Mrs May: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I think the majority of the public agree with him too that our security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies should have the powers necessary to keep us safe and secure.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It will not have escaped the Home Secretary's attention that at least one of the perpetrators of these appalling attacks had previously been on the periphery of an inquiry that the French security services had been carrying out. I welcome the fact that she will be attending the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on Friday. When she raises the issue of sharing information, will she also talk about sharing information about such cases? If we cannot spot them early enough, we will not spot them before the crime is committed.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. In looking at these issues, as far as possible we wish to be able to identify people before they get to the point of conducting an attack. That ties in not only with counter-terrorism but with criminality, which is one of the reasons we are looking for an improvement in the exchange of information about criminality among the countries in the European Union.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): As I have many French relatives living in Paris, I associate myself wholly with the Home Secretary's remarks about this outrageous act. May I raise two points with her? First, she rightly made the point that in avoiding such acts in this country, we are blessed by the fact that automatic weapons and in some cases more sophisticated explosives are harder to obtain in this country. It therefore becomes particularly important that we should have adequate screening at our borders to prevent their importation. We know that we have very good intelligence, but that in itself cannot be a substitute for it. What priority will she be able to give to that point? Secondly, on her comments about Islamophobia, its existence is very widespread at present in this country and this House would be wise not to underestimate its impact on law-abiding Muslims. That is a task for all of us.

Mrs May: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right on the latter point. One reason why it is important to ask the police to record anti-Muslim hate crime separately is so that we can get a much better understanding of its extent. The Tell MAMA statistics suggest that it has been increasing in recent years. It is therefore important that we all play our part in addressing the problem and recognising the impact it has on Muslim communities.

My right hon. and learned Friend asked about firearms. I have been pressing for some time for greater action within the European Union on the movement of firearms. I expect that it will be further discussed this week. The National Crime Agency has undertaken a number of operations, together with the Border Force, to consider how it is possible for firearms to enter the United Kingdom across the borders and what further action can be taken to prevent that.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I was alarmed to hear that last week French security services were informed that a man had been detained in Bavaria with automatic weapons in his car and Paris inputted in his sat-nav system. I welcome the Home Secretary's commitment to provide additional resources for our security services. Will she confirm that it is new money and that 1,900 new officers will be appointed? Will she also confirm that if such relevant information had been given to our security services about a planned attack on the United Kingdom, the outcome might have been different?

Mrs May: I am not able to comment on the case the hon. Gentleman outlines because I do not know all the facts. There have been reports in the media, but it would not be appropriate for me to comment. I confirm that these will be extra posts and that it will be additional money.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on France and on behalf of all those in this place who love France, may I

express our solidarity with our French colleagues in their national Parliament? Just as in the two world wars, we stand shoulder to shoulder with them. May I speak directly to them and say, “A nos collègues à l’Assemblée nationale, maintenant et pour toujours, vous avez nos prières et notre solidarité. Vive la République. Vive la France.”?”

Mrs May: I can only respond to my hon. Friend by saying, “Nous sommes solidaires avec vous. Nous sommes tous ensemble.”

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): May I add my voice to those who have condemned the barbaric attacks on France, the Lebanon and those who were flying from Egypt to Russia? One of my many concerns is that, as has been said, there has been and will be a rise in Islamophobia. I welcome the Home Secretary’s acknowledgement that Muslims across the world are standing up and saying, “Not in my name.” In the light of that, I encourage everyone in this House to stop using the name of Islam when talking about these terrorists. It appears in the names that the terrorists have given themselves: ISIS, ISIL and Islamic State. I encourage everyone to use the term Daesh. It is a derogatory term, but they deserve it. That might break the link in people’s minds between Islam and terrorism.

Mrs May: I have considerable sympathy with the point the hon. Lady makes. I often use the term Daesh. As it happens, I have not done so this afternoon. She is absolutely right that this group is not Islamic and is not a state. We should not give the impression that either of those is the case.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, which will be widely welcomed in France for her offer of support and co-operation, and for her insistence that normal life should go on, with particular reference to the football international. She will know that there are numerous attempts to attack the British public. We should be deeply grateful to the security services here.

Will she reflect on the proposals in the draft Investigatory Powers Bill to involve the judiciary in the executive decision of issuing warrants? That decision should be in the hands of Secretaries of State, who bear a heavy responsibility and are responsible to this House. The judiciary should, by all means, be involved after the event, perhaps days or a week later, but will she consider the idea that it must be a responsible, democratically elected Secretary of State who makes such difficult decisions, and that speed is vital?

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend is right that there are cases in which speed is absolutely essential, which is why the draft Bill provides for emergency or urgent situations when timeliness is required. In those circumstances it will be possible for the Secretary of State to sign a warrant that will come into effect immediately before the judicial authority has considered it. He asks me to look again at the double lock that we have put in place. I agree that it is important to have public accountability for a decision taken by the Secretary of State, but I also know that people are concerned to ensure that there is a second element of judicial authority. Indeed, some people want there to be only judicial authority, but I do not think that would be right. I think that the way we are going, with the accountability of the Secretary of State and the independence of the judiciary, is right.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Plaid Cymru condemns these murderous and depraved attacks, and we send our condolences to the bereaved and the injured. I thank the Home Secretary for her statement and for early sight of it. Organising such attacks and outrages takes considerable planning and resources. Can she assure the House that the Government are doing all they can to help in international efforts to stop the supply of arms matériel and expertise to the terrorists at source?

Mrs May: We are looking across the board at every measure and every step that can be taken in relation to these matters. This attack was different from those that have previously been carried out in the name of ISIL, because it clearly required considerable preparation and planning. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it is important to try to stem the availability of weaponry at source, which is one reason why we have been looking, and will continue to look, at the whole question of the movement of firearms across Europe, particularly heavier weaponry such as assault rifles.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I would like to add my condolences, and those of my constituents, to those already expressed following Friday’s horrific attacks in Paris. The Prime Minister suggested this morning that the Government would be looking at the timetable for the draft Investigatory Powers Bill. Events in Paris and Brussels have highlighted the importance of making sure that our intelligence and security services have all the resources they need, within a legal framework, to monitor those who show signs of radicalisation and to prevent cowardly acts of terrorism from happening here at home. Therefore, can my right hon. Friend offer any further information on the Prime Minister’s comments this morning? I also support her comment that Daesh are neither Islamic, nor a state; they are nothing more than a death cult.

Mrs May: I commend my hon. Friend for those comments. With regard to the timing, as I have indicated, we will obviously always look to ensure that we have in place the legislation that enables our security and intelligence agencies to have the powers they need. The draft Investigatory Powers Bill is a significant measure that we expect to stand the test of time. We do not want future Governments to have to change investigatory powers legislation constantly, so it is important that we get it right. It is therefore important that the Bill receives proper scrutiny and that it has support across the House, given the nature of it.

Mr Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab): These mad young people of Daesh who carried out the attacks in Paris must obviously have been brain washed somewhere along the line by someone—a mad mullah or whoever. First, what is the Home Secretary doing to try to stop them getting to young people, because they do not always come from Syria? Secondly, who finances Daesh? If they are getting oil, who are they selling it to?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about counter-radicalisation. That is why we have in place the Prevent programme and, within it, the Channel programme; Channel deals specifically with individuals and works to move them away from a path of radicalisation, while Prevent works more generally within communities. The Counter-Terrorism and Security

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Act 2015 introduced the Prevent duty for the public sector, so greater training is now being given to help people identify potential radicalisation and to be able to take action against it. Beyond that, of course, we have launched our counter-extremism strategy, because it is important that we challenge the extremist ideology that lies behind radicalisation, and that is what our strategy aims to do.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of the successes against drugs and arms smugglers have resulted from the work of the Border Force maritime aerial surveillance capability and its team based at Hurn airport in my constituency? Will she therefore reverse the decision to terminate that contract with effect from 6 January 2016, at a saving of £4 million, and in so doing heed the warning of Baroness Neville-Jones that we will otherwise be left with a significant gap in our maritime surveillance capability?

Mrs May: What is important is that we have the capabilities that we need, and I can reassure my hon. Friend that we will be ensuring that we do indeed have the capabilities that we need.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): I ask this in a genuine spirit of inquiry, and it is a sensitive area, but would the Home Secretary ever consider withdrawing citizenship from some who sought to promote and act on the basis of an ideology that was so repulsive that it threatened their fellow citizens?

Mrs May: Of course I do have it in my power to remove citizenship from individuals, and I have acted in that way on a number of occasions. While this is subject to some limitations in relation to ensuring that people are not made stateless, we did enhance our ability to remove citizenship in the Immigration Act 2014.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that Daesh targets in Syria should be bombed by the RAF, and is it now time for the House to be consulted again on this matter?

Mrs May: The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that he will come back to the House on this matter only when there is a consensus. Obviously everybody in this House will be considering their position on this particular matter.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): In her welcome statement, the Home Secretary stressed the importance of our counter-extremism strategy in building a sense of shared values that counter what she called the “perverted and murderous” values of these terrorists. Will she meet her colleagues in the Department for Education, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Communities and Local Government to discuss what more those Departments can do to build that shared sense of values?

Mrs May: The extremism taskforce chaired by the Prime Minister includes the very Departments that the hon. Lady mentions, and others, as well as the Home Office. If she looks at the counter-extremism strategy, she will see that it includes references to action that can

be taken by the Department for Education. Indeed, it has already moved in relation to this work on promoting the values that we share as part of living in this pluralistic society.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the 129 murdered and the hundreds still in hospital, but in addition there are people like a friend of mine, who on Friday night was in a bistro just yards from the café that was attacked. He and two English friends—he is English too—escaped and ran down the road, only to find themselves getting very close to another area, the Bataclan, which was under attack. He has now returned home, and I can tell my right hon. Friend and the House that he is totally traumatised. Will she work across Government to ensure that people like him and others who have returned to the UK who have been hurt in this way will receive assistance from the Department of Health and other organisations?

Mrs May: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance. Indeed, the Foreign Office has ensured that such support is available for those who have returned who were caught up in this—not just those who were physically injured but those who have been traumatised as a result of the experience. I suggest that my hon. Friend contact the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is on the Treasury Bench, who will be able to enlighten him on what is available.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): This afternoon I have received the sad news, courtesy of the *Press and Journal*, a newspaper in Scotland, that a young man from Fort William, Hamish MacDonald, known as Callum MacDonald, is in an induced coma in Paris having been caught up in the events in the Bataclan. What support can we give to the family in this situation—not just the young man involved but his extended family—and what solidarity can we show to those in France who have been caught up in this as well?

Mrs May: I am sorry to hear of the sad case of the hon. Gentleman's constituent. Our thoughts are with him and his family and friends. Obviously, we hope that he will make a recovery.

Consular support is available to families who wish to support members of their family who are in hospital in France. On a wider point, we have also been looking at what assistance the Department of Health and its experience can give to France, particularly with regard to those who have been traumatised by the event. Work is ongoing on those sorts of exchanges. As I have said, consular assistance is also available from the British embassy in Paris, and the Foreign Office has sent a team to Paris to help with that work.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Following the 2003 Casablanca bombings, Morocco set up the Mohammed VI Institute in Rabat to train foreign overseas imams and preachers, including women preachers, in the moderate Sunni-Sufi tradition that characterises that country. Last month, an agreement was reached with France in that respect. What can we learn from that experience? Would it be of benefit to the UK? Will the Home Secretary commend Morocco for its initiative?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important example and I absolutely commend Morocco for the initiative it took. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East, who has responsibility for north Africa and the middle east, visited that facility recently and we are encouraging other countries in the middle east to take a similar approach to that taken by Morocco.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): May I join the Home Secretary in thanking our security services, police and armed forces for the important work they do in keeping us safe? The Home Secretary rightly spoke about taking all necessary steps to prevent attacks on the UK. I would be grateful if she said something about what work is taking place to audit our existing security capabilities, to ensure that we have what we need in the right place and at the right level of preparedness and that it is properly resourced. Will she also confirm that she is examining our resilience not just in London, but in towns and cities across the UK?

Mrs May: I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that we look at resilience not just in London but across the United Kingdom. As I indicated earlier, we had enhanced our capability to deal with these sorts of marauding gun attacks in particular—not just the police capability, but the ability of the emergency services to work together to save lives in high-risk situations—but that is being reviewed as a result of the Paris attacks, to see whether there are any lessons we need to learn from them. We are, of course, looking at other aspects of our security arrangements, to ensure that they are appropriate for the threat we now face.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): We stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of France, and our thoughts at this time have to be with the families and friends of all the victims. When it comes to the security of our borders, we are all only as strong as our weakest link. The French reintroduced border controls at the weekend. To what extent can the Home Secretary and, indeed, the Government initiate a discussion to look at reintroducing border controls throughout the rest of the European Union?

Mrs May: The internal borders within the Schengen area are a matter for those countries that are members of Schengen, but we have, of course, been discussing with other EU countries the whole question of the external borders of Europe and how we can enhance security at them. We will continue those discussions.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. She is aware that my constituency of Brent North has the highest number of refugees and asylum seekers from the middle east in the country. In the light of the clear advice of both current and former Metropolitan Police Commissioners on the importance of neighbourhood safety teams and local policing, will she meet the current commissioner and look at the needs of constituencies such as mine, to ensure that those local neighbourhood safety teams are kept in place and enhanced in order to ensure that the strategy is followed?

Mrs May: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I regularly meet the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to discuss a number of issues relating, obviously, to the policing of London, but also to any wider responsibilities he has.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, particularly with regard to the doubling of resources for airport security during this Parliament. She will know that, over the weekend, Gatwick airport had to be closed after someone with a firearm—likely to be a French national—was foiled. Will she join me in paying tribute to Sussex police and all who work in security at Gatwick airport for their vigilance?

Mrs May: I am aware that an incident took place at Gatwick airport, which was dealt with very professionally by the police. I certainly commend the work of the Sussex police at Gatwick airport, but also for their wider work to keep people within the county safe.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I wish to add my condolences, and to affirm that these people are not of my faith and should not be regarded as such.

I pay tribute to our police and security services for the continued excellent work that they do to keep us safe. I acknowledge the new funding that has been announced and the Home Secretary's comments on Islamophobia, but will she look at the Border Force staffing that is needed? It is not only the key airports that need to be looked at; all of our ports and airports need to be looked at, and the more resources we have to deal with them, the better.

Mrs May: May I first welcome the statement that the hon. Gentleman made? It is important that he has made that statement in this House, and that message should go out across the whole country.

We do look at staffing across not just airports, but sea ports and—obviously, in relation to St Pancras—railway stations as well. We are constantly looking at the appropriate staffing and at the measures in place to maintain security, which we of course review on an ongoing basis.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I strongly welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of increased funding for our intelligence services, which do a magnificent job, and also of the protection of our counter-terror funding. In the light of the appalling events in Paris and the heightened risk in London, may I echo the calls for sufficient funding to ensure comprehensive neighbourhood policing in London, which is a crucial tool in tackling home-grown terror?

Mrs May: Obviously, the funding that will be made available to individual police forces and the policing budget in general will be made known after the spending review and the allocation, which will be made a few weeks later. I assure my hon. Friend that in looking at all these matters, we of course look at the capabilities required by our police. In looking at counter-terrorism work, we look across the board at the capabilities that are required to ensure that we can maintain our national security.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): May I inform the Home Secretary that, over the weekend, there were great celebrations in Iraqi Kurdistan at the recapture of Mount Sinjar by the peshmerga in co-operation with the PYD—the Democratic Union party—in Syria and with the assistance of UK forces in the air, as well as other partners and allies? That has broken the connection between Mosul and Raqqa. Will the Home Secretary speak to her colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Departments to assess whether it is not time that we in this country did more both to assist the Kurdish peshmerga and to see how we can destroy the Daesh caliphate cult in its headquarters in Raqqa?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we of course need to defeat Daesh. We are doing that in a whole variety of ways, but dealing with it where it is primarily based is of course part of that. He is right to refer to the recapture of the important landmark of Sinjar, which was an important battle and an important success. I am sure that he has noticed that there is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister on the Front Bench, who will have heard his remarks.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who seek to defend our liberties—enjoyed by Christians or Muslims, those of faith or of none—by depriving the security services of the powers we need are actually putting those liberties at risk and should consider their position?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Sometimes people talk about security and liberty as if it was a zero-sum game. Actually, you can enjoy your liberty only if you have security.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I spent this morning with one of my constituents who spent Friday night just yards from the Bataclan. Despite the trauma he had been through, he wanted to speak to me about his concerns about the Syrian community, especially in the light of the passport that was found. His view was that those who run away from Islamic State in Syria do so because—like us—they do not share its values. It is important that we continue to make it clear that Europe—and Britain—welcome refugees.

Mrs May: Indeed and, as the hon. Lady knows, we are committed to welcoming 1,000 Syrian refugees before Christmas and 20,000 over the course of this Parliament. She is right: those fleeing Syria are fleeing from the barbarism of ISIL and, in many cases, from attacks on the Syrian people by their own Government. That is why it is so important that we ensure that we find a political resolution to what is happening in Syria, so that those many hundreds of thousands—millions—who have had to flee can go back to their homes where they want to be.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): My right hon. Friend referred to the French Government's maintenance of police in Calais at this difficult time, and I support her expression of gratitude to them. As she knows, some 5,000 people living outside Calais are desperate to get to the UK—and they are living in desperate conditions. The Government rightly invested in better security this summer, which has been effective,

but still some people get through the border every night. What further steps will she take to make sure that the border at Calais is secure and also that conditions in the camp are not inhumane, but reflect our values, especially of compassion?

Mrs May: As regards conditions in the camp, I believe that some EU funding has been made available to the French Government for facilities in the camps and the UK Government have committed funding to the French Government to work with them, especially to identify victims of trafficking who may be in the camps.

On the security front, we have stepped up the screening that is taking place in Calais and other ports, of freight, cars and passengers. As my hon. Friend rightly says, we have increased the security fencing there, and the French Government have increased the police presence at Calais and Coquelles.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Home Secretary will be aware that on Saturday Glasgow, like many other cities, was the scene of a spontaneous vigil for peace and tolerance in solidarity with Paris. The city is also preparing to welcome refugees under the Government's resettlement scheme. Does she agree that the promotion of peace and tolerance is the best way to counteract terrorism, and living up to our pledge to welcome refugees is one of the best ways to demonstrate that tolerance?

Mrs May: It is right that we should all do all we can to encourage peace and tolerance, and especially to ensure tolerance within communities in the United Kingdom, as several hon. Members have mentioned. Our welcoming of refugees, giving protection and a home to those who have been displaced by the conflict in Syria, is a good example.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for mentioning the consular work done in Paris. Will she explicitly pay tribute to the work of Sir Peter Ricketts and his team who have been working around the clock since the events? As someone who was on parliamentary business in Paris only last Monday, I invite her to take the opportunity to recognise that now is not the time to weaken the work done by our consular services across the globe.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right. I first met Sir Peter Ricketts when he was the national security adviser, so he is well aware of the issues of national security and counter-terrorism work. He has done an outstanding job as our ambassador in France. I worked closely with him in the summer on the issue in Calais, and he and his staff have worked tirelessly over the weekend to ensure that consular support was available to those British families who were caught up in the terrible attacks, and that every assistance was given to the French authorities in the work that they were doing.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), the indoctrination of young, vulnerable minds is a real source of concern when it comes to the growth of radical Islam. Last week, Ofsted found 15 illegal schools educating 800 children in very worrying circumstances. We have a real problem

with private Muslim faith schools and pupils dropping off the register. May I urge the Home Secretary to work on this with the Education Secretary and Sir Michael Wilshaw? This is an area of real concern, because we are not doing the job at the moment.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. We have already seen some actions taken in this area. The Government are committed to taking further action in relation to supplementary schools, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in October. We will be looking at further inspections of supplementary schools that are providing a certain number of hours of education. This is important both in relation to the issue he raises on radicalisation and as a general safeguarding issue.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I join Members across the House in welcoming the Home Secretary's statement, in particular the announcement of extra resources for GCHQ and the security services. As she will recognise, the Metropolitan police has responsibilities for counter-terrorism not only in London but across the country. What extra support might be extended to the Met police for the execution of those duties?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right that the counter-terrorism command—what was called ACPO TAM, but is now NPCC TAM—is based in the Metropolitan police. It is funded through the counter-terrorism policing grant, as are the counter-terrorism regional units that exist in places across the country, such as the west midlands and the north-west. We have already protected counter-terrorism policing budgets over the past five years and we have been clear that counter-terrorism funding will continue to be protected.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Europe must pull together to tackle this threat. We welcome the Home Secretary's attendance at the European Justice and Home Affairs Council on Friday. Does she agree that it is imperative we continue to co-operate with our European Union partners and friends to stem the flow of arms, to share information and to stop these vile acts of terrorism?

Mrs May: Indeed. That co-operation is important. We are looking to enhance co-operation in a number of areas, including in relation to the movement of firearms, as I indicated earlier, and in relation to the exchange across borders of information about criminality and criminal records, so we can all better protect our citizens in future.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement, in particular that there will be increased border checks for vehicles entering the United Kingdom. Does my right hon. Friend not agree that to further reduce the risk of illegal immigrants and illegal firearms being brought into the United Kingdom, every single vehicle entering this country should be thoroughly checked?

Mrs May: Decisions on the extent of checks on any particular vehicle will be taken at our borders by the Border Force. It operates under a clear mandate. It has increased the number of checks it is undertaking. It will be looking for those who are trying to enter the United

Kingdom illegally and for those who are trying to bring in firearms illegally. It has had success in both those areas; our Border Force officers do an excellent job for us.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The Home Secretary will have heard, in departmental questions and during the statement, the high level of concern across the country about cuts to police forces. What consideration has she given, in discussions with the Ministry of Defence, to utilising the armed forces in the prevention of, and in response to, an armed attack in the UK?

Mrs May: I assure the hon. Lady that there are tried and tested arrangements in place for military support to be provided to the police when necessary. We looked at this issue again after the attacks in Paris earlier this year. Exercise Strong Tower took place on the streets of London this summer. Hundreds of individuals took part in the exercise, which involved not just the police but the military.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): As somebody from a Muslim background, I agree with the Home Secretary that this was an evil act carried out by an evil organisation and that we must unite to defeat Daesh, including its ideology and propaganda. It is estimated that 80% of attacks aimed at the United Kingdom in the last five years have been prevented thanks to intelligence sharing with the Saudis and other Gulf Co-operation Council countries. Is that correct, and will we continue with that intelligence sharing?

Mrs May: I do not comment on any particular information or intelligence that leads to our being able to disrupt attacks. We work, of course, with a number of countries in relation to intelligence sharing, and I can confirm that, as the Prime Minister said this morning, in the last 12 months, seven terrorist attacks have been disrupted in the UK.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I listened carefully to the Defence Secretary's justification for the drone strike against Reyaad Khan, from Cardiff, and his description of the nature of threat he posed to the UK. Will the Home Secretary say a little bit about the nature and origins of the threats we face and the extent to which they are supported directly from Daesh-controlled territory in Syria?

Mrs May: The threat we face is diverse. The threat we face from Daesh is diverse. As we saw in Paris, it comes from individuals conducting an attack that has been prepared and planned, but it is also possible these days, with social media, for people based in one territory to reach out to others and to encourage them to go out, perhaps as lone individuals, to undertake an attack on our streets. The threat we face is diverse, and obviously some of it originates from ISIL-held territory.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Our thoughts go out to those in Paris. Further to the last question about the nature of the threat, is my right hon. Friend saying that if Daesh were defeated in Syria and Iraq, it would not necessarily stop the problem in western Europe?

Mrs May: It is important that we defeat Daesh, but as my hon. Friend will recognise, we face threats not just from Daesh—for example, there are still threats from organisations with links to al-Qaeda. It is important, therefore, that we defeat the ideology that lies behind these terrorist groups, and that can be done in a variety of ways. For that reason, moves we have made, such as on the counter-extremism strategy in the UK, are also important. There is often a focus on what security agencies and the police can do—on that sort of activity—but defeating the ideology is essential.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): A survivor of the Paris attacks expressed surprise at the young age of some of the suicide bombers. For example, it has been reported that one of the suicide bombers at the Stade de France might have been as young as 15. I have already raised the issue of the growing number of child suicide bombings in the House. Is this not an urgent matter that we need to do more to consider?

Mrs May: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the potential youth of some of those involved in the attack. Sadly, in recent times, we have seen more and more younger people attempting to travel to Syria and more teenagers in the UK being prosecuted for their involvement in potential terrorist activity. This is a matter of real concern. It is a question of dealing with the radicalisation of those young minds.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, Plymouth is a dispersal centre for asylum seekers and will be welcoming a share of them over the next few weeks. What action is she taking to make sure they are genuine asylum seekers, not terrorists, and that younger asylum seekers are not radicalised?

Mrs May: In relation to the refugees we are accepting from Syria and to people claiming asylum here, of course we carry out the necessary security checks when considering claims. That is an important part of the process. In terms of children or minors coming to live in the UK as unaccompanied asylum seekers, my answers to hon. Members about radicalisation are important. It is important that we promote the mainstream voices and cohesion within communities that can help provide the resilience against radicalisation.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): How does the Home Secretary respond to the claim made by President Putin that Daesh is funded by 40 countries, including members of the G20? Do not the Government and the Opposition deserve the nation's congratulations on their restrained, measured response to these terrible events? Do the Government now fully embrace the notion that hearts and minds can never be won over by bombs and bullets?

Mrs May: What lies behind the terrorist attacks and Daesh is a perverted ideology. It is important, as I have said in response to a number of questions this afternoon, that we deal with that perverted ideology. We need to take steps to ensure that our police, our security and intelligence agencies and our Border Force have the powers they need and the ability to keep us safe and secure. What underpins what the terrorists do is that perverted ideology, which is why dealing with that ideology—confronting and challenging it—is so important.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that, if re-elected, he would seek to tag electronically all those on the extremist watch list. Has the Secretary of State considered doing the same thing in this country?

Mrs May: In respect of anyone who is a matter of interest to the police, law enforcement or security agencies, a number of powers and measures are available. For those planning or seeking to undertake terrorist attacks, of course, we have strong counter-terrorism legislation here in the United Kingdom, and I think everyone would agree that the best place for a terrorist is, after prosecution, behind bars.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Home Secretary understand that the Prime Minister will not get a consensus for increased military intervention unless and until he comes to the public and to this House with a plan involving increased diplomatic, development and military options? When can we see some leadership? The right hon. Lady says that the UK will stand with France. When will this happen?

Mrs May: I find the hon. Gentleman's question a little confusing: we do stand with France and we have stood alongside France. We have been providing France with assistance and co-operation in these matters, and we continue to do so. The hon. Gentleman mentions the issue of whether the UK will take part in military action in Syria. The Prime Minister has been very clear that if and when he comes to this House in relation to such matters, it will be on the basis of a consensus.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): From Beirut to Paris, and not forgetting the explosion on the Russian Metrojet plane, it is clear that ISIL/Daesh is looking to take its barbaric battle beyond its hoped-for caliphate. Will my right hon. Friend tell us what steps are being taken to work with the international community, particularly including Arab states, to cut the funding to these terrorist groups and particularly to Daesh?

Mrs May: A group of counter forces has come together in coalition in a whole variety of ways in respect of these matters, including carrying out work to counter the narrative given by Daesh. Our Foreign and Commonwealth Office is playing its part in the coalition of states with that single aim of ensuring that we can defeat Daesh.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Michael O'Connor from South Shields lay on top of his girlfriend in the Bataclan; as shots fired around him and bodies fell, he lay there still, pretending to be dead. Michael's actions saved both of their lives, and I am sure that the Home Secretary will join me in commending his brave actions. I welcome what she said about the support that the Government are offering to British citizens caught up in the aftermath of the attacks. I would like some confirmation that such support will be extended to those who are temporarily resident in Paris, such as my constituent Michael.

Mrs May: I join the hon. Lady in commending her constituent Michael O'Connor for the action that he took. It is unimaginable to have been in that situation,

with the shots all around and so many people being killed; the presence of mind that he showed was considerable. As the hon. Lady said, it saved two lives.

I can confirm that the support available to British nationals who have been caught up in this extends to those who are temporarily resident in France.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I share my right hon. Friend's gratitude to our intelligence and security services, but as long as Schengen continues—and I hope that the British Government are actively advocating reform and the end of Schengen, to the extent that that is possible—our security will depend, at least in part, on those on the front line of Europe. What support are the Government giving the intelligence and security agencies on the front-line extremities of Europe to beef up our own security?

Mrs May: As I have said in reply to a number of Members on both sides of the House, the internal borders of Schengen are primarily a matter for the countries that are in Schengen, but the United Kingdom takes very seriously the question of the external borders of the European Union. We have been working to enhance the security of those external borders by, for example, encouraging the proper registration of migrants who are crossing them. We have also supplied resources to Greece in particular, but we have offered resources to Italy as well, to help those countries to deal with the numbers of people crossing the borders, as part of the process of strengthening the security at the external borders, which, as my hon. Friend said, is so important to us.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): The financing of terrorist organisations such as Daesh is essential to their capacity to carry out atrocities of the kind that we witnessed on Friday. What strategy is in place to combat the financing of such groups, both here in the United Kingdom and internationally?

Mrs May: Action is being taken at international level to deal with the financing of such organisations. Daesh took territory that enabled it to access oil supplies, and part of its financing has resulted from that. In the wider context of the funding of terrorism, we take very seriously the existence of links between organised crime, such as kidnappings, and terrorism finances, and we work on that problem not just as the UK but on an international basis.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The people of Yorkshire have been showing their solidarity with the people of France over the weekend. We made many friends in Paris and beyond when we hosted the Tour de France last summer. May I add my voice to those who have demanded a review of the availability and resourcing of armed rapid response units in our regional towns and cities?

Mrs May: We had previously considered the whole question of the availability and capability of rapid response and armed response vehicles, and over the last five years we have increased capability of both straightforward armed response and specialist counter-terrorism armed response. We are now considering where it is most appropriate for capabilities to sit to ensure that they provide the greatest reassurance and security.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's reference to the understandable measures to boost border and aviation security. Are there specific corresponding plans to review railway security in particular, including the role of the transport police and the resources at their disposal?

Mrs May: The increased security arrangements that have been introduced since the attacks in Paris include increased security in relation to rail movements to the continent. That action was taken in conjunction with the French authorities, who were keen for rail travel security to be increased. That is important in continental Europe, as well as being important in terms of the links with the United Kingdom. We assess the capabilities of the British transport police regularly and as part of the post-Mumbai exercise that I mentioned earlier, we have reviewed their capabilities over the last few years. As a result, those capabilities have been increased in this regard.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Vital to upholding our values of freedom and liberty are measures of the sort in the upcoming Investigatory Powers Bill. Of course that Bill must be examined thoroughly and the joint scrutiny Committee will be meeting shortly for the first time. May I ask the Home Secretary what message she would send out today to my colleagues and I serving on that Committee?

Mrs May: I think the message I would send out is that this is a significant Bill. I think it is an important Bill. I think it is crucial that it has the scrutiny that it requires, and I look forward to the report that will come from the joint scrutiny Committee. I commend my hon. Friend and others on agreeing to serve on what I think is going to be a very important Committee doing this significant piece of work.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I had the privilege of being invited to attend and speak at the Ahmadiyya Muslim community peace conference in Scotland on Saturday. Not only do they fully contribute to life in Britain, but they raise thousands of pounds each year for British charities. The horrific events of Friday evening in Paris were condemned by all attendees. True Islam is a peace-loving religion and the Ahmadiyyans follow this principle in their daily lives: they believe wholeheartedly in peaceful solutions to all matters.

It is very sad that in today's world there is a minority of Muslims intent on presenting an alternative image of Islam. The Ahmadiyyan Muslims wish to promote loyalty, freedom, equality, respect and peace, and the motto they live by is "Love for all, hatred for none." All of us would do well to remember, and try to live by, that motto also.

Mrs May: A few months ago I had the pleasure of attending the Ahmadiyyan mosque in Morden and I have met on a number of occasions with members of the Ahmadiyya community. The hon. Lady is absolutely right: they are a very good example in terms of not just the values they live by, but the practice—the way in which they put those values into practice in working within their local communities.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is clear that as a country we face a growing tension between our desire to be compassionate and welcome those who are genuinely fleeing the violence in Syria and our own safety and security. Since the events on Friday, I have been contacted by a number of constituents who are very concerned about this issue. Please will the Home Secretary reassure my constituents and the country that the safety and security of our own people remain this Government's No. 1 priority and that they will not be compromised by our desire to welcome refugees?

Mrs May: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that the safety and security of people here in the UK is our No. 1 priority, but that is not in conflict with our desire to ensure that we can welcome into the UK a number of those who have been displaced and affected by the conflict in Syria. We have security arrangements in place to provide proper security checks for those refugees coming from Syria into the UK. It is absolutely right that we do so, and in doing so we can both work to keep people here safe and secure and provide that protection to a number of people who have fled from the conflict in Syria.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): My constituents in Darlington would like me to convey their sympathy and solidarity with the people of Paris after the horrendous events on Friday. We know from experience in France, Denmark and elsewhere that often people who commit these atrocities have served time in prison. I am not convinced that the people who run our prisons know as much about radicalisation in prison—or, indeed, the opportunity for deradicalisation there—as they could. How confident is the right hon. Lady that we are doing all we can in our prisons to prevent radicalisation?

Mrs May: Of course the Prevent duty we have introduced covers prisons as well as other public sector institutions. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Justice came into his post, he required a review of the provisions for dealing with radicalisation in prisons. That review has, I believe, yet to report, so there is a piece of work ongoing to look at what is happening in prisons. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security will soon be meeting the prisons Minister to talk about exactly these issues, because we do recognise that we need to look at what is happening in prisons and ensure that we are taking every possible step to reduce the potential for radicalisation.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I was delighted to be able to join many of my constituents this morning in Sutton to observe a minute's silence and to remember those who had fallen in Paris. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as testing our resilience to a similar attack here in the UK, we must also play a full role in defeating Daesh at its source on either side of the Iraq-Syria border? Does she also agree that it is most important that we continue with our daily way of life, in the full appreciation of the fact that we live in a free and democratic society?

Mrs May: I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend joined his constituents for the minute's silence. A minute's silence was observed in the Home Office and in other Departments this morning, and I joined the French ambassador at the French embassy for the minute's silence there. My hon. Friend's point about our way of life is absolutely crucial. If we change our way of life and stop doing the things we normally do, the terrorists will have won. They want to divide us and to attack our very way of life, so it is important that we continue with it.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Over the weekend, a number of my constituents have contacted me with concerns about the adequacy of security arrangements at the port of Hull, which provides a major route into the United Kingdom from northern Europe and particularly from Belgium. Will the Home Secretary undertake to look specifically at the adequacy of the security arrangements at Hull and other sea ports?

Mrs May: We are looking at the security arrangements at all our ports, but I am happy to take away the hon. Lady's point. If she has any specific concerns, will she please pass them on to the Home Office?

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I welcome today's funding announcements, but given that our police officers are the nation's front line on the ground in responding to and protecting us from these barbaric individuals, will the Home Secretary make the strongest possible case for police funding to be protected in the spending review?

Mrs May: I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that I discuss these matters with the Chancellor, and I am very clear about the important role that policing plays in the life of our nation, and not just in relation to these sorts of matters. I indicated earlier that counter-terrorism and policing grants had been protected. Also, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has pointed out that police forces can make changes that would enable them to make savings without affecting their ability to respond to matters such as these.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The tragic events of the weekend illustrate yet again that we live in changing times in terms of threats to national security. To that end, I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement of additional security officers and aviation measures. However, given the concerns being expressed by Members, including those on her own Benches, does she agree that a greater investment in policing, security and prevention measures would be far more productive than wasting £167 billion on Trident? That would also give future Governments greater flexibility to react to events.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman cannot stand up and say that we need to look after the security of this country and then say that we should be scrapping Trident.

Point of Order

5.13 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I rise to raise an important constituency matter on the back of a meeting that took place in my constituency last Friday between the Ministry of Defence, the defence contractor QinetiQ and local fishing interests. The meeting was held in the light of an announcement by the MOD of a consultation on the closing of fishing waters in the Minch.

I was assured in the House by the Minister for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) on 23 June that there would be a public consultation before the byelaws were published, but that has not happened. I have written today to the Secretary of State and asked him to intervene. With your guidance, Mr Speaker, I would like him to come to the House to make a statement about what has happened. In particular, I am asking for these events to be put on hold while an economic impact assessment is carried out and a project group is set up to look into these matters in the correct manner.

Mr Speaker: I did not hear to which Secretary of State the hon. Gentleman was referring.

Ian Blackford: The Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman. This is not a matter for the Chair, but he has made his point with his usual force and alacrity, and it will have been heard by representatives of the Government sitting on the Treasury Bench. They will choose how to respond. There is an arsenal of parliamentary devices to enable the hon. Gentleman to pursue this matter—if not thoroughly to his satisfaction, then at any rate sufficiently to ensure that he has aired his concerns at every turn.

Backbench Business

Council of Europe

Mr Speaker: We come now to the motion on membership of the UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I have selected the manuscript amendment (b) tabled by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), who is in his place. To move the motion, I call Mr Owen Paterson.

5.15 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House adopts with immediate effect the same system for nomination of its membership of the UK Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as it has for nomination, following party elections, of membership of departmental select committees, and accordingly directs the Speaker not to send the names of its membership of the UK delegation to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly until the nomination of that membership has taken place according to that system.

After the horrors of the weekend and the statement, there will be many looking at this Chamber today and wondering why we are discussing this arcane issue. It is highly appropriate that we do so because the Council of Europe concerns itself with the conduct of 47 different countries and covers human rights, democracy and the rule of law. At the heart of this debate is the perennial tussle between the Executive and the legislature—it is about who really calls the shots.

May I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for enabling this debate to take place at very short notice? We are six months out from the election, and I am sad to report that the UK membership of the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe lapsed on 7 November because we did not provide a delegation within six months of our general election. The next chance occurs when the Assembly's Standing Committee meets in Sofia on 27 November, so there is real urgency in having this debate and in ensuring that we come up with a delegation that is selected by appropriate methods.

If, as I hope, this motion is accepted by the House today, it will enable the necessary elections to take place so that that timetable can be kept. I say “necessary” because most parties in this House with representation in the Assembly already choose their members democratically on a basis similar to that for choosing members of departmental Select Committees.

This motion has attracted widespread support across the House. Those who have signed it include five Chairmen of Select Committees and the Chairman of the 1922 committee of Conservative Backbenchers, as well as a former Conservative Deputy Chief Whip.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): On that very point, I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) has removed his name from the first motion and instead tabled in his name and the names of other hon. Members amendment (b), which has been selected. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the amendment reflects a good old-fashioned British compromise that should be widely welcomed on both sides of the Chamber?

Mr Paterson: I thank my hon. Friend for his comment, and I am happy to stand corrected. I got off a plane from France only a couple of hours ago and learned about that amendment, which has interesting merits. I shall wait until my hon. Friend moves his amendment to hear how it will work in practice.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Do I take it from my right hon. Friend's earlier remarks that, although previously serving members have been told they will not be put back on this committee, no substitute names have yet been put forward? If that is true, it would suggest that it is more about removing certain people than there not being room for them to serve again.

Mr Paterson: My right hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. There is room, because a larger number stood down than were taken off. If I could just make progress, I might explain that point a little later.

The motion should also be helpful to the Government because it will establish beyond doubt that all new members of the new UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will have been chosen by Parliament and not by the Government. The Government are already represented at the Council of Europe in the Committee of Ministers, which is the intergovernmental decision-making body of the 47 member countries. The role of the Parliamentary Assembly by contrast is like that of a departmental Select Committee of this House: it holds the 47 Governments to account for their decisions in relation to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As I said at the start of my speech, those are the three core competences of the Council of Europe.

The House has only relatively recently begun to elect members of Select Committees. The need to do so evolved over time; and in my view, one of the main catalysts of the current system of election were the attempts by Governments of both persuasions to use the previous system of appointment to exclude those who had criticised their own party. That happened to the late Gwyneth Dunwoody at the hands of a Labour Government, and there was an earlier occasion involving Sir Nicholas Winterton at the hands of a Conservative Government. All Government involvement in appointing members of departmental Select Committees has now ended, and the same should apply to membership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

It is fair to say that hitherto the Labour party has elected its members while the Conservative party has operated on an informal basis whereby those who wish to be on the Assembly are accommodated, and, without exception, those who are already on the Assembly and wish to be reappointed are so reappointed.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Is that not the unfortunate aspect of this whole affair? Those hon. Members who have been replaced testify that they have been told that they are being replaced because they voted against the Government when it came to such matters as purdah. That must be wrong, and that is the central issue that we must address. That is what they themselves have been told by Front Benchers.

Mr Paterson: Sadly, my hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I shall come on to that point in a few moments.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I respect my right hon. Friend terribly and have read the motion with a great deal of interest, but after the events of the weekend does he not think that people outside this place will see this debate as somewhat self-indulgent?

Mr Paterson: That is an interesting point, which I touched on in my opening remarks. We had a lengthy statement lasting 90 minutes or so and I have just come back from France myself. People will wonder what we are doing discussing this arcane issue, but the Home Secretary was absolutely spot-on. The mood I experienced in France at the weekend was one of complete determination to carry on with normal business and not to be knocked off course. The Home Secretary was quite right to say that the football international should go ahead, and I think that we are quite right to go ahead with this debate on a Back-Bench motion, discussed by the Backbench Business Committee only last Thursday, arcane though it might be. We have had a good crack at discussing the horrors of the weekend and now we are discussing something fundamental that the people who launched the attacks do not even believe in. Who calls the shots? Is it the legislature or the Executive? There is a constant battle between the two and this tiny vignette continues that tussle.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): Further to his reply to the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), does the right hon. Gentleman not concede that a Parliament that can stand up to Front Benchers and in which Back Benchers can exercise their rights is a Parliament that will answer some of the important questions that have arisen from the events of the weekend far better than one composed of yes-men and women?

Mr Paterson: That was well put and I will not attempt to improve on it.

Of the 12 Conservative members of the PACE from the House of Commons in the last Parliament, four retired at the general election and two others said that they did not wish to continue as members. The remaining six said that they wished to be reappointed, and, in accordance with the precedent, had no reason to believe that that would not happen. As we now have 13 members, that would still have left room for seven additions. At the end of October, however, the Government said that they would not reappoint three of the six who wished to be reappointed because they had voted in September in support of retaining purdah for the EU referendum. That was confirmed in a report in *The Daily Telegraph* on 4 November that quoted "Downing Street sources" saying that

"the trio had paid the price for rebelling against the Government".

Such direct interference by the Government in the process of reappointment is at odds with the previous convention in the UK and is also against the statute of the Council of Europe. Article 25a of the statute of the Council of Europe emphasises that appointments or elections should be by Parliament and not by Government. As the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) rightly and accurately said during the urgent question on 3 November, correctly quoting article 25a:

"The Consultative Assembly shall consist of Representatives of each Member, elected by its Parliament from among the members thereof, or appointed from among the members of that Parliament, in such a manner as it shall decide".—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 888.]

The Prime Minister's role in announcing to Parliament the members of the UK delegation is purely formal, and before so doing he should consult the parties. This time, there was full consultation with the official Opposition and with other parties but none with the Conservative parliamentary party outside the Government. Why, for example, was there no consultation with the chairman of the 1922 committee of Back Benchers?

The three Members who are being punished for supporting the retention of referendum purdah were backed by the opinion of the independent Electoral Commission, the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, and a majority of this House in a vote on 7 September. By penalising the three, the Government seem to be showing that, far from respecting the decision of the House, they resent it. It is peculiarly inappropriate to choose this issue to do so, as the Council of Europe set up the Venice Commission, otherwise known by its full name of the European Commission for Democracy through Law. It is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters. It has ruled on the conduct of referendums in guidelines and elsewhere. An analysis of its considerable output indicates that the Government's stance on purdah in the EU referendum is clearly in breach of the European Commission's guidelines. Specifically, the Venice Commission's "Guidelines for Constitutional Referendums at National Level", published in 2001 at its 47th plenary meeting, clearly states:

"However, the national, regional and local authorities must not influence the outcome of the vote by excessive, one-sided campaigning. The use of public funds by the authorities for campaigning purposes during the referendum campaign proper (ie in the month preceding the vote) must be prohibited."

As recently as 2005, the Venice Commission built on those guidelines in "Referendums in Europe—an Analysis of the Legal Rules in European States", which notes that Ireland makes provision for electoral neutrality; that in Portugal, all authorities are required to ensure the strictest impartiality; that Latvia must provide citizens with neutral information; and that the Russian Federation—that well known democracy—has neutrality rules. The UK Government were very much out of line in trying to abandon the purdah rules.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that given that the Council of Europe stands for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, it is a bit strange that the Government should punish people for exercising their right to freedom of expression? They are saying, "As you say what you think, and vote as you do, you can no longer go to an institution that champions those principles."

Mr Paterson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is even more perverse than that, as for a couple of decades the Venice Commission has promoted the issue of Government neutrality in referendums.

Judges in the European Court of Human Rights are appointed for a seven-year term, which is non-renewable to protect their independence. How can members of PACE from the UK's governing party express independent opinions in Strasbourg if there is a covert threat that their appointment will not be renewed if they step out of line with the Government's wishes? Right at the heart of this issue is the question of the separation of powers; that is at the root of the whole debate. What could the Government possibly have to fear in trusting

Conservative Back Benchers to elect Conservative representatives to the Parliamentary Assembly, as they do for departmental Select Committees?

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I was tempted to raise this as a point of order. My right hon. Friend does not have to go to Europe to get the guidelines on this; he can look at "Erskine May". On page 265, under the heading "Improper influence", it says:

"Conduct not amounting to a direct attempt improperly to influence Members in the discharge of their duties but having a tendency to impair their independence in the future performance of their duty may be treated as a contempt."

In other words, what the Government have done to Members of the House would be treated as contempt of Parliament if it had been done by anybody else in the country.

Mr Paterson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his assiduous research. That is a most pertinent point. It is also particularly relevant when one considers the three characters in question, all of whom are established, respected, assiduous Members of this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), if I may embarrass him first, has been on PACE for 10 years. He is the leader of the European Conservatives Group—a group with members from 17 countries. He sits on the Presidential Committee, which is made up of the President and the five group leaders. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) was Secretary of State for Wales, she guided a referendum so skilfully that none of us even noticed it. She is also Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who sits on the Council's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, has done splendid work highlighting the horrific persecution of centuries-old Christian communities in the middle east.

Dr Julian Lewis: May we take it that, given the eminence and integrity of all three right hon. and hon. Members, there has been no question of any of them having been informed by the Government that their previous service on that body was in any way deficient?

Mr Paterson: No, indeed. They seem to be completely incorruptible and their behaviour impeccable, and they have represented this House well on that parliamentary body, whose job is to hold the 47 Governments to account.

By supporting the motion this evening, the House will be able to tell the Government that the way forward is not for the Government to seek to exercise ever more control through patronage, but to win political arguments through persuasion. We have a great ally in this. The House will be endorsing the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) who, as Leader of the Opposition in 2009, gave a speech called "Fixing Broken Politics", in which he correctly said:

"If we're serious about redistributing power from the powerful to the powerless, it's time to strengthen Parliament so it can properly hold the government to account on behalf of voters."

He specifically said:

"MPs should be more independent - so Select Committee Chairmen and members should be elected by backbenchers, not appointed by Whips."

[Mr Owen Paterson]

Very pertinent to today's debate, he called for

"Parliament to be a real engine of accountability . . . not just the creature of the executive."

If it is good enough for the Prime Minister, it is good enough for the rest of us.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): When my right hon. Friend introduced the motion, he mentioned all the eminent people who had signed it. He forgot to mention a former Secretary of State who is proposing the motion. Will he confirm that the Conservative party manifesto that we all stood on said that we would increase parliamentary reform in this Session?

Mr Paterson: Indeed. We all stood on that platform, so we are at one with the Prime Minister in his 2009 speech.

This is unfinished business. It is right that the Executive do not appoint members or Chairmen of Select Committees. It is right that we vote today that this House should appoint its representatives to the body that represents 47 Parliaments, holding 47 Governments to account.

5.32 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): It is straining the ecumenical character of this Chamber to the limit that I am today supporting the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson). In the 20 years that he has been here and the 28 years that I have been here, I think this is the first occasion when we have been in agreement on a subject. He is right. What is at stake here is the continuing reform of Parliament and the movement of power from the Executive to Parliament itself.

I am the longest-serving member of the Council of Europe UK delegation. I became a member in 1997. I am not seeking re-appointment this time for various reasons, but I know well the work of the three Members involved. I was present when they were first nominated and watched with admiration their diligent and effective work on the Council of Europe. The only crime they have committed is that they have been caught in possession of independent ideas, which, as far as the Executive is concerned, is a very serious offence and deserves expulsion from that body.

We should support the motion. We will hear later what the manuscript amendment would be. The Government's proposed course of action is an outrage and a step backwards for us as a Parliament, because there has been progress—uncertain, faltering progress—in order to reform Parliament. It is the most serious task we have. After the screaming nightmare of the expenses scandal, we have a decade-long task of trying to win back public respect for us as an institution and for us as Members of Parliament. When we appoint people to serve on an international body of such importance, it is absolutely right that we do so in the most democratic way possible. That has not happened with the Conservative delegation.

There is another reason I think we should look at the way in which we can or cannot question the delegation. I believe that we are slipping backwards in our determination to take a firm line on those who offended in an egregious manner when the expenses scandal

broke. I have seen somebody ennobled in the House of Lords who put in one of the most unlikely claims. I will not mention what it was.

One of the people who is likely to be recommended for appointment in the place of our three hon. Friends was considered by the Committee for Privileges and Conduct in the House of Lords to have offended against the rules. There were two cases—one in 2012 and one in 2014. In 2014, the person involved had forgotten that he had signed an agreement with the Cayman Islands to lobby for it—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of this House. I am quite sure that he will not be using the narrow terms of the motion to talk about the history of any particular person.

Paul Flynn: I accept your judgment, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is just that this appointment is of such importance. Our role at the Council of Europe has been an honourable one over its long history, the reputation of the British Members has always been high and we have often set a fine example to other countries.

The Council of Europe has been very influential. When the former communist countries wanted to become part of Europe, their first step was to become members of the Council of Europe. Standards were insisted on by the Council of Europe to ensure that those countries were brought up to the standards that existed throughout the free Europe of the time. That was a great achievement. The Council of Europe is suffering at the moment because its most important issue is human rights, but a rival institution in the European Union is performing the same task, but with much greater finances.

We must refuse to accept the decision that has been handed down to us by the Government in the name of the Prime Minister. We all know that the Prime Minister is probably not intimately involved in such matters. In practice, it is the Whips who are doing this. They should be defied by this House in the name of reform and in the name of increasing the power of Parliament over the Executive.

5.38 pm

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I beg to move manuscript amendment (b), leave out from "adopts" to end and add

"henceforth a system for nomination of its membership of the UK Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe following a General Election reflecting that for nomination of membership of departmental select committees, namely that the House of Commons names be communicated to the Speaker following party elections involving a secret ballot (with each party to seek to reflect in its nominations the same gender representation as in its parliamentary membership, in order to comply with the rules of the Assembly), and for such names to be sent as now by the Speaker to the President of the Assembly; requires that the revised system be implemented in time for the delegation thus nominated to be able to attend the January 2016 part session of the Parliamentary Assembly; and in the interim authorises the Speaker to send now the names of the delegation as set out in the Written Statement of 3 November to the President of the Assembly in order to permit UK participation in the Assembly until then."

I am pleased to be able to move amendment (b), which stands in my name and that of the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen). In 2009, he and I were

elected by our respective parties to sit on what became known as the Wright Committee, the Committee on Reform of the House of Commons. That Committee recommended, among other things, the creation of the Backbench Business Committee—the body that enabled this debate to be tabled—and the election of the Chairs and members of Select Committees.

As has been alluded to by other hon. Members, the establishment of the Wright Committee and the election of Select Committees came about when Parliament was at perhaps its lowest ebb, held in deep disdain by the public and the media, and mired in the expenses scandal. I would venture to suggest that it is the election of Select Committees, perhaps more than anything else, that has begun the process of rebuilding the reputation of this House. Select Committees, with their elected Chairs and with members elected by the party groups, have grown in stature, and I think that the House itself has benefited as a result.

I will not concentrate in my brief remarks on why we are having this debate, because I do not want to build on the magisterial introduction given by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), looking at the important work of the Council of Europe and the rules and precedents that surround it. Although I absolutely cleave to the belief that this House should regard itself as sufficiently important, capable and worthwhile to believe that it is obvious that it should choose its representatives, whether on Select Committees or important international bodies such as the Parliamentary Assembly, I tabled this amendment because I am also aware of the dilemma that colleagues might be placed in by the timetable envisaged in the motion. My amendment is an attempt to resolve that difficulty.

My amendment would preserve the principle of election—the principle that this House, rather than the Executive, should choose its representatives on the Parliamentary Assembly and that we should elect them in the same way that we elect Select Committees—but would also accommodate the needs of the timetable for appointment to the Parliamentary Assembly, as set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire.

Were the motion to be agreed unamended, we would be left with a very short window in which to organise elections and ensure that the right choices made by Members of this House are put forward for representation in the Parliamentary Assembly. Amendment (b) would therefore preserve the principle of election while recognising that we can have an interim period, so that those Members currently proposed by the Government to be members of the Parliamentary Assembly would still go forward. They would therefore meet comfortably the deadline of 27 November for the delegation to be in place, yet we would also have an expectation that elections would take place before the beginning of the January 2016 part-session. That would give us a reasonable timeframe within which to organise and hold those elections.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) kindly described my amendment as a fine British compromise, and I hope that my hon. Friend on the Front Bench will see it in that light. I hope that the Government will recognise that this amendment is an attempt to preserve an important principle that is held dear by many Members on both sides of this House, while ensuring that the practicalities of appointment to the Parliamentary Assembly can be accommodated.

As has been said already, election to Select Committees is a fairly new practice. There were calls for that for many years, but it began only at the beginning of the previous Parliament, in 2010. Few now would advocate returning to a patronage-based system for appointing Select Committees. Were the motion or the amendment to be agreed to, I suspect that the election of the UK delegation would quickly become the norm too.

This House is made up entirely of elected representatives. It would surely be odd if today it rejected the principle that representatives should be elected. Choosing to support the amendment would be the act of a legislature that is becoming more self-confident, more independent and better able to do its job.

5.44 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak as a member of the Council of Europe.

Many people may think it strange that we are having this discussion in the long shadow of the atrocities that we witnessed over the weekend. They might think that it looks like self-indulgent navel-gazing and that we should be talking about the clash between liberty and security, and how to have more light and love and less hatred and darkness. However, if we think of the history of the Council of Europe, which was born out of the clash of steel and fire of the second world war to champion democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to spread its wings across a map of 47 nations, it is right that we think again about who we select, how we select, and what we are allowed to say.

Against the backcloth of what we find ourselves in, this may be regarded as a very trivial thing, but it is about whether the Government should be allowed to choose or exclude members of the Council of Europe on the basis of how they are whipped in a vote, whatever it may be. With regard to the Members who have been isolated in this way, I do not agree with what they say on a variety of issues, but I agree with their right to say it—or, should I say, their right to be wrong. Unlike some of the Members involved, I am very much a pro-European. I will be voting and campaigning for Britain to stay in Europe because I think that is in all our interests, while some Members are sceptical or anti-European, but that is not really the point. The argument about requiring the Government not to have a voice during the referendum—indeed, at a point where we may have the presidency of the European Union—may seem absurd to many, but this is about free speech and the right to be, in my view, wrong. Obviously other Members put forward their arguments with great sincerity and believe them to be true.

The issue is whether people who feel strongly about something and are willing to put that forward in what they say and vote for should be punished by the Government in order, in essence, to filter the people who are allowed to go the Council of Europe to talk about human rights, democracy and the rule of law so that they are just yes women and men for the Government of the time.

Mr Bone: If the hon. Gentleman did something domestically that the Labour party did not like, it could not remove him from his position. Is that not the crux of the matter? We need to have elected representatives in the Council of Europe, and once elected they must do what they think is right and not be looking over their shoulders.

Geraint Davies: I felt too polite to make the obvious point that Labour is already embracing these democratic principles and trying to evolve democracy in the Conservative party. I welcome the opportunity to mention that. The hon. Gentleman is right—there is a free election within the parliamentary Labour party.

We are meant to go to the Council of Europe not as representatives of the Government—there are Ministers to do that job—but as parliamentarians. In the exchanges of Back Benchers from across the nations there is a different sort of dialogue going on whereby we can suggest, “Why don’t we do this in our Parliament and your Parliament?”, and begin a campaign. Those in positions of power may be conservative with a small “c” in terms of change or may not want to cross-fertilise culturally in terms of policy, but these sorts of forums enable us to move forward on human rights through free thinking, freedom of expression, and new ideas. For Governments here and elsewhere to constrain that so that it basically duplicates the meetings of Heads of Government would defeat the object of the Council of Europe in many respects.

My view of some of the people we are talking about, strangely enough, is that they are often the difficult, open-minded and self-opinionated people whom the Government wanted to put into exile in Strasbourg but who are now making their contribution in a wider forum, regrouping and coming back with perhaps stronger views. Personally, I do not agree with their views, but this is clearly a public punishment of Back Benchers who dare to have enlightened thoughts and support freedom of expression. Without further ado, I am happy to support amendment (b).

5.50 pm

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I guess I have to declare an interest: for my sins, I appear to be, at least for the moment, the leader-designate of the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Geraint Davies: Resign!

Sir Roger Gale: I might do that at the end of my speech, but give me five minutes!

I should also say, just in case anybody thinks otherwise, that, as far as I can see, I will have no gain and a lot of grief if I take the job. If I am asked to do something, I have a tendency to say that I will do it to the best of my ability, and that is what I will do. I have some experience, including nearly 20 years as a member of the Panel of Chairs and a couple of days in the big Chair. With the help of friends, I am sure we can create a satisfactory delegation, if we are allowed to do so.

I do not want to dwell on the background to this debate. My personal view, for what it is worth, is that neither side, if I can put it that way, has covered itself in glory. I certainly think that the Whips Office made a pig’s ear of it, and I think my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), who is a genuine friend of mine, ignored Denis Healey’s first rule of holedmanship, which is that if you are in one, stop digging. That made it harder for those of us who were trying to broker an agreement between an immovable object and an irresistible force. However, we are where we are.

It is in sorrow rather than in anger that I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), who moved the motion, that if it goes

through as it stands, it will be a complete dog’s breakfast that will leave our relationship with the Council of Europe in the mire. It quite clearly was not thought through by my right hon. Friend or those who signed it. When I telephoned the chairman of the 1922 Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), on Thursday and asked him, “Do you actually know what this is going to do?”, he was very candid and said, “No.” We had a constructive conversation, the product of which—I am deeply grateful to him for it—is amendment (b). I hope, at the very least, that the House will accept it, even though it would not do what I want to do.

Let me go back to the effect the motion will have if it is carried as it stands. The list approved by Mr Speaker has to be in Strasbourg by no later than this Friday, 20 November. That does not mean downstream or by the end of the month—it means by the end of this week. If it is not in by then, we will not have a delegation—at least not until January, but I will come to that in a moment. There is, therefore, a sense of urgency.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire was right to say that there was a delay, but to be fair to the Government—although I have no reason to be fair to them—we waited, understandably and reasonably, for the Labour party to have its leadership election and for it to apportion high office positions so that others could then be elected to the Council of Europe. That led to a huge delay and in my view there has been an inordinate delay since then, too.

If we do not submit our nomination in time for the Bureau, which will be held in Sofia on 26 November, and the Presidential Committee, which will approve committees on 27 November, none of the work that should take place during December and January will be able to take place. That includes work in Paris, and we really need to be in Paris after what happened over the weekend. Those of us who have served on the Council of Europe have good friends there, and we want to see them and reassure them. We want them to know that we are not running away and that we will be there alongside them and supporting them.

The committee on culture, science, education and media, which is vital, will meet on 3 and 4 December. It is a pity that the Press Gallery is empty, because those who have criticised the Council of Europe need to recognise that we, including the sub-committee that I chair, do a huge amount of work in defence of the freedom of the rights of journalists internationally. We fight for those in prison.

On 7 December, the political affairs committee will meet in Brussels, and that is important. On 8 December, the legal affairs committee will meet in Paris. The monitoring committee, which is one of the key committees of the Council of Europe, will meet in Paris on 9 December. On 10 December, the procedure committee will meet in Paris. On 13 and 14 December—Members should bear it in mind that if the motion goes through, we will have no delegation—the Presidential Committee and the Bureau will meet here in London. The meeting will take place in this building—we are hosting it. We are going to look pretty stupid as a nation if we do not have a delegation to host it. Mr Speaker is probably aware of this by now, but he will host a reception in Speaker’s House at the end of that meeting. On 15 December, the migration committee will meet in Paris. That is important, particularly given what is happening at the moment. On 14 January,

which is before the plenary part-session, the committee on the election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights will meet, and that is very important indeed.

I say as gently as possible to my right hon. Friend that a raft of work needs to be done between now and the next plenary session. I have already been prevented from completing a report for the monitoring committee on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because we had no delegation and therefore no members, so I could not go. Other colleagues have found themselves in the same boat.

I am not opposing the principle of election; it applies to Select Committees and that is fine by me. However, if we are going to do that—this is why I tabled my amendment, which has not been selected—I want to give the process a little time so that we can do the job properly. I served on the Procedure Committee and we considered how members of every single Select Committee and the Deputy Speakers and Speaker should be elected.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Roger Gale: Let me just finish this point. We made recommendations, only one of which—I will not say which one—was rejected. All the rest went through. The issue under discussion was never raised at that time and we have to ask ourselves why not. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the NATO committee were not mentioned either. They are not on the agenda of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire, in spite of the fact that one very senior member of the NATO committee has also been removed from his position. That may have escaped my right hon. Friend's notice, but it is true.

If we are to do this properly—and we should—I would have preferred the issue first to be referred to the Procedure Committee so that it could give a proper recommendation on the Council of Europe, the OSCE and NATO. That could then have been approved by the House in time for the election of a full delegation for the next session in 2017.

I am told there is fear that the Government would block that process. I do not believe that to be the case and I hope my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House will be able to give a clear assurance—she might not—that, were we to go down the route of the Procedure Committee and do the job properly, the Government would not stand in the way of its findings. If we did that, I think we would do a better job.

I can and will work with whatever is foisted upon me this afternoon. If it is the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West, we will work with that as best we can. However, if it is the original motion, I fear it will fail the House.

5.59 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister issued a written ministerial statement confirming the agreed names of the UK delegation on Tuesday 3 November. The credentials of the current delegation expired on 6 November, six months after the general election, and there is now no UK delegation. The only way to ensure that there is a serving delegation quickly is to transmit the credentials for consideration by the Standing Committee

on 27 November. As we have heard, it would prefer to have the credentials a week in advance, and my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) has already mentioned the date of 20 November.

The longer the delay continues, the more the problem is exacerbated. A failure to submit the delegation's credentials in time for ratification at the Assembly's next Standing Committee will mean that delegation members will be unable to participate in Assembly business until at least the next plenary part-session at the end of January.

Paul Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: It is probably best if I try to inform the House of the Government's position, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

The absence of the UK delegation will be most keenly felt in the work of the Assembly's committees, as well as in preventing participation in key decision making during this period. As has been said, the UK Government do not and cannot represent the Assembly delegation. Consequently, we will be without a voice. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet has set out some of the other meetings in more detail.

Even those with sympathy for the principles of the motion should recognise that the UK parliamentary delegation is not a Select Committee of the House. The Council of Europe has certain guidelines to provide that a delegation is a fair representation of Parliament. In meeting those guidelines, we have consistently ensured that the delegation has had appropriate political balance, has members from both Houses and MPs from every nation of the United Kingdom, and has fulfilled the criteria on gender balance.

Paul Flynn: When there was a vacancy for the leader of the Labour delegation some years ago—the leader of the majority party's delegation is the leader of the entire delegation—a vote was held between Lord Prescott and Chris McCafferty. Will the Minister explain to the House how the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) was chosen as the leader-designate not only of the Conservative delegation but of the entire delegation? How does that process work—is it election or appointment?

Dr Coffey: Given that the Conservatives have a majority in the House of Commons, I believe that the decision was made by the Prime Minister as leader of the Conservative party. I am not privy to all the ins and outs of how Labour Members decide who they select or appoint to various Committees or Assembly delegations. I do not know about the election to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but I am not aware that it was an election of the whole House. On his logic, it probably should have been, given that the whole House elects Committee Chairs. I am aware that the Labour delegation was uncontested within the parliamentary Labour party in 2010, but I do not know what happened this year.

I have outlined how the Council of Europe has certain guidelines and demonstrated how we have met them. As a consequence, I believe that the delegation is perfectly in order. The delegation has been chosen in this way for many years, and we believe that this is still the right way to nominate the parliamentary delegation, as it is not a Select Committee. I should remind right

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

hon. and hon. Members that we also have parliamentary delegations to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, NATO and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, which is meeting today. The UK and this Parliament are at risk of losing influence at an important time.

The Government do not support the motion. I therefore encourage my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) to seek the leave of the House to withdraw the motion, or not to give voice to the motion at the end of the debate. I encourage my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) to do the same with regard to his amendment.

6.3 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I will be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker. When the Government, in a system without the separation of powers, choose to use their dominance against the legislature, one of the things they are very good at is making very important issues of principle into trivial or procedural matters. This is painted as an introverted, esoteric issue about the Council of Europe. I have no interest whatsoever in the Council of Europe, and I do not ever wish to be on the Council of Europe delegation, but God bless those who do. The question at the heart of the issue could not, however, be more significant—whether Members of the House can elect their own delegates and do so in a secret ballot, rather than letting Front Benchers decide who is to represent the House of Commons on such organisations. The use of a secret ballot in an open franchise is as fundamental an issue as one can get.

On the back of that, I want to make a short and simple point. There are many new Members in the House, several of whom on my side of the House or on both sides of the House may think that having a secret ballot must surely have been the tradition of the House for 50, 100 or 200 years. No, the idea that Members are capable enough of electing their own members of Select Committees—such as you, Madam Deputy Speaker, who served with great distinction on the Select Committee that I chaired in the last Parliament—is six years old. The fact that we can do that and that Select Committee Chairs can themselves be elected in a secret ballot, within the main parties or within all parties in this Parliament, has been part of our environment only for about five years.

My anxiety is that if we do not hold the line on this issue, there could well be slippage back to the days when a particular important person, the independent-minded Chair of the Social Security and Health Committees, Sir Nicholas Winterton was eased out—in fact, rather publicly pushed out—by his side. On my side of the House, one of the most distinguished Select Committee Chairs, Gwyneth Dunwoody, had to fight, hanging on by her fingernails, to the Chair that she had made such an important part of this House. If I may say so, what had hitherto been rather a backwater, the Transport Committee, became one of the key places in which issues were fought out in the House. We could return to those days very quickly unless colleagues in all parties hang on to the principle that they can elect their own representatives.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): The hon. Gentleman was part of the original constitutional Select Committee, the Wright Committee, which recommended that all Committees of this House should be elected. Does this whole incident not demonstrate that not only should such European committees be elected by the House, but House Committees should be elected as well?

Mr Allen: That is absolutely right. We have already seen slippage. I will not go into any detail, but the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee was abolished by Government Front Benchers who decided that they did not want it to continue with some of its work. We have seen stalling for six years on the creation of a House business Committee, to which all parties said they would sign up. We are now seeing an erosion of the principle that the secret ballot should rule when we appoint colleagues in the House to representative positions outside it. This is an area of very great concern. It should concern Members of independent mind and none. Members should hold the line on this very significant issue. It has been painted as trivial, but it is actually one of the most fundamental things a Parliament can discuss.

6.8 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who has expressed exactly why this debate is so important and who has consistently put Parliament first.

I have come across the Council of Europe on only two occasions. One was early on when the deputy Chief Whip said to me, “Peter, we’d rather like you to go to the Council of Europe.” Then I found out why: it was not because I would be a star on the Council of Europe, but because I would be sent away from this House and not be aggravating the Whips. May I suggest that some of the Members who have now been removed were put there for that reason?

The principle is not the fact that three Members, who would by convention have been reappointed, have now been removed. That is not the reason why I am supporting the amendment so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady)—not the original motion, although my name appears on it. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) that, in practical terms, if the main motion were passed it would be difficult to get our delegation in place quickly enough, and there would be a gap. That is why we should all support our amendment.

The amendment is a sensible compromise—we would get our delegation appointed tomorrow, effectively, because Mr Speaker has said that he wants to know the will of the House before submitting the names, and then we would have elections next year. That would solve the problem.

I return to the simple point that we are talking about the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It is not the Ministers who sit on it: it is parliamentarians. It represents this House, so this House must choose. The delegation should not be appointed by the Executive. This is clearly House business and not party political. I am sure that when we vote the Government will do what

they have done with so many Backbench business motions and ask the payroll vote to abstain, letting Members who are not part of the Executive express their view on what is clearly a House matter.

Mr Graham Brady: Given that my hon. Friend has kindly indicated that he is transferring his support from the main motion to amendment (b), does he share my concern that the Minister only advanced reasons not to support the main motion? I have yet to hear an argument, from those on the Front Bench or elsewhere, why amendment (b) would be a problem.

Mr Bone: I am grateful for that intervention. The Minister rightly explained why the original motion would not work, but she did not want to express an opinion on the amendment because it is not something on which the Government should express an opinion. They will stay out of it and let Members, especially Conservatives, make their own minds up.

I pay tribute to the Council of Europe. When I was chairman of the all-party parliamentary group against human trafficking, it was not the European Union promoting reform: it was the Council of Europe. The original convention on the rights of people against human trafficking was a Council of Europe convention, representing 47 countries. I remember arguing from the Opposition Benches that the then Labour Government should ratify it.

This is not a minor matter: it is important. It is about parliamentary democracy, and is in line with what the Prime Minister said so eloquently in his fixing politics speech. The amendment is also in line with my party's manifesto and, more importantly, supporting it is the right thing to do.

6.13 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I am a little embarrassed to interrupt this—what can we call it—family argument or lovers tiff. I cannot concur that debates on the inner workings of the Conservative party are the best way to use valuable time in this Chamber, but I welcome Conservative Back Benchers' newfound belief in democracy. I just think that they should go further and give the public more of a say in important issues. The irony cannot be lost on Tory MPs that they are arguing here to give themselves a vote on electing delegates to the Council of Europe while their peers in the other place are voting to deny 16 and 17-year-olds a vote on the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union.

Of course, those Conservative Members who are arguing for democracy are correct—that almost goes without saying. I am not as polite as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), who is no longer in his place. In the Labour party, we appoint our delegates through elections and we have an excellent set of representatives to show for it. We are happy to see changes made if other parties wish to adopt our system.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is meant to be made up of parliamentary representatives, not Government representatives. Delegates must either be elected or appointed in a way decided by Parliament—neither of which has happened here. Instead, it is clear to everyone that the Prime Minister is simply punishing

those Members who disagree with him. That is no way to go about selecting representatives for our country. The Assembly is, after all, meant to be a representation of Europe's Parliaments, not a group of those in the good books of Europe's Prime Ministers and Presidents.

The situation is becoming embarrassing for the UK. The Standing Committee for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will meet at the end of this month, as has been mentioned, and we still do not have a representative. That means that the UK could be unable to make a contribution when the rest of Europe is debating refugees and migrants, justice and human rights, tackling violence against women and other major issues facing the continent. The UK needs to have a seat at the table when the Assembly is deciding on policies that will affect our country, but once again the internal squabbles of the Conservative party are weakening the UK's voice in Europe. The Government have had months to sort this out: instead, they have created this unnecessary mess. The Government need to sort out this disagreement with their MPs before it damages our place at the table in Europe.

6.16 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): How wonderful it is to observe at close quarters the development and progress of democracy. When I was only an engineer, I used to think that the development of high principle happened through careful thought and gentle means well in advance; I wonder now whether democracy is actually often advanced through the irritation of those in power when their rights are trespassed on by those in higher office.

Of course, these circumstances bear no relation to the great events of 800 years ago, in which a tyrant imposed his will on self-interested barons, out of which emerged Magna Carta. Today, we wish to uphold a principle that the House has already accepted: that we elect our own representatives in matters that are not Government business.

I accept that the original motion, which I signed, involves a little of the revolutionary fervour of 800 years ago. I have been persuaded by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) to dampen down that revolutionary fire and accept his compromise amendment. If my revolutionary spirit had not been dampened down sufficiently, my hon. Friend the Minister would have quenched it completely. In endorsing amendment (b), therefore, I hope that the Government will also support it wholeheartedly so that we do not have to have a Division. In the event that we do, I will certainly vote for amendment (b) and encourage colleagues to do so also.

6.18 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): How sad it is that we find ourselves in this position, in large part because certain Ministers decided to punish individuals who sat on the Council of Europe for voting with their consciences on key issues. It is as simple as that. We have heard from the individuals themselves that that reason for their removal has been described to them. We have had no denials from Front Benchers on that point, so we do not have to rely on reports in *The Daily Telegraph* and hearsay: we know why this has happened, and it is a great shame that it has.

[Mr John Baron]

We should remind ourselves that we are talking about the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It should be up to Parliaments to elect, by whatever means they deem fit and sensible, their representatives to the Council of Europe. But here we have this ludicrous tussle between the Executive and the legislature. Ministers have dug a hole; they would now be best advised to stop digging and accept amendment (b), to resolve the situation.

We must come back to the fundamental principle in relation to parliamentarians and Back Benchers on issues of this sort. The Council of Europe, 47 nations coming together, expects its parliamentary assemblies to be made up of Back Benchers who are elected by each other and are able to express their views. We should remind ourselves that that is what the Council of Europe is about. That is how the vast majority of other parliamentary assemblies go about their business. We need to catch up with that fundamental principle in relation to the Executive and the legislature, particularly when Ministers decide to punish individuals for expressing views against the Government.

This matter is about the Council of Europe, but it is also about something much bigger: getting the right balance between the Executive and the legislature. We have an opportunity to take a small step forward in that direction this evening, which is why I encourage the House to support amendment (b), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady).

6.20 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I am very grateful to be called so late in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

For the benefit of the House, I want to place on the record, as a member of the Backbench Business Committee, that the application for the debate came to us in a cross-party manner. It was not presented purely by Government Members; it was a cross-party application. That should be put on the record clearly from the point of view of the Backbench Business Committee.

6.21 pm

Mr Paterson: We have had a most interesting debate. I endorse those last comments: Members from six parties, I think, signed the original motion.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) made some very interesting comments. I do not entirely accept his gloomy view that it is impossible to organise a swift election at short notice—given the competence of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), I think an election could be put forward very rapidly—but he made sensible and practical points about all the important work being undertaken down the road at the Council of Europe. It is not good that the UK is currently not represented.

As the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) said, we have clearly won the point. It is appropriate for Governments to appoint Ministers to a body representing 47 Governments, but Parliaments should elect the delegates to a parliamentary body that exists to scrutinise and hold to account 47 Governments.

I learnt about amendment (b), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West, only as I got off an aeroplane at lunchtime. I sense it has some support across the House. We are not clear on what the Government are going to do. I will wait and see whether my hon. Friend is prepared to press his amendment to a Division. It is probably our best chance for a sensible compromise to keep the delegation doing the important work that my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet requests and to give us a proper election system down the road.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 34, Noes 171.

Division No. 122]

[6.23 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam
Allen, Mr Graham
Baron, Mr John
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Mr Graham
Burrowes, Mr David
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Sir William
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Crausby, Mr David
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Philip
Flynn, Paul
Gray, Mr James
Hermon, Lady
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Lamb, rh Norman
Leigh, Sir Edward
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lucas, Caroline
Nuttall, Mr David
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pursglove, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Stringer, Graham
Turner, Mr Andrew
Vickers, Martin
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wragg, William

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Mr Steve Baker and
Mr Peter Bone**

NOES

Andrew, Stuart
Atkins, Victoria
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Benyon, Richard
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Boles, Nick
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brazier, Mr Julian
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Chalk, Alex
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie

Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Evans, Graham
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg

Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howlett, Ben
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackintosh, David
 Mak, Mr Alan
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Newton, Sarah

Nokes, Caroline
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pugh, John
 Quin, Jeremy
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt

Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Margot James and
George Hollingbery

Question accordingly negated.

Main question put and negated.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):
 On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As
 someone who does not follow the interminable petty
 disputes within the Conservative party—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.
 I cannot hear the hon. Gentleman. People should not
 be speaking behind the Chair.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker,
 for a second chance. For those of us who do not follow
 the lovers tiffs within the Conservative party, will you
 explain which wing of the Conservative party actually
 won that vote?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, I cannot explain that to
 the hon. Gentleman; I think he knows, like the rest of
 the House, that, very fortunately, that is not a point of
 order for the Chair.

Mr Graham Allen: Further to that point of order,
 Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it possible for the Chair to
 inform the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire
 (Pete Wishart) that he would have better understood
 how to vote and what the discussion was about, had he
 attended the debate—rather than coming in two minutes
 before the end?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Very fortunately, the matter
 of Members being in the Chamber or not is also not for
 the Chair. On a point of information, however, I should
 say that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire
 (Pete Wishart) was here for a fair amount of the debate,
 so I am sure he understood as well as anyone.

Famagusta

6.37 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I beg to move—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Members are being exceedingly discourteous to the hon. Gentleman, who is trying to move the motion.

Mr Burrowes: I beg to move,

That this House supports the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant Security Council Resolutions and the High Level Agreements; endorses the Declaration of the European Parliament of 14 February 2012 on the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants; notes that the city of Famagusta in the Republic of Cyprus was captured by the invading Turkish forces in August 1974, that a section of Famagusta was then sealed off and remains uninhabited, under the direct control of the Turkish military, and that the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants would facilitate efforts toward a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem; further notes the 1979 High Level Agreement and UN Security Council Resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992) and the 2008 Report of the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament on Petition 733/2004; calls on the government of Turkey to act according to those UN Security Council Resolutions and Report Recommendations and return Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants, who must resettle under conditions of security and peace; urges the Government, as a guarantor power of Cyprus, to promote Turkey's cooperation; and directs the Speaker to forward this Resolution to President Nicos Anastasiades, Mr Mustafa Akinci, the UN Secretary General and the government of Turkey.

The massacre in Paris is rightly dominating public and parliamentary attention, so the question might be asked, "Why is a motion about Cyprus being debated today?" I could reply with a phrase commonly used by many of my Cypriot constituents: why not? In fact, Cypriots have been asking why not for more than 40 years, since the occupation and division of Cyprus in 1974. Why not justice for Cyprus? Other divided and occupied countries have seen freedoms over those 40 or so years, but Cyprus remains one of the longest-running unresolved issues in British foreign policy.

This issue matters to my constituents because I represent the most Cypriots, both Greek and Turkish, in the world. I am proud to represent them, but it is sad that nowhere else in the world do so many Greek and Turkish Cypriots live freely side by side, working, socialising and trading with each other—in my constituency, they live together along Green Lanes, but in Cyprus they are divided by the green line.

Cyprus remains one of the most militarised places per head of population anywhere in the world. When we think of the current conflicts around the world, that is an extraordinary fact. When we note the tens of thousands of Turkish troops in the north of Cyprus, we have to ask ourselves why this is continuing, day after day, year after year. We know that Cyprus is a member of the European Union, yet it is tragically and intolerably divided and occupied. That provides the context of the motion before us today.

Why should consideration of this issue fall to this particular Parliament? As we know, Britain has a significant historical interest in Cyprus, as well as a legal interest as one of the guarantor powers. In recent months and days, Cyprus stands as an obvious strategic interest,

given its location in a troubled region, and it is home to sovereign base areas that are significant for the wider world. We know, too, that RAF Tornados are based there, conducting operations, and there might be further ones to come.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this important debate. He mentions Dhekelia and Akrotiri as the sovereign base areas, and he will know that previous Cypriot Governments, if not the current one, were very keen to get their hands on those sovereign base areas. To what extent does my hon. Friend think attention is taken away from those areas by the current conflict between the Turkish and Cypriot sides? Once that is resolved, which I hope it soon will be, does he fear that attention might refocus on Dhekelia and Akrotiri?

Mr Burrowes: I should declare an interest as a member of the Conservative Friends of Cyprus, which recently visited the country, returning at the weekend. Cyprus has a Conservative President, President Anastasiades, who has taken a very sensible view of the sovereign base areas. Indeed, an important agreement was reached with the British Government on appropriate property development to support Cyprus on the road to economy recovery. This was a very pragmatic and appropriate use of those base areas, showing a keen understanding of the ongoing strategic interests of those base areas for wider security in the region. I think Cyprus is in good hands, and we hope for a comprehensive settlement, which, together with our ongoing strategic interest, could make Cyprus a beacon to other nations, providing the stability the region needs so much.

This House has conducted a number of debates on Cyprus, many of which were secured by me and by other hon. Members whom I see here. What makes this particular debate different is that we have a substantive motion, and I would like to thank the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to it. The basis of the motion is, in many ways, public support, with a petition signed by 50,000 Greek and Turkish Cypriots being presented to the Prime Minister back in 2012. It follows up the declaration of the European Parliament of 14 February 2012, calling for the return of Famagusta. If such a motion can be good for the European Parliament, it can certainly be good for our British Parliament.

We often say in this place that our debates are timely. That is certainly true of the particular motion before us—not just because six of my hon. Friends who are in their places today have just returned from a visit with the Conservative Friends of Cyprus, but because the two leaders of Cyprus are undertaking an intense period of negotiation this month to reach a settlement to the Cyprus problem.

Our meetings with both Greek and Turkish Cypriots revealed an encouraging positive approach to the talks. Indeed, Ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis, the Greek Cypriot negotiator, described it as the "best chance ever". Very pertinently, he said that if we do not succeed now, "we may never succeed". That echoes the Foreign Secretary's remarks a couple of months ago, who also has great timing as I understand he will be visiting Cyprus on Thursday. He said that the stars were "optimistically aligned" to create the chance for a settlement, the like of which we have not seen in decades. I thus

look forward to hearing the Minister affirming the Government's support for the comprehensive settlement, which we need as soon as possible.

Why the particular focus of this motion on Famagusta? The reason is all too clear, as it was to my hon. Friends who were in Cyprus on Saturday and saw for themselves, as I did, very visible on the beach of Famagusta the fenced-off area of Varosha.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I declare an interest, too, because I accompanied my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on the recent trip to Cyprus. Famagusta has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, and they would play a strong part in the economy. I know that because my constituents in South East Cornwall also have some beautiful beaches. Will my hon. Friend join me in encouraging both sides to come to an agreement so that we do not see these beaches divided by a dreadful barrier, with part of Famagusta being a ghost town?

Mr Burrowes: My hon. Friend speaks with some experience about tourism and the beautiful coastlines that benefit from it. She is right to say how important it is that Famagusta, which previously generated 53% of Cyprus's tourism, should no longer be a ghost town—a sharp contrast in what was the jewel of the Mediterranean. Every day that Famagusta remains as it is is a day of injustice, which is why we must not tolerate it. While we appropriately recognise and support the comprehensive settlement, we must recognise that Famagusta and its return is a key element in facilitating such a settlement.

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate; I know how hard he fights for his Cypriot constituents, whether they be of Turkish or Greek heritage. Does he agree with me that Famagusta is a visible reminder that Cyprus is the only EU country occupied by a foreign power—Turkey—and that we cannot allow Turkey to accede to the EU until it withdraws from Cyprus?

Mr Burrowes: My hon. Friend has been a champion of these causes over a number of years. The Famagustans in the Public Gallery are acutely aware of that very fact. They, along with 40,000 others, fled their town. They recognise that they have lost not only their town but their freedom and justice. We all recognise that this is a scar on Europe—a scar that must be sorted out, sooner rather than later. It is the visible reality of a divided, occupied island that stands out, but it also offers the hope and opportunity to provide credibility for a settlement.

That is recognised by all the communities who formed the basis for the motion by signing the petition. Together, they recognise the importance of this act of justice. They have called for the two UN Security Council resolutions 550 and 780 to be properly fulfilled. Sadly, Turkey has ignored that. I invite the Minister to let us know what steps have been taken to ensure that we get co-operation from Turkey. We must see co-operation to ensure that this comprehensive settlement is truly credible and will have a reality. Britain has a key role to play in securing it, and providing assurance about the safety and security that everyone wants.

The return of Famagusta was described during our visits as a game-changer.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)
rose—

Mr Burrowes: Before I explain why it is a game-changer, I give way to the hon. Lady.

Catherine West: I thank the hon. Gentleman and congratulate him and his colleagues on securing this debate. Does he agree that there is a lot of cross-party support for a deal, and that we could indeed bring about the very moment when both sides come together, extending the arm of friendship and gaining a great deal of support in the region for a settlement? Does he also agree that it is good that the Cabinet Secretary has twice visited Cyprus over the last 12 months, which must also be a positive step?

Mr Burrowes: Those are all very positive steps. What we also need is to provide a reality to the agreements, given that they have been reached in the past but without meeting the approval of the public on both sides. One key way of making an agreement a reality is through Famagusta. We cannot get away from Famagusta, which is the subject of this motion. It matters. Opening the ports, run jointly by both Greek and Turkish Cypriots under the supervision of the EU or the UN, would dramatically help to support, financially, a reunited Cyprus.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): I am the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and I have just returned from a visit to the area with other members of the group. While we were there, we met the President, Mr Akinci, and other politicians, including the Prime Minister. They seemed very optimistic that there would be a deal and settlement very shortly. We also met and discussed these matters with the British ambassador in Cyprus. I understand that the issue of Varosha is very much part of the discussions that have taken place there, and I sensed from the discussions in which I engaged that it was hoped that, sooner rather than later, there would be a settlement of some kind.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Lady will have plenty of opportunities to make a speech later: the Labour Benches are not overpopulated. It is bad form to make a very long intervention.

Mr Burrowes: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention. As she said, and as we observed ourselves during our visit, there is real positivity among both Turkish and Greek Cypriots. I had visited the area many times before, but on this occasion there was clearly genuine support for Mr Akinci and Prime Minister Anastasiades, who were making good progress. We should wish them the very best in their endeavours.

It is also important for us to note the role of Turkey, and the need for proper co-operation. Turkey's opening up of ports is a good sign. If Turkey removed its troops from the island and recognised the Ankara protocol and the customs union—which would result from the opening up of the port of Famagusta—that would allow proper recognition of the need for free movement of goods and trade, and would remove obstacles from Turkey's path to accession to the European Union. Those are all important aspects of the proper, comprehensive settlement that would provide reassurance.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: During our visit, we saw churches desecrated and graves robbed. Does my hon. Friend not think that a settlement would help the people of Cyprus to rebuild religious tolerance and understanding in all the communities on the island?

Mr Burrowes: I agree. There is much sadness on what is a beautiful island. There are humanitarian issues such as religious and cultural destruction, and the issue—which may well be mentioned later—of missing persons and the need to find truth for relatives who still have no information about their loved ones. There is also the humanitarian issue of Famagusta, which demands all our attention and demands justice.

I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government support the motion. He would not have to be too bold, because he would have the backing of the Prime Minister, who wrote to me on 29 June 2012 about the petition which, in effect, referred to this motion. He wrote:

“we fully agree with the principle behind it; that measures to build confidence between the communities in Cyprus can have great value in facilitating efforts towards a comprehensive settlement.”

He also wrote:

“We fully support all the relevant Security Council resolutions, including UNSCR 550 and UNSCR 789.”

So there is the Prime Minister’s backing. The Minister simply needs to say that he agrees with the Prime Minister.

Time is short. Others wish to speak, and I shall leave it to them—with your leave, Madam Deputy Speaker—to raise a number of issues that may go beyond the motion. Let me end by saying this. I left Cyprus at the weekend, along with a number of my hon. Friends. Many people who visit a tourist destination such as Cyprus leave with souvenirs such as duty-free goods—they may even try to leave with tortoises—but I brought back a list of questions for the Prime Minister, which I shall now read.

Will the Government support access for experts to Varosha, so that they can assess the damage and the requirements for restoration and regeneration? If we are serious about the return of Famagusta and a comprehensive settlement, we should be serious about enabling experts to go there now.

In relation to our guarantor powers, will Britain indicate that external countries’ guarantees have no future following a comprehensive settlement? Do the Government stand ready to help following settlement negotiations when intractable issues may require Turkish co-operation?

There has been good bi-communal progress on the issue of missing persons. The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus is an exemplar, providing support in areas of conflict across the world, working not only with other committees in directing that support, but with lab technicians from both communities. It has done painstaking work in seeking information and DNA that can be linked with missing persons. There has been good news recently: the Turkish army is to provide access to 30 military bases over the next three years, which will provide important information. Will the Government go further, however, and continue to ask the Turkish Government to provide information that is still being kept in their archives? Relatives of missing

people rally here in Parliament every July. Can we persuade Turkey to provide that information about their loved ones?

I do not propose to speak for much longer, because others wish to contribute. This is a historic motion, which not only sets the scene for a general debate, but makes it crystal clear that we stand full square behind a comprehensive settlement that will be good for Cyprus, good for the region, and good for Britain. We can make that a reality if we provide justice for Famagusta and return it to its lawful inhabitants.

6.56 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on securing the debate. As he said, it is extremely timely, given that six of my colleagues and I travelled to the divided island of Cyprus only last week. It was not my first visit, and, indeed, it was not the first time that I had crossed the border and entered the occupied territory, but it was my first opportunity to travel to Famagusta.

I could speak about many issues that arose during that trip. I could speak about our encounter with the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus—which people found very moving—about stolen artefacts, or about access to property or land. However, I want to make just two points. First, I want to describe my observation of a situation on the island which I found truly inexplicable. Secondly, I want to talk about the effect of the huge military presence in the occupied zone.

Let me begin by talking about the beaches, particularly those in Famagusta. To witness what I can only describe as a ghost town, frozen in time, would be interesting if it did not affect so many people in the here and now. Many people are unable to visit the graves of their relatives or friends, access their properties or businesses, or even visit their own beaches without harassment.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): There are 371 people—mostly conscripts from this country—buried in Wayne’s Keep. We must ensure that we have access to that graveyard and look after it. Those men were killed mainly by Greek Cypriot terrorist fighters, and we must not forget that.

Dr Offord: My hon. Friend is right. As the record shows, I have asked parliamentary questions about the issue, because we have our own graves in that country. I shall not open a debate about the historical aspects of the island—we realise that there are many sides to all the stories that we can tell—but we are very concerned about the graves of all the people on the island, be they Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots or British service personnel who died and were buried there.

I can name some of the people who have been affected. These are not names that I have plucked out of the air. There is Maria, who was formerly a regular visitor to the beach; there is Antonis, who is denied access to his grandfather’s property; and there is Costas, who is unable to visit the King George hotel, where his father worked for more than 30 years. Those are all real people with stories to tell. Owing to the behaviour of the authorities, which we experienced, I shall not reveal their surnames, because I fear that there would be further repercussions against them.

What I found striking about Famagusta was not just the sight of hundreds of residential and commercial properties lying empty, but the simple issue of access to the beach. I think that my hon. Friends the Members for Gower (Byron Davies), for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) will relate to this, given that they have coastal constituencies.

Walking along the sand in Famagusta means having to enter a contested area, alongside the overbearing corrugated iron and barbed-wire fences which enclose the tower blocks that surround the beach and give it the air of a militarised zone. This barrier extends across and alongside the beach until it meets the curvature of the water's edge and then enters the sea, preventing anyone from moving along the coast. Both that and the mines in the sea ensure that there is no access. To someone who grew up on a beach—literally—I would find that very difficult to explain. Even if someone could navigate that, the military presence in the watchtower will shout at them to get away from the fence and certainly not to take any pictures. I wonder whether the Turkish authorities are embarrassed by that sight. I leave it to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and other Members in the Chamber to decide whether that is so; I certainly think that it is.

In an attempt to intimidate us even further, the Turkish authorities had another security presence on the beach. He was quite a peculiar person, in his own shorts and with comb-over long grey hair. He marched around the beach at great pace, walking closely by us to intimidate and to see what we were doing, and all the time we could hear the Turkish border guards shouting at him through his earpiece at the top of their voices. It was one of the most peculiar scenes I have ever seen.

It is not just the environment in Famagusta that has been physically manipulated by the Turkish forces; so, too, have the people who have been relocated from mainland Turkey—the settlers, known as the *Türkiyeli*. Northern Cyprus's first official census performed in 1996 showed that there were more than 200,000 people in the occupied territory. A decade later that had increased by 65,000. A third census was carried out by the United Nations in 2011, and it recorded a population of over 294,000, but these results have been disputed by many political parties, trade unions and indeed local newspapers. Accusations of under-counting were made because the TNRC—Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—had said to Turkey that there were more than 700,000 people in the occupied territory in order to gain access to greater funds. What we do know as a fact is that over 50% of the people who come from the mainland have no common heritage or culture with the indigenous Turkish or Cypriot people.

We often hear in this Chamber—I am sure the Minister has heard me say it to him many times—about the settlements in Israel and how they are illegal under international law. I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you are glad that I will not be opening up that debate, but I never hear criticism of Turkey for doing the same thing, yet its actions are a clear breach of the fourth Geneva convention. Article 49 makes it clear that an occupying power may not forcibly deport protected persons or deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into occupied territory. Turkey has done this; Turkey has clearly breached this convention and there can be no dispute that immigration to the occupied territory is unlawful.

What is not disputed is the number of Turkish troops in the north. In 2013 the Cyprus Center for Strategic Studies estimated that 74,000 troops were based in the occupied territory in Cyprus, an area of 1,295 square miles. To put that into context, in April the UK had 87,060 Army service personnel and we have a land mass of 83,700 square miles. The contrast is obvious and illustrates Turkey's determination to maintain its military presence in Cyprus.

Indeed, on Saturday we witnessed the over-the-top display of soldiers, trucks and howitzers as traffic was stopped to allow army personnel to travel through Famagusta. It was clear that this was purely a public display of weaponry designed to do little more than intimidate the indigenous Turkish and Cypriot population into not seeking the removal of the Turkish army in the occupied territory.

The European Parliament has repeatedly voiced its support for the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants. The resettlement of Varosha and Famagusta on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions would have a positive effect in seeking a comprehensive, viable solution to the Cyprus problem, as it would create a tangible example of co-operation and coexistence between Greek and Turkish Cypriots on the island and serve as a symbol of future harmony and prosperity.

Famagusta may be a forbidden, occupied town in Cyprus, but it will never be a forgotten community among its lawful inhabitants and its friends in this place.

7.4 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on securing this debate and on his brilliant leadership of the recent delegation, of which I was privileged to be a member. I should tell the House that I found none of my colleagues disagreeable on that trip. My hon. Friend exhibited true leadership skills, and if ever an hon. Friend were fit for office, it is he.

I am delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) will be responding to this debate, because I know him well, and he is not a Minister who will respond with a lot of waffle. I anticipate that he will agree with everything said in this debate, and given that, as I understand it, the Foreign Secretary will be visiting Cyprus in a short while, the timing of this debate could not be better.

When I first became a Member of Parliament, I was taken to the island of Cyprus. I have no constituency interest at all—very few Cypriots, whether Greek or Turkish, live in my constituency—but when I visited that tiny island I could not believe that it was divided by a green line. This debate focuses on Famagusta and I can best liken it to “Great Expectations” and Miss Havisham. It is very much a time warp. It is very distressing to see the buildings that have stood empty, decaying since 1974, which is an absolute disgrace.

At the start of the visit, I was very cynical about the prospect of a settlement, because I had heard it all before. As we all know, there is no problem between Cypriots, whether they live on the north or south side. It is when the two mother countries start to intervene that things become challenging. However, I was very impressed by the meetings we had, and particularly with what the acting President and the negotiator had to say. I therefore

[*Sir David Amess*]

think that that will be the last time that any British parliamentary group will visit a divided island. I am very optimistic that in two or three months' time we will at long last see a united island. I therefore again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate on his timing of our trip.

We could go back to 1974 and say that it was a disaster that should never have happened—we can often be wise after the event—and it is indeed a tragedy that those events occurred then and that all these years later the situation has not been resolved, but I have decided that it is no good going on about the past; we have to draw a line under it, as Cypriots on both sides have decided to do.

I was very pleased that on 18 September our Prime Minister met the Greek Cypriot President and there was a general meeting of minds on the issue. I believe there is a need for Turkey to send specific signals through specific actions that would enhance the ongoing settlement process. The recent election of the new leader on the northern side is widely seen as having significantly increased the prospect of a solution.

Mrs Murray: Does my hon. Friend agree that this also presents an opportunity for the missing persons to be located and identified? We have seen for ourselves the bones of both Greek and Cypriot persons, which had seemingly been strewn across tables, being sorted in the anthropological laboratory. It should be a priority for both sides to come together so those who lost loved ones can lay them to rest.

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, although I have not seen the details of the DNA testing that was carried out on the bones.

Returning to the election of the new leader, his first act on assuming office was to abolish the entry visa for visitors to northern Cyprus. The requirement for such a visa had long angered Greek Cypriots, so this was a very positive move. Of course there are obstacles to overcome, relating to governance, security, territory and—as my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate and for Hendon (Dr Offord) have mentioned—refugees. However, if relations continue to be positive, as they certainly seem to be, I am optimistic that with the support of the UK—which I was told over and over again was absolutely crucial—there could be a fairly swift unification, perhaps within two to three months.

The potential impact on Greek Cypriots of the return of Famagusta cannot be overestimated. It would be very significant indeed. It would be an enormous confidence-builder for Greek Cypriots; it would also be an important humanitarian move that would allow the return of 40,000 people to their homes. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) has mentioned missing persons. I think I am right in saying that about 1,500 Greek Cypriots and about 500 Turkish Cypriots are missing.

We were all shocked by the detail of the work that is going into tracing those missing people. We were taken to the laboratories. If any of us had had a loved one whose bones were somewhere in the room, it would have been overwhelming, but we managed to step back because we did not know any of the people involved.

I had had no idea of the forensic detail of the work, and the House should know that it is a very expensive operation. The Department for International Development is stretched on this issue, but if there is anyone who could lend financial support to the programme, it would mean a great deal to all those concerned.

Mr Burrows: Anyone who visits Cyprus would surely be encouraged to see the work of the bi-communal committee on missing persons. The laboratory that we visited is on British land, and I understand that we have given it support in the form of a vehicle and in other ways. It is also encouraging that the Foreign Secretary will visit that laboratory. It will be good for him to see how we might provide as much support, either financial or in kind, as is necessary to obtain the information that the relatives of those missing persons need.

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend makes a wonderful point. He is absolutely right about the timing of the Foreign Secretary's visit. It was explained to us that we will never find all the missing persons, but it would mean a great deal if that work could be continued for the foreseeable future.

Bob Stewart: I am the chairman of Remembering Srebrenica, which works on tracing people who went missing in Srebrenica. It is not that difficult to get the DNA off a bone and compare it with a DNA sample taken from a close relative. Those are the two parts of the process, which can be done quite quickly under the auspices of the United Nations.

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, but it was explained to us that there is a difficulty, in that some of the burial grounds are now under multi-storey buildings such as housing developments. It is therefore not quite so straightforward as we might hope.

Dr Offord: May I remind my hon. Friend that finding the bones is also complicated by the fact that some have been dispersed by wild animals, some have been washed away and some have been bleached by the sun? Those that have been bleached in that way often lose their DNA.

Sir David Amess: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of that fact. The experts are doing a fantastic job, but there is a limit to how far they can go.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon also mentioned the graves. I was shocked and horrified to see that many of the Greek Cypriot graves had been totally vandalised, with their crosses broken up and the ground dug up by people searching for riches like those the Egyptians used to have. However, the Turkish graves, just opposite, were kept in magnificent order, and all through European Union funding. It is an absolute scandal. It is an insult, and the House would be well directed to find out more information about this. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate tried to get a group of volunteers to go over there to do something about the graves. This is a relatively small matter which, given the will to do it, could be put right very quickly. The lady who took us to see where her loved ones were buried broke down in our arms, and my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall comforted her.

Mrs Murray: Does my hon. Friend also acknowledge that it is not only the graveyards but the churches that have been destroyed? In my opinion, that is all part of the oppression of the people, and something really should be done to rectify the situation.

Sir David Amess: Absolutely. It was so insulting to see that one of the churches had been turned into a stable. If only we had had the archbishop or his deputy with us on those trips! That would have made it even better. I believe that we could do something about the graves.

We need to endorse the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's mission, which states:

"We work with Cyprus to implement policy on Europe and the single market, building trade for mutual growth. We support all parties in finding a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus and work together to beat international crime and threats to British and international security."

I would like to commend the Cypriot President for all his efforts on the unification of Cyprus. If all goes well, the island could be a wonderful model for coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Cyprus now has a real opportunity to reach an agreement that would be a wonderful thing for Europe and the world.

7.17 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I have not been to Cyprus. It sounds as though I might have missed a really fun trip and that you all had a really positive experience in the last couple of weeks—

Mrs Sheryll Murray: I have to say to the hon. Lady that it was not fun to see graves that had been destroyed or to see beaches with a great big barrier down the middle of them. It certainly was not a fun trip for me or for any of my colleagues.

Catherine West: I thank the hon. Lady for that clarification. Perhaps one feels a little excluded, not having visited Cyprus with the group. On this question, there is no division between us. It should be an all-party parliamentary thing, because we all want the same thing, but one cannot help but feel a little left out of the debate this evening.

I want to talk about the contribution of the Cypriot community—the Turkish speakers and the Greek speakers—to business, to local government, to catering, to IT facilities and services and to our diet in Haringey. The Mediterranean diet and the arrival of fresh fruit and veg on our high streets began the revolution towards a healthy way of life and the move away from the staple of fish and chips towards wonderful vegetables, olive oil and so on. I know that the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) will agree that north London has been greatly enriched by the diet that the Cypriots have brought us from the 1970s onwards.

On a more serious note, the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) is right to say that there has been much suffering in Cyprus. I believe that there has been suffering on both sides. Older Cypriots have told me that they want to see some kind of hopeful conclusion to what has been a terrible experience for them, before the end of their lives. They want to see that conclusion for their children and their grandchildren,

but it is not enough for them to know that it will happen at some point; they want to be part of it and to see it before they pass on.

There are sticking points, though, and Famagusta is one of them, as are the land disputes. We got close to a settlement two decades ago—

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that an important feature of our visit last week was the fact that the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots want to live together and are quite happy to do so? It is the Turkish Government who are stopping that at the moment.

Catherine West: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Certainly, both my Turkish speaking and my Greek speaking colleagues and friends in the borough of Haringey are always talking about the place of Cyprus, and we are the Friends of Cyprus. It is important to remember that sense of togetherness, and the fact that we need to bring the formalities together. We need the Cabinet Secretaries in place, and we need to live up to the reality, which I believe we can do.

Mr Burrowes: The hon. Lady emphasises that we are debating a cross-party motion. Indeed, there has been cross-party support over the years. There is also cross-party support for the Friends of Cyprus. As we are in neighbouring constituencies, she must be aware that Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots will work together and agree on lots of things, but they will not necessarily agree on Cyprus. However, on the issue of Famagusta, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have, quite uniquely in many ways, signed petitions and come together to say that this is a really good confidence-building measure that can facilitate a comprehensive settlement. That is a point that we need to keep emphasising and for which we need to encourage support.

Catherine West: That is right. We have to show that it is impossible for other Governments to ignore the huge swell of support. The most important thing is Cyprus itself. We should provide an example so that regional Governments have to support the idea.

We must bottom out the disagreements over land before we get close to a settlement. I hope we can assist with that. A number of my right hon. and hon. Friends have come along to speak this evening. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Sir Alan Meale) has played a key role for many years, working with colleagues across the piece on the environment and other such issues.

As a new Member of Parliament with a commitment to the place of Cyprus, I hope that I can now join the table. I am pleased to see that there is another hon. Lady in our midst, because my experience of other such meetings has been rather lonely. I look forward to seeing her at future events to talk about the unification of Cyprus.

7.23 pm

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Let me first say to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) that the baton—the chairmanship of the all-party group—has been smartly passed from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) to me. Either I or the hon. Member for

[Sir Roger Gale]

Mansfield (Sir Alan Meale) will certainly ensure that she gets a chance to see the position for herself. Some colleagues have seen the Berlin wall, but not everybody has seen the green line in Cyprus. Right through the centre of one of Europe's major cities is a barricade. There are several yards of barren land, with buildings going back to 1974 when everything stopped. There are 1974 cars in the car showroom, meals still on the table, and change still on the table. It is quite extraordinary. Unless colleagues have seen that for themselves, they do not understand how desperate the situation is.

It is quite wrong that, since 1974 when Turkey invaded the northern part of Cyprus, a European Union member state, Cyprus, has been occupied by an aspirant member state of the European Union, Turkey. Successive attempts to resolve the problems have failed. That is not, as has been said, because Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots do not get on together: they do by and large—well, as much as anybody else does—and they live happily side by side. There was a time, a generation and a half ago, when Greek Cypriots spoke Turkish and Turkish Cypriots spoke Greek and they used the same bars, cafes and coffee bars, they played sport together and they coexisted in the same villages in harmony.

Sadly, a generation and a half down the line, that is beginning to change. Now there is a generation of children—some of Turkish settlers and some of Greek Cypriots—who have never known the other side, have never spoken Turkish or Greek and have never shared each other's cultures, much of which is very similar. [Interruption.] I am coming to Varosha Famagusta, Madam Deputy Speaker; I am just trying to set the matter in context. By the way, I should have declared an interest as an honorary citizen of Morphou who takes part, by invitation, in the annual march.

I have been working on the Cyprus problem—as it is known—since 1983, which is when I first came into the House, and I have not seen a great deal of progress, but there is a window of opportunity now.

The leader of Northern Cyprus, Mustafa Akinci, used to be the mayor of the northern part of Nicosia when Lellos Demetriades was the mayor of Nicosia. The reason that is important is that, while everybody else was fighting, not getting on and posturing, Lellos Demetriades and Mustafa Akinci got together literally in the dead of night and planned the sewers for the whole of Nicosia, because patently, there cannot be two sewerage systems for one major city. They also planned the water systems. They even planned the road system, so that one day, looking downstream when there would be a settlement, the roads would join up, and they will.

I do not believe that Mustafa Akinci, who was capable of that degree of foresight and co-operation, is not capable of reaching a deal with Nicos Anastasiades, the current President of the Republic of Cyprus. Such a deal can, and should, happen. In the interests of the peace of the whole of the middle east and the whole of Europe, it must happen, but for it to happen, unfortunately, Turkey must agree.

Recently I have seen the welcome mat put out for Turkey. For very obvious reasons, we need Turkey at the moment. It is, for example, taking thousands and thousands of refugees from Syria and it is rightly looking for help. The idea that we can fast track Turkey into a European

Union without settling the Cyprus problem is a non-starter; it is simply a red line—or shall I say a green line? Both Front-Bench teams must use their best endeavours to seek to ensure that Turkey comes to the negotiating table and does the deal. Yes, the hon. Lady and my hon. Friends were right to say that without the settlement of the property issues there will be no settlement. Without the right of freedom of movement, there will be no settlement. Without the removal of Turkish troops from Northern Cyprus, there will be no settlement. How would it feel if we had said after the war that we would keep troops there in perpetuity? Why should the Cypriots—Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots—settle for the presence of foreign troops, even one foreign troop, on their land without invitation? If they are there by invitation, that is a different matter. The Greek troops and the Turkish troops have to leave the island.

The rest gets harder. Property is very difficult indeed, as much of the land has been built on. We know who owns the land, but who now owns the houses? It will not be easy. It will take money and it will take time, but it has to happen. The bottom line is a bi-communal and bizonal federation. That is the goal, and it is achievable, but we say to our Cypriot friends, some of whom are in the House tonight, "We are with you and we will stay with you for long as it takes."

7.30 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) not only on securing the debate but on his excellent leadership of the delegation that visited Cyprus a few days ago. It was my first visit not just to Famagusta but to Cyprus itself. It is a beautiful island and the beach at Famagusta runs Cleethorpes a close second.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: Does my hon. Friend not believe that south-east Cornwall comes above Cleethorpes?

Martin Vickers: No. I am afraid that I cannot agree with my hon. Friend, as I am sure she anticipated.

As always in countries where there is conflict and division, it is the ordinary people who suffer. We had the privilege of meeting a number of them over the past few days, including those who suffer what has already been described by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), witnessing the desecration of their churches and the vandalism of their graveyards. That scars them permanently and we must do all we can to improve that situation. It is damaging to not only those individuals but the heritage and culture of the Cypriot island and people.

I will not detain the House unnecessarily, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West has focused on the point about the committee for missing people that I wanted to highlight. This was the second time that I had visited a place such as that which we visited on Friday, where we saw bones and DNA. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) intervened earlier, and it was with him that I visited similar work being done in Bosnia this time last year. It is harrowing and the meticulous work of those involved deserves recognition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West pointed out, modest resources are needed to maintain and enhance that work and I hope that the Government

will look favourably on that request. It need not necessarily involve taxpayers' money, but could involve donations in kind from the private sector. I am sure that if the work is highlighted to a greater extent donations will be forthcoming.

Mr Burrowes: My hon. Friend might remember that it was, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) who mentioned the potential to use the good will of a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) to provide an extra digger. The digger is perhaps one of the most expensive parts of the kit needed to try to find missing persons, and that might be a useful in-kind donation.

Martin Vickers: That is exactly the point I was trying to make. If we were to make known what is required to a greater extent, I am sure that donations would be forthcoming.

It meant a great deal to me to visit the former Nicosia airport, which gives an impression of being frozen in time, as do the empty and derelict buildings in Famagusta.

Bob Stewart: I used to fly from Nicosia airport—I am that old—and I used also to go on the beaches of Famagusta as a boy. It is crucial that we get both areas functioning again. The United Nations, which has manned the green line for so long and has done so well, could well be redeployed to help with Famagusta and open up the airport. That would end the sterility that has faced these areas for the past 40 years.

Martin Vickers: I entirely agree. The island is heavily dependent on tourism and every opportunity to enhance that would surely be welcome.

At the airport, as elsewhere, we saw bullet-scarred buildings that were a constant reminder of what happened 41 years ago. What purpose does the continuation of this division serve? I urge our Government to do everything possible to encourage and support the Cypriot people.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Cyprus is a fantastic country and I have been on delegations and holidays there, but the Turkish Government have continually ignored UN Security Council resolutions on peace. What additional pressure can the UK Government put on the Turkish Government to try to bring this dispute to an end that satisfies everyone?

Martin Vickers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I hope that it will be the Minister who will enlighten us about what additional help, support and encouragement can be given. It is entirely true that it is the Turkish Government who have seemingly been the blockage for so many years, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West said a few minutes ago, if there ever was a possibility of a settlement it seems now to be within our grasp.

Dr Murrison: Does my hon. Friend not agree that there were in fact two midwives to this situation? One, of course, was Turkey, and I support the motion and its condemnation of the actions of the Turkish Government, but there was also Greece. In 1974, Greece's militarism was very much part of destabilising Archbishop Makarios and introducing an unpleasant junta, albeit for a short period. One can perhaps have a little bit of sympathy for Turkey, and so far the debate has been rather one-sided.

Martin Vickers: Yes, of course, it takes two parties—two to tango, as it were. Both sides must be willing to come to an agreement.

Dr Offord: Although there is some history of Turkish troops invading the island, that was 36 years ago. It is time for them to go now. Even their behaviour on our visit, when we were followed by security forces who photographed us, sought our names and determined when we were leaving and what we were doing, shows that the Turkish Government have not really changed.

Martin Vickers: Yes, there was a slightly sinister feel to some parts of our trip as a result of being followed and photographed by the Turkish authorities.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I apologise for not being present at the opening of the debate, but I had other duties elsewhere. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that for the first time in 41 years settlement looks closer than it has, but does he not accept that in order for such a settlement to take place there must be some recognition on both sides that there have been failings on both sides before anyone can move forward?

Martin Vickers: Yes, of course. As I mentioned in response to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), there clearly have been failings on both sides but it takes two to come together and reach a conclusion. That is now within our grasp and we should do everything possible to achieve it.

7.39 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and his co-signatories on tabling the motion for debate. The division of Cyprus for more than 40 years is often referred to as a frozen conflict. The motion gives some sense of how long the situation has gone on for. It mentions the UN resolutions, the high-level agreements reached, and the efforts made, and as it says, all that effort was aimed at a "comprehensive settlement"—that is the phrase that is continually used—of the problem of the island's division. The aim, as the motion says, is

"a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality" guaranteed for the whole population of the island.

Bob Stewart: I would like to put on record that one reason why the conflict was frozen for a very long time was that the actions of so many United Nations troops on the green line stopped the conflict from breaking out again. It may have been sterile and boring for the troops, but by goodness, they have prevented people from dying.

Mr McFadden: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I suppose he is gently reminding us that a frozen conflict is better than an unfrozen one, without a settlement. The frozen nature of the conflict is perhaps at its most graphic in the city of Famagusta, and specifically in Varosha, where homes, hotels and other buildings have lain dormant for 40 years, trapped in a specific moment in time. Those buildings are still standing, but year after year, they have been devoid of the people and the changes that give a city life; they are overgrown with

[Mr McFadden]

vegetation, and are gradually rotting away. It is no accident that the term “ghost town” has been used to describe it, both in tonight’s debate and before it.

It is of course right that the city and its properties be returned to their rightful owners. When people left, they thought they would be able to return within days, or perhaps weeks. They have had no access to their homes, businesses and other places of real importance to them for more than 40 years. People lost their houses, land, money, and access to places of worship. It is no wonder that this enforced absence is a source of such heartbreak and sorrow to all those affected. They are right to not only hope but expect that they will be able to return. The broader question is how that happens, and the relationship to a wider settlement of Cyprus’s division and issues.

As has been mentioned several times in the debate, the omens are better than they have been for some time. Both Mr Anastasiades and Mr Akinci seem genuinely committed to a settlement, and optimism is higher than it has been for many years. The prospect for progress on this agenda seems stronger than in the past. I am sure that the whole House hopes that that applies to the wider issues, including that of Famagusta, on which we have focused tonight. The Foreign Secretary is due in Cyprus later this week. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate, asked the Minister a few questions; I wonder whether I might add to the list. Will the Minister tell us the Government’s agenda for that visit, and what more the UK Government can do, as a friend of Cyprus, to encourage momentum, and ultimately agreement, in the talks?

Given that the political atmosphere is more positive than it was, how does the Minister see the Government using their position as a guarantor to press for a settlement that leads to the reunification of the island, as set out in the various UN resolutions that have been adopted? Does he believe that Mr Akinci, who represents Northern Cyprus, and in whom a great deal of hope has been invested, is free to make an agreement if he wishes to? Can the Minister say more about Turkey’s role in the process? That is particularly important with regard to Famagusta. It is important to mention that the frozen area of Varosha is in the hands of not the Turkish Cypriots, but the Turkish military. It is important that we consider not only the people on the island, but the Turkish military’s role.

Could the Minister also say what the relationship is between this process and the issues raised tonight that are being discussed by Turkey and the European Union? Specifically, I am thinking of the huge refugee problem affecting both Turkey and the European Union, and the question of future accession to the EU. How possible is it to make progress on these other issues while the situation in Cyprus remains as it is? What is their effect on the process taking place in Cyprus?

Much has happened in recent months and days that is a cause for grief and heartbreak on the human level, and huge concern on the political level. In the statement earlier today, the House set out its views on the terrible events in Paris a few days ago. We have talked, understandably, of a generational struggle against Islamist extremism. The world has failed to find a solution to the terrible war in Syria, which has been unfolding for

years, and which is driving much of the refugee problem facing Europe. Yet on the Cyprus issue, there are grounds for hope and optimism. Inevitably, that will be tempered with caution, given how many setbacks there have been over the years—the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) referred to having been involved in this issue for decades—but as we know from our experience, making peace is hugely dependent on leadership. Among both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, there is a leadership in place that seems committed to finding a way forward. We Labour Members will support their efforts, and we hope that the UK Government play as positive a role as possible, so that this conflict, which I have referred to as being frozen, can be resolved, and the island of Cyprus can be unified on the basis of mutual respect among all parts of its population.

7.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I congratulate the Backbench Business Committee on finding the time for this important debate. I begin by apologising for the absence of the Minister for Europe, who has an engagement away from the House. I will do my best to answer the questions from right hon. and hon. Members, but I shall certainly pass on to him any that I am unable to answer, so that he can write to hon. Members. It has been mentioned that the Foreign Secretary will visit Cyprus this week, so this debate is fortuitous.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on securing this important debate at this time. Cyprus is not in my brief—I deal with the middle east and north Africa most of the time—but it is a country with which I am very familiar. I served there as an officer with the Royal Green Jackets. I remember my old stomping grounds of Nicosia, Larnaca and Paphos; I have been up to the panhandle and Bellapais monastery in Kyrenia. It is a truly beautiful country, steeped in history. We have gone back to when it gained independence, but of course it has a place in Greek mythology as the birthplace of Aphrodite and Adonis. The sculptor Pygmalion also came from there. It is truly a remarkable place. I have very fond memories of it. It is where I learned to fly, as a pilot, and where I learned to parachute. It is a place associated with fun and enjoyment, but there is a serious element to it, which has been highlighted today. Back when I was there, in the 1990s, two other protagonists were taking up the debate: Denktas and Clerides, the two leaders of the day. They were debating the very same matters that we are. There is a sense of frustration, which has been aired by right hon. and hon. Members, about how long it has taken to resolve the issue in an important part of Europe.

My hon. Friend mentioned the British interest. Britain has an historical interest, a commercial interest, including culture and tourism, and a security interest because of the sovereign bases where I had the honour to serve. The RAF, and the role that it is playing, not least in the current challenges in the middle east, have been mentioned. We have an important strategic relationship with the country. My hon. Friend mentioned the letter that he had received from our Prime Minister on his commitment to a bicameral solution, supporting UN resolutions 550 and 789, and working towards that important comprehensive settlement.

Mr George Howarth: Does the Minister agree that in order to make progress on that proposal, it is necessary to recognise that there are legitimate grievances on the side of the Northern Cypriots that must be addressed if they are to feel comfortable with such a settlement?

Mr Ellwood: As I make progress, I will come on to those grievances and the role that Britain can play.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) commented on the empty beaches that he saw on the visit—it sounds like quite an amazing visit—that he and other hon. Members made, and the enormous potential for tourism to fill those beaches. That is exactly what all sides want. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) did not want to dwell on the past. He wanted to look at the future, but we must learn from the past and also stress the importance of trade. I was about to say lots of nice things about the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), but I see that she is not in her place. Although she has not been to Cyprus—she was not on that visit—she clearly has a major diaspora in her constituency. By coming today, she is representing her constituents well. She mentioned an older generation of Cypriots still waiting for a solution and said how frustrating the situation is for them. We hope we will make progress.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) to his new role. He has some big shoes to fill, if I may say so politely. He stressed that there is a window of opportunity. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate talked about the stars being aligned. If I may correct him, I think it is the planets, rather than the stars, that are aligned. Nevertheless, the moment is before us. That is why it is pertinent that the Foreign Secretary will visit Cyprus in the near future.

Mr Burrowes: I was repeating what the Foreign Secretary said in the House. He was, no doubt deliberately, using the same phrase as was used ahead of the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, to make the point that we are on the cusp of another historic agreement.

Mr Ellwood: I agree. I hope that is right. That is why the visit of the Foreign Secretary this week is so pertinent. I am sure he will read *Hansard* to make sure that he is fully aware of what has been said in the House today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) asked what purpose the division continues to serve. I agree—it serves no purpose whatever. Everybody will benefit from a solution.

I welcome the support expressed in the motion for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem. Cyprus has been divided for too long. Under the courageous leadership of President Anastasiades and Mr Akinci we may now have an opportunity to secure a just and lasting settlement. I can assure the House that the UK will remain a strong supporter of the two communities' efforts to secure a settlement. We will do whatever we can to help them reunite Cyprus.

Ian Lavery: I understand what the Minister said earlier about others in the Department having more expertise on Cyprus than he might have, but can he say what powers the UK Government have as a guarantor power of Cyprus?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman needs to allow me to develop my argument. I will come to the role that Britain seeks to play in the important task of finding a solution.

A lasting settlement would have clear benefits for Cyprus, for the region and for the UK. Some 80,000 British nationals live in Cyprus, and 900,000 visit every year. A reunited Cyprus would unlock significant economic benefits through increased opportunities for trade, investment and tourism, including tourism to the Varosha area of Famagusta. The respected Peace Research Institute Oslo forecast that the peace dividend from a Cyprus settlement would amount to €20 billion over the next 20 years, and it would add, on average, 2.8% GDP growth in real terms every year. Those figures alone make a powerful case for the importance of securing a settlement.

Beyond the economic benefits, a settlement in Cyprus would help to advance regional stability. Cyprus is already a beacon of stability in a challenging region, and a settlement would reinforce the island's security. It would open up the possibility of new energy and economic partnerships in the region, and bring new momentum to Turkey's EU accession process. In all these areas there are opportunities for the United Kingdom.

It is clear that Turkey remains an important part of reaching a solution. We welcome Turkey's support for a settlement, and public statements on that from President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu have been important in building support for a settlement. Turkey's recent agreement to give the committee for missing persons in Cyprus access to 30 sites controlled by the Turkish military, which was mentioned by hon. Members, was a very helpful step. We welcome the positive response from the Republic of Cyprus to that and hope that the parties can build on this to generate even more confidence in the settlement process.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I have listened intently to the debate, which of course stirs memories of the past in Northern Ireland. I would like to make a suggestion to the Minister. The IRA murdered and disappeared a number of people 30 or 40 years ago. A very distinguished forensics expert has helped identify some of the remains of the disappeared—they have not all been found, sadly—and also helped in Bosnia. Will the Government please make a point of involving that very distinguished lady forensics expert in identifying those found in graves in Cyprus?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady makes an important point about the reconciliation and her words are now on the record. I am sure I will have discussions with the Europe Minister about the matter. I am pleased to say that progress has been made on it, as has been mentioned by other hon. Members.

Securing a sustainable Cyprus settlement remains important internationally and regionally, given the opportunities and security threats, but above all for the people of Cyprus, who stand to gain most from the social, economic and security benefits that a lasting settlement would bring. The UK remains firmly focused on supporting the people of the island to find a solution. Our approach has three elements. First, we maintain strong links in Cyprus with both communities. We strongly support the efforts of President Anastasiades and Mr Akinci to reach a lasting settlement through the

[Mr Ellwood]

UN-led negotiations. As the Foreign Secretary, who will be visiting Cyprus this week, confirmed to the House in June, the UK has made a generous offer to cede nearly half of the territory of the sovereign base areas to Cyprus in the event of a settlement.

Bob Stewart: May I place on the record the immense help the sovereign base areas have provided over 40 years to maintain stability? The Turkish troops were stopped by the sovereign base area when the invasion occurred in 1974. We are ceding back land to the Republic of Cyprus. Those two areas of British territory provide huge stability to the island in security terms.

Mr Ellwood: Following independence, the sovereign base areas have played an important part in the history of the country and they continue to do so. I am pleased that we are using them as a method of encouraging a settlement.

We support practical initiatives to build trust between the communities, notably through our support for the excellent work of the bi-communal chambers of commerce. The Minister for Europe was very pleased to host an event at the Foreign Office in March that enabled the chambers to highlight the value of bi-communal work and the economic benefits of a settlement.

At the regional level, we discuss with the other guarantor powers, Turkey and Greece, how best to support a solution. On the question of security and guarantees, our position is clear: we are not seeking a specific role for the UK. Rather, we are ready to consider whatever arrangements the sides can agree to enable their communities to feel secure. Finally, we engage with other international partners, including through the EU and the UN, to encourage them to support the efforts of the President and Mr Akinci. As the Foreign Secretary has made clear, the UK will continue to do all it can to help the sides reunite their island.

On the specific issue of Famagusta, I understand the strength of feeling about Varosha. The present state of Varosha reflects the consequences of the continued division of Cyprus. We fully support all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 550 from 1984 and 789 from 1992. We have raised this issue with the Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish authorities. The Government remain convinced that, ultimately, a comprehensive settlement is the best chance of resolving these complex issues. We will remain focused on supporting the efforts of the two leaders to secure a settlement.

In conclusion, this debate has underlined the depth of the ties between the United Kingdom and Cyprus. It has demonstrated that it is in the UK's national interest to help the Cypriots reach a lasting settlement. That will require bold decisions from both communities in the weeks and months ahead. The President and Mr Akinci have demonstrated that they can provide the strong and determined leadership required to secure a historic agreement. The Government are cautiously optimistic that a solution may be within reach. Certainly, many people think that there is now a chance, the like of which has not been seen for decades. We urge both sides to seize this opportunity. Cypriots of both communities want to live and prosper together in peace. As they

strive for a lasting solution, we will continue our active support in Cyprus, Ankara, Athens, Brussels, New York and beyond.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for making time for this debate and giving us the opportunity to discuss these important issues.

8.3 pm

Mr Burrows: I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to this important and timely debate. I thank the shadow Minister and the Minister for their broad support for the principles behind the motion and the powerful case for a comprehensive settlement, which would bring economic benefits, as the Minister said, and regional stability. We must bring in other partnerships and use the momentum that is there through the work of Mustafa Akinci and Nicos Anastasiades. We must give them support, which the motion does.

We have heard many voices in this debate. Seven Members—my hon. Friends the Members for Gower (Byron Davies), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) and for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) and the hon. Members for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery)—have shown their support for the motion.

Five other Members have spoken. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) felt left out from the delegation; it was a Conservative Friends of Cyprus delegation, but she is welcome to apply. Perhaps she could join the all-party group under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), who spoke about the generational problem and the hope that Mustafa Akinci has the skills to work with Nicos Anastasiades to make the most of the best chance for decades.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) said that international law should be applied equally everywhere, whether in Israel or Cyprus. He said that we must never forget the important issue of justice that must be dealt with. The motion seeks to do that. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) mentioned the old Nicosia airport, which is a horrifying example of the scar of division and occupation. We must do more on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) said that he had heard it all before, but that the motion would allow us to take things a stage further. That is the case.

Some 40,000 Famagustans, many of whom are in the Gallery, fled their homes after the relentless bombardment. They had to leave Famagusta to be looted and left empty to decay. I have been given a set of photographs showing its former glory, which we must work hard to see returned. Those people have had a long wait for justice.

We had UN Security Council resolutions 550 in 1984 and 789 in 1992. There have been various proposals by the various leaders of the communities and there have been negotiations. There have been petitions—not least the one from 50,000 Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots that forms the basis of this debate. There was a European Union declaration. Now, we will have a resolution of this House, which I hope will receive unanimous support, that speaks of the return of Famagusta and supports a comprehensive settlement. We want to ensure that this is the last time we need such a debate and resolution, and that we reach a settlement that is for the good of all Cypriots.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant Security Council Resolutions and the High Level Agreements; endorses the Declaration of the European Parliament of 14 February 2012 on the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants; notes that the city of Famagusta in the Republic of Cyprus was captured by the invading Turkish forces in August 1974, that a section of Famagusta was then sealed off and remains uninhabited, under the direct control of the Turkish military, and that the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants would facilitate efforts toward a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem; further notes the 1979 High Level Agreement and UN Security Council Resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992) and the 2008 Report of the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament on Petition 733/2004; calls on the government of Turkey to act according to those UN Security Council Resolutions and Report Recommendations and return Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants, who must resettle under conditions of security and peace; urges the Government, as a guarantor power of Cyprus, to promote Turkey's cooperation; and directs the Speaker to forward this Resolution to President Nicos Anastasiades, Mr Mustafa Akinci, the UN Secretary General and the government of Turkey.

Transport for London Bill [*Lords*]: Revival

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the promoters of the Transport for London Bill [*Lords*], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2010-12 on 24 January 2011, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of Bills).—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

8.7 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): This is a private Bill promoted by Transport for London that was deposited on 26 November 2010 and ordered to commence in the House of Lords.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Blackman: Perhaps I might make some progress on what has happened and on timescales before I give way.

The Bill was considered by an Opposed Private Bill Committee of this House on 13 January 2015 and one of the clauses was amended. The Bill was subsequently debated on Report on Monday 16 March, but the time allocated for the debate expired before proceedings could be brought to a conclusion. Parliament was prorogued shortly thereafter and the Bill fell.

In accordance with the practice of the House, at the beginning of the present Session the promoters requested that the Bill be revived under Standing Order No. 188B on private business. The revival motion that was subsequently tabled in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means has continued to be objected to, leading to the necessity for this debate. I stress that this debate is about the revival of the Bill, rather than its substance.

Andy Slaughter: The hon. Gentleman has pointed out that a revival motion is needed because the Bill did not succeed earlier this year, but I wonder whether he raises his eyebrows slightly, as other Members do, at the fact that it has taken five years to reach this stage. Will he indicate why he thinks that might be the case?

Bob Blackman: Clearly the process in the other place has taken some time, and there were various applications to the Opposed Bill Committee for consideration of amendments, which is why the promoters of the Bill have amended it to allow those who objected to it to see changes that would benefit the overall process.

The purpose of the Bill is to provide TfL with additional powers so that it can meet its business needs more flexibly and take advantage of more efficient arrangements for the stewardship of its financial affairs. It would allow TfL to maximise the value of its assets and deliver significantly better value for money to the paying public, which is a laudable aim, and one with which I am sure we all agree.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my colleague from Harrow for giving way. I recognise that he has lived with the Bill for a very long time, whereas I am coming to it fresh. Is there anything in it that might give hope to my constituents, and perhaps to one or two of his, who use Harrow-on-the-Hill station and are waiting, and who continue to wait, for improved access arrangements there? Might the Bill help to sort that out?

Bob Blackman: I am wary of straying too far from the principle of the revival of the Bill, because I know full well that there are transport improvements across London that we would all like to see. The key point is that ensuring that TfL has the ability to maintain its finances efficiently and effectively means that the improvements that my honourable colleague and neighbour would like to see can be brought to fruition. There are some improvements that I would like to see brought to fruition in my constituency, because, as I will say shortly, there are provisions in the Bill that would allow TfL's finances to improve, so there would be more money for the transport improvements we all want.

Mr Thomas: My colleague will forgive me for being a little uncharitable and suggesting that his answer about Harrow-on-the-Hill station was a tad vague. I know that Stanmore station is a significant issue for him, so I will happily make common cause with him if he will use the influence that he undoubtedly has with TfL, having been asked to be the promoter of the Bill, to ensure that it brings forward improved access arrangements at both Harrow-on-the-Hill and Stanmore as a matter of urgency.

Bob Blackman: I thank my colleague for stressing the point about Harrow-on-the-Hill station. I know from my use of the Metropolitan line that that is a vital aspect of the improvement that needs to take place. I will use the opportunity with TfL and others to ensure that we get the improvements we all want to see in Harrow, including at Stanmore and Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman seems to have great influence with TfL, so will he also take up the cause of Caledonian Road tube station, which is going to be closed for six months so that a lift can be renewed? I do not understand why the whole station has to be closed for sixth months, because there are four lift shafts—it is incomprehensible. I have written to TfL about it but do not seem to be getting very sensible replies. I wonder whether he might take up that cause as well.

Bob Blackman: I am rapidly taking up a number of causes across London. I know that Caledonian Road tube station as one of the great ways of leaving the Emirates stadium after football matches. Interestingly, substantial amounts of money were secured in order to dramatically improve the transport system around the stadium when it was being rebuilt. The reality is that there are concerns about whether that money was used properly. Clearly I realise that there is a need to renew the lift at Caledonian Road tube station, but I would much rather we ensured that there was a lift at Harrow-on-the-Hill station, because it does not have one, and at Stanmore station.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Bob Blackman: I give way to another hon. Lady from London, who no doubt has an aspect of London transport to bring up.

Rachael Maskell: I must correct the hon. Gentleman: I represent York Central, but I am in London today, as we all are. He said in his opening remarks that TfL's financial position would be improved as a consequence of the Bill. On what premise is that assumption based?

Bob Blackman: If the hon. Lady permits me to advance further in my speech, I will refer to that issue in a few moments.

TfL is responsible for one of the world's biggest transport networks. On the tube alone there have been 1.3 billion passenger journeys over the past year. TfL is also responsible for a multi-billion pound investment programme to improve capacity and the connectivity of the transport network. London Underground, the subsidiary responsible for providing the tube service, has achieved improved reliability, with a 40% improvement in recent times. Since TfL took over the Overground network in November 2007, demand for its services has quadrupled, delays have been cut by two thirds and customer satisfaction has risen from 70% to 82%.

TfL is providing 25% more capacity to Overground services to help meet growing demand. The network was expanded in May to include the West Anglia inner suburban routes. TfL is the joint sponsor with the Department for Transport of Crossrail, the largest transport project undertaken in the capital for many years. The delivery company is a wholly owned TfL subsidiary and the project is on time and within budget.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I note that the hon. Gentleman has prioritised Harrow-on-the-Hill station when it comes to improvements, but a whole swathe of Londoners had hoped to be able to get on the tube network but now cannot: people with disabilities who need level access. Osterley station and Turnham Green station in my constituency were promised level access but now the projects have stopped. Is that because of the delay in the Bill or some other problem that TfL has?

Bob Blackman: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. TfL has clearly been investing quite dramatically in access for disabled people on the network over the past 10 years. I remember that the points she has made were made under the previous Mayor of London and not delivered, so I think that there is a *quid pro quo* on that subject.

Emily Thornberry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Blackman: I am going to move on to the key points about the Bill.

The Bill has only four substantive clauses. None the less, it is of great importance to TfL because it would enable it to deliver better value for money for the fare payer and the tax-paying public. Since the Bill was deposited, TfL's operational funding from central Government has been cut by 25%, and the Government's aim is to reduce that funding over time to zero. TfL is required to deliver £16 billion of savings over the period to 2021. The Bill would assist in that regard.

In summary, clause 4 gives TfL subsidiaries the ability to access cheaper finance, subject to the consent of the Mayor and, in respect of core operational assets, the consent of the Secretary of State, so clearly there will be an opportunity for Members of Parliament to have oversight of such proposals.

Clause 5 allows TfL to form limited partnerships. Following scrutiny by the Opposed Bill Committee, the clause was amended to provide that the Secretary of

State must consent to the formation of the limited partnership by way of an order to be debated in both Houses of Parliament. Therefore, on the principle of transparency of the limited partnerships, which I know was one of the particular concerns raised by objectors, the sponsors of the Bill have given way and ensured that there will be full public debate over such arrangements.

Mr Gareth Thomas: The hon. Gentleman talks about oversight by Members of this House. Does he acknowledge the concern that there ought to be more regular oversight by ordinary Oyster card holders in London and that the governance of TfL as a whole needs reform, partly to oversee the arrangements in this Bill but also to give people in London more of a stake in the big decisions about TfL's future on asset sales, fare rises, and other big calls that it has to make?

Bob Blackman: There is clearly oversight by the Mayor of London, the Assembly and the Assembly's transport committee. Of course, the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government who set up the arrangements for London in 2000, so no doubt somewhere on the record he has expressed the view that this should have been done, but I do not recall that that was being said at the time. The key point as regards oversight and transparency is that there will be an opportunity for the limited partnership arrangements, in particular, to be scrutinised by both Houses of Parliament.

Emily Thornberry: The partnership might be overseen when first established, but will there be anything to stop the identity of those in control of the other partnerships changing at a later stage and our not having control over that?

Bob Blackman: The initial set-up will be scrutinised by both Houses. If there were to be any substantial change to the way in which the partnership was structured, there would clearly be an opportunity for oversight. I am sure that nothing would be done that prevented proper oversight of proceedings through the London Assembly, its transport committee and the Mayor of London.

Emily Thornberry: Is there anything specific in the Bill that would stop the control of a partnership moving from one organisation or individual to another and ensure that at that point there was some form of oversight that would stop a transfer of control?

Bob Blackman: The hon. Lady might wish to probe that point further on the revival of the Bill when we debate particular aspects of changes to it, but it is not about the revival of the Bill in its own right.

Clause 6 expands the list of entities through which TfL can undertake commercial activities to include limited partnerships, limited liability partnerships and companies limited by guarantee. This enables TfL to conduct its affairs more flexibly and meet the maximum value from its assets. Clause 7 gives TfL greater flexibility to mitigate its risks through hedging, including allowing it to hedge commodity prices when it is exposed to fluctuations as a consequence of a transport contract or a contribution risk to the pension fund.

Contrary to assertions made on Second Reading and elsewhere, the Bill does not give TfL any new powers to sell or to develop its land. TfL has had such powers since it was created in 2000 and is not seeking to extend them in any way, shape or form. TfL must obtain the consent of the Mayor to dispose of surplus land by sale or granting a long-term lease. If that land is operational, or has been operational in the past five years, the Secretary of State must also give his or her consent. TfL is also subject to scrutiny by the London Assembly and has various obligations to publish financial details in its accounts and details of its surplus land and building assets. The powers TfL is seeking in the Bill will not detract from its discharge of its core functions.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Blackman: I will not give way any more.

The discrete scope of the Bill should be taken as indicative of a desire by TfL to meet its business needs more flexibly, and cost-effectively.

One of the key issues that has been identified during the whole process, which I think we all agree on, is the opportunity to maximise the development of assets for housing purposes. If the Bill were finally to become law, TfL would release more than 300 acres of land in London to help create more than 10,000 new homes across London. Sixty-seven per cent. of this phase of development is in travel zones 1 and 2.

Andy Slaughter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Emily Thornberry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Blackman: No, I am not giving way any more.

TfL is working with the Mayor, London boroughs and the commercial property development sector to bring forward developments in an innovative and creative way. The additional powers in this Bill will enable these developments more efficiently, enabling more of the revenue raised from the developments to be reinvested into the transport network and bear down on fares. That means that the people who oppose the revival of the Bill will be saying to Londoners that we do not want 10,000 new homes on redundant TfL land.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Bob Blackman: I am not giving way any more.

In view of the benefits that this Bill will bring, it is essential that it becomes law as soon as possible. I will be eager to listen to contributions from Labour Members, in particular. Given the campaign that is shortly to be run in London, it is vital that we give the Mayor of London the opportunity to create much needed housing. The creation of 10,000 housing units on 300 acres of redundant land is a great opportunity that is being denied and prevented by the shenanigans of Labour Members. I therefore move that the Bill should be revived so that it can complete its passage through this House. I trust, Madam Deputy Speaker, that during the course of this debate you will ensure that Members restrict themselves to the subject of the revival of the Bill.

8.26 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I am concerned about clause 5, in particular, and the idea of limited liability partnerships. As I understand it, limited liability partnerships were established in 1907 to enable people to become partners without taking on the liability. There needs to be a general partner who will be liable for everything, but then those who are coming into the partnership, and perhaps giving money towards it, would not have any form of liability. I understand that it is a means of raising capital, but I am very worried about who the partners might be. We have heard all kinds of scare stories, and I would be very interested to hear some reassurance.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): When my hon. Friend describes the scope of limited liability, is it her understanding that the limit of the liability in such a partnership arrangement could be nil? If that is the case, what on earth are we doing thinking about such an arrangement?

Emily Thornberry: I believe that that is exactly the position. This legal instrument was created in order to help to raise money. However, the difficulty is that we will be raising money on public land—public for the moment, at least. That is land owned by you, Madam Deputy Speaker, by me and by all of us, and we will be handing over some sort of investment in it to organisations that are cloudy, to say the least. Is there anything to stop these partners being offshore companies or being able to establish themselves with £2-worth of capital? Is there anything to stop documents naming certain people as responsible for the company, only for the Russian mafia to take over at a later stage? Are we handing over Caledonian Road, Old Street and potential developments in my constituency to such people? I certainly hope not, but I am worried that this Bill's revival may allow that to happen.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is asking extremely pertinent questions, but I wonder who is going to answer them. If I get the opportunity to make a speech, I will try to answer them with the aid of the promoter's statement on the one hand and the legal opinion obtained by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers on the other. The Bill's sponsor, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), is now deep in thought, having gabbled through the end of his remarks without taking interventions on any of the substantive matters covered by the Bill. If this Bill is to be revived, does my hon. Friend agree that our questions should be answered tonight?

Emily Thornberry: I genuinely think so, because, as the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) has said, we are talking about large swathes of publicly owned land in the centre of our capital. My constituency has the least amount of green space of any in the entire country, and all our brownfield sites need to be looked at very carefully in order to maximise housing. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the need for housing, but frankly we do not need developments such as that currently taking place on our canal, where a one-bedroom flat is being sold for £826,000. That is not affordable housing for anyone who lives in Islington. We need real affordable housing, but the Bill does not seem to have any control over that.

Clive Efford: That is a really important point. Too often, people talk about housing numbers and bandy around the word “affordable” for properties that are by no means affordable for most people in London. Making available 300 acres of land for housing that people from London, particularly those on moderate and low incomes, will not be able to access will contribute nothing to their housing needs.

Emily Thornberry: I have to say that Islington residents who are on what could be seen as high incomes are very concerned about their children, as are those who are on middle and low incomes. How will children who were born in Islington remain in Islington, given the price of housing? The Mayor of London's answer has been to redefine affordable housing. It is a little like getting rid of child poverty by taking income out of the definition.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): People in my borough of Westminster now need an income of £77,000 to be able to afford what the Mayor of London has deemed to be an affordable property. My constituents, like those of my hon. Friend, look at the proliferation of new developments and see properties that they will never have the remotest chance of being able to afford. They want not just house building, but the building of affordable homes that they will have a chance to access.

Emily Thornberry: The point is this: once the land is gone, it is gone for ever. Once these luxury flats are built, Islington residents will never have a chance of being able to afford to buy them, and if no social housing or real affordable housing is built in inner London, that will be it. We need to defend very carefully the land available.

The Mayor of London has decided that affordable housing equates to 80% of market rent. That would be a laugh if it were not so tragic. It is like newspeak in “Nineteen Eighty-Four” and someone saying, “Say black is white and say it for long enough, and hopefully some fools will start to believe it.” In Islington, 80% of market rent is not affordable housing.

I read with alarm what was said in the *Financial Times* about housing. Transport for London is talking about affordable housing in the constituency of the hon. Member for Harrow East in outer London, but not in inner London. There are 21,000 people on the waiting list for housing in Islington. Does this Bill answer any of their problems?

Mr David Burrows (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): We are being distracted from one of the Bill's main points, which is of concern to the hon. Lady's constituents and mine. The explanatory notes to clause 4 state that, as fare payers and taxpayers, they are bearing the cost and the risk of the lack of

“capacity to finance projects and functions at the best available interest rate or at the lowest risk.”

If we do not give the Bill a safe passage, our constituents will continue to bear that risk. Is that acceptable?

Emily Thornberry: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. It brings us back to another rumour, which is that £700 million will be taken away from Transport for London in the comprehensive spending review and Transport for London is therefore even more

in desperate need of a fire sale of our land to subsidise fares. London is the greatest capital in the world, and we need a proper transport system that is appropriate and helps our city to continue to be the lifeblood of this country. It seems to me to be short-sighted to the greatest extent to take away subsidy from Transport for London, because our city will grind to a halt. Once we have sold off that land and the opportunity for my constituents to live in affordable housing has gone, for the sake of their having cheaper fares for a year or two, what do we do then, having sold off the family silver in the way that is being suggested?

Ms Buck: Does my hon. Friend agree that risk comes in many different forms? The *Evening Standard* revealed a few weeks ago that there has been £100 billion of investment in the London property market from overseas since 2008. Some of that money comes from very dodgy sources, including money laundering. That kind of investment in property—where it is not transparent and the property is not properly managed—involves a fundamental risk to the London property market and all other sources that depend on such revenue.

Emily Thornberry: All of us have probably been down the river and seen all the developments that are happening. Members should look for how many flats have lights on at night, because if they do not, people are not living there. It is simply that somebody in Singapore can either invest a bag of gold or they can think, “No. Let’s buy a flat in south London, on the river with a lovely view. There will be someone to look after it. We can invest in that and keep it empty for years or decades.” Those empty flats are laughing at my constituents, who are in desperate need of proper housing. It seems to me that this opportunity is being frittered away.

Mr Gareth Thomas: I apologise to the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for appearing uncharitable to him—one should always be charitable to him, as a Tottenham fan—but does my hon. Friend not accept that the Old Oak Common experience, with its lack of affordable housing and the poor negotiation that TfL entered into with its partner on that site, has scarred those of us who have looked at this Bill? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman might persuade TfL to look afresh at the Bill in the light of such concerns and to come back with more amendments, perhaps on the future governance and oversight of any deals that are done.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Essentially, the sponsor of the Bill and TfL are saying, “Trust us. Let us enter into limited partnerships with who knows who.” TfL wants to enter into a limited partnership, which is not a distinct legal entity, which has a clear consequence for public transparency. For example, we cannot use the Freedom of Information Act to find out who is behind the partnerships that TfL may get into. TfL says, “Don’t worry about it. We can be trusted.” The difficulty is that TfL’s behaviour during the past few years, with some of the developments we know about, shows that we cannot in fact trust it.

Caledonian Road is not a frivolous example. As the hon. Member for Harrow East said, it is one of the few tube stations that has disabled access that is available to the large number of people who go to watch the highly

successful Arsenal football club, but it will be closed for six months. What about Arsenal fans in wheelchairs during that time? TfL cannot look after a tube station with four shafts. It tells me that it needs to close it for six months to renew one of the lift shafts; yet it has two functioning lifts at the moment, both of which it will stop. I said, “The lift capacity is only 50%, so just use one lift while you are repairing the other one.” It replied, “Oh, but what happens if the lift that is in use breaks down?” I said, “Well, excuse me, TfL, but you’ve got lift engineers on site. You are re-doing the other lift shafts, so what’s your problem?”

If TfL has difficulty running a tube station, I have some concerns about its ability as a property developer, particularly if it goes into partnership with others. Those people may be perfectly adequate. TfL may go into partnership with a latter-day Peabody. That would be fantastic, would it not? It would be great if it went into partnership with somebody who really wanted to provide housing that was entirely appropriate for my constituents. The difficulty is that I do not really believe that, and I do not think that the hon. Member for Harrow East does either. TfL is trying to make as much money as it possibly can out of that land, and it will make as much money from affordable housing as it will from luxury flats.

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend hits the issue on the head. Of course the value of the assets needs to be maximised, but the structure is based on the best investment opportunity. It will not be a Peabody Trust that comes along: it will be someone who wants to make the maximum money out of it. That is why the flexibility is there. It is an “ask no questions” policy—“we do not care who you are”.

Emily Thornberry: My concern is that we will be the partner who takes unlimited risks. My constituents will not get what they need, but their public assets will have been subject to a fire sale and they will be taking the risk.

Mr Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend rightly talks about risk. A further risk is the partner that TfL goes into business with on a site—for example, the Caledonian Road tube station site she mentioned—going bust. TfL would be left with a large potential cost to taxpayers and that would make getting the lifts at Harrow on the Hill—which, if she will forgive me, I think are more important than her lift at Caledonian Road—an even more distant prospect.

Emily Thornberry: It is as though the risk is being nationalised and the profit privatised. That is what is happening for the sake of George Osborne being able to balance the books in the CSR.

Rachael Maskell: A further risk is that profits for some of those property developers may be invested offshore and they may not pay tax here. The Treasury would lose even more money on that land.

Emily Thornberry: Many questions need to be asked about the status of the partners that TfL will be able to join in partnership. Will they be offshore? Will they pay taxes here? Will they be able to move the control of the partnerships from one party to another without the

[Emily Thornberry]

public—it is our land—being able to stop it? One hears many scary stories, such as money from Moldova being laundered through Scotland—all sorts of extraordinary things go on under these instruments—and my concern is that the limited partners are liable only for the value of any investment they make and do not need to be involved in the management of the partnership. They put their money in, that is the extent of their liability, and we do not know what sort of profits they will then be able to make and we do not know whether they will pay any tax in this country. Those questions need to be asked before we revive this Bill.

Mr Burrowes: My fare-paying, tax-paying constituents—and the hon. Lady’s—will want to know whether future projects offer the best available interest rate at the lowest risk. Everyone wants that to be achieved. Would not clause 4 enable that to happen?

Emily Thornberry: I do not know that it would. It is vague in the extreme. In my view, it is inappropriate for a public company to go into partnership with public assets with who knows who—for us to take the risk of putting the assets out there and see who will put up the money. That is not the sort of slippery Joe operation we should deal with. We are talking about public land in my constituency in the centre of London, and frankly I do not want it to be controlled by the Russian mafia, for instance.

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I realise that the hon. Lady has concerns, so I will try to be helpful. To answer the questions she has asked, she might want to talk to Labour Sheffield, Labour Barking and Dagenham or Labour Gateshead, which have all entered into similar joint limited partnership arrangements, to see how they have worked.

Emily Thornberry: I do not know what the conditions are in those limited partnerships. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to enlighten me, I will give way again. It is a question of what controls are available.

Mike Freer: From my limited investigations, I understand that Sheffield entered into a local housing company in which the council invested the land and the joint venture partner invested the finance, with shared risk. Barking and Dagenham had a special purpose vehicle, in which the council put in the land and the private investor put in the money. Gateshead had a local asset backed vehicle—I believe such vehicles were introduced by the previous Government—where the council put in the property but the private sector put in the finance.

Emily Thornberry: As the hon. Gentleman said, there was some form of shared risk, but there is no shared risk in this instrument as I understand it. If I am wrong I am open to being corrected, but I do not believe I am. That, essentially, is my concern.

Mr Gareth Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for raising the example of Sheffield. Sheffield Housing Company is an extremely interesting model. I am surprised to hear a Conservative pushing an example of local housing companies being set up, because they enable the right to buy not to apply to any properties built by such housing

companies. It is very odd that the hon. Gentleman should pray that in aid, given some of the other proposed legislation this House is debating at the moment.

Emily Thornberry: There we are. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I believe we ought to be focusing on whether the Bill should be revived and whether it will make London a better place. My fundamental belief is that it will not.

There are more questions in relation to the Bill than there are answers. It is about disposing of land all over London, much of it operational land. Some of it may be appropriate for development, but some of it may not. Who is to say whether these shady partners might not be pushing TfL into inappropriate developments? Yes of course we need housing, but where may we have it? For example, there is a large tract of land next to Farringdon station just by Farringdon road that on the face of it is very valuable. At the moment, it is just tracks. Is there a possibility of that land being built over and some form of flats being built there? I do not know.

Is there a possibility of something being built over Old Street? Old Street is a phenomenal station. It has two wells in it. I do not know how it functions as a tube station, but what kind of property might be built on top of it? We may well find these shady partners pushing TfL into developing such areas, which would be entirely inappropriate for the building of flats, even luxury flats. We should be very careful about that.

Another risk of the Bill is that we may end up restricting TfL’s ability to invest more in transport in London, because we have caged in a particular area or built a block of flats on a particular place, not allowing it to continue to develop the transport system that London needs and deserves.

Andy McDonald: We have heard examples of investments in other places in other cities, but is there not a stark distinction between other places and London? There is no risk involved whatever in investing in the property market in London. People are investing in a goldmine, so there is no need for special purpose vehicles or any other such arrangements that may not withstand scrutiny. Is that not the reality of the situation?

Emily Thornberry: Certainly, the way things seem at the moment is that the property market in London only goes upwards. We will see what happens in the future. There has to be, in the end, a limit to it, and there may be some form of risk. One risk has to be, for example, finding asbestos. If asbestos is found at a development site, what happens then? Again, the risk is nationalised and the profits are privatised.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend mentions asbestos. The site that began all this nonsense in the first place is the Earls Court exhibition site, which is coming down at the moment and is absolutely full of asbestos. There are huge risks here. The brakes are being taken off. It seems ironic that Transport for London should think it needs to do something to ease up the London property market. The London property market is out of control as it is. Only TfL, with its lack of commercial acumen, could really think that it should prioritise building more luxury flats with whoever turns up to build them and make it as easy as possible, with no questions asked.

Emily Thornberry: Yes. Representing and living in the area that I do, I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. The property market continues to be stoked. The Government say “Let’s cut back on the amount of housing benefit available and that will dampen down the property market.” I laugh, because clearly that is not what happens. Instead, rents and property prices continue to rise, and we continue to price Londoners out of London. If it continues to eat itself, London will cease to function. But perhaps that is fine by TfL: no one will need to travel into London because no one will be able to live or work in London. They will need to live so far out that working in the centre will not be viable.

Clive Efford: My hon. Friend, like me, heard the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) say that TfL should be able to maximise the income from the sale of this land, but, as she pointed out, where land values are extremely high, that is likely to squeeze out affordable and social housing. TfL is a public body, however, and there is a shortage of public land on which to build social housing, which is why we need properly to scrutinise how this land is used, instead of selling it off to the highest bidder in every case.

Emily Thornberry: If we do not use public land to build affordable housing, what land will we use? If we sell off the land, and it ends up in the hands of private property speculators, that will be the end of it, in terms of its being within the reach of Londoners.

Again, perhaps someone can enlighten me, but there has been talk that TfL could set up a subsidiary to insulate itself against risk. I do not understand what TfL has said about that, but, on the face of it, if it continues to own the land, or at least to manage it, it seems that a court would say, “The legal instrument might say one thing, but the reality is quite clear”, and strike it down. The project is being built on the never-never, and on very dubious grounds. We are asking serious questions about the risk this public body is being put under. What is TfL going to be doing with our land? What does it mean for the future of London? There are so many questions. I appreciate the Bill has a long history, but that makes it even more disappointing—to say the least—that these questions cannot be answered. They have been asked of TfL many times, yet we still do not have answers. In the absence of such answers, it does not seem correct to revive the Bill.

Andy Slaughter: I will attempt to answer my hon. Friend’s question, although, again, it would be better if the sponsor did. Counsel’s opinion, on exactly this point, expresses doubt about whether such an approach would be within the vires of TfL and lawful and that, even if such a subsidiary was formed, it might also give rise to the issue of vertical liability for TfL. It seems that, if that is what TfL is attempting, it has failed to do so in the Bill.

Emily Thornberry: That is very interesting. If that is counsel’s opinion, why can TfL not allay our fears? It is a pretty fundamental question. As I understand it, attempts have been made over several years to progress the Bill, yet there are still no answers to these important questions. It is not enough for TfL to say to the House, “Please revive the Bill. The Chancellor is going to take £700 million away from us, and we need to sell off our assets to fill the gap.” Economically, it makes no sense;

socially, it is appalling; and, politically, it is extremely short sighted and not the sort of thing the House should allow.

Mr Gareth Thomas: If the scenario my hon. Friend paints, of £700 million being taken out of TfL’s budget in the spending review, if the hon. Members for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) vote for it, quite clearly against the interests of their constituents, and if the Bill becomes a reality, could not the gap be better plugged by ensuring full fiscal devolution, including of property taxes raised in London, to the Mayor and London local authorities? In that way, some of the rising value in the London property market could be captured for investment in housing or public transport, and the sort of controversial things we are discussing now might not be needed.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend tempts me. I understand what he says, and there are times when London MPs argue for investment in our infrastructure, yet wonder why it is that London has to beg when it is the driving force behind our economy—

Andy McDonald *rose*—

Emily Thornberry: I will give way in a moment!

London is a driving force, so it seems a ridiculous idea that TfL can be so short-changed at a time like this, when the economy is supposed to be getting back on its feet, and we are finally coming out of the recession caused by the international financial crisis. We seem finally to be staggering our way out of it, despite the Tories crowing about it over a large number of years. At a time like this—*[Interruption.]* The Minister says “Staggering?” from a sedentary position. There are 3 million people in this country who believe themselves to be underemployed, and, despite the fact that there may seem to be more people employed, the last lot of statistics show that the number of hours we are working as a nation has gone down. So, yes, I do say “staggering”.

Andy McDonald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. She is being tempted down a particular path, so I simply wish to bring to her attention the fact that, at least on the Labour Benches, we are all in it together, and there is a momentum and imperative towards us staying together in solidarity, which is the order of the day. We should not forget the regions that have made a major contribution to this city in building its sewers, its stadiums and all the rest of it. I ask my hon. Friend not to be too tempted by the proposition suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas).

Emily Thornberry: I am very grateful to my comrade for bringing me back from the brink. In those circumstances, there is nothing more to say about that.

Andy Slaughter: I wonder whether I can help my hon. Friend by putting it slightly differently. As London MPs we are very grateful for the support from great engineering and great railway towns around the country, such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). I think the nail was hit on the head in the answer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), who is no longer

[*Andy Slaughter*]

in his place, about whether there is a balance between Londoners who want access to housing and Londoners who want reasonable fares. The answer is that everybody is losing out under this scheme. The cover on this Bill has been blown by the revelation that money is going to be sucked out of London and that TfL is going to have to scabble around, selling the family silver simply to pay the fares bill over the next year or two. That is a disgraceful way to run the economy.

Emily Thornberry: That, in summary, is my objection to the Bill. It seems to me that we need to call out its true intentions. I am afraid that, supporter as I am of TfL—I have written to its director to praise him, but I have to criticise other things—I have to say that TfL is making a mistake about this. I suspect that the reason it is trying to make this terrible mistake is that it is being pushed by the Government who are looking to entirely short-term gain. This is not in the interest of Londoners, so the Bill should not be revived.

8.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has been an assiduous campaigner for this Bill and made some very important points in seeking its revival on the Floor of the House today. I have listened with interest to the contributions and I hope to continue to do so. I have say, however, that we have meandered—nay, staggered—round a very circuitous path in talking about this Bill. We have talked about mafias, Moldova and the city of York, which the last time I looked was a little way away from the city of London. We have staggered around a special purpose vehicle, and for some reason the image of a white van is flashing before my eyes.

What I have also noticed is a revival of interest in transport matters on the Opposition Benches. Many Labour Members are frequent and assiduous campaigners on behalf of constituents in London, but there are also those I have neither heard nor seen in my time as the Minister—either at Transport questions or in any correspondence coming across my desk. I am therefore delighted that we are seeing that revival of interest in transport matters this evening.

Let us now return to reality, rather than remaining in the meandering world that we have been inhabiting. The Bill simply seeks to enable TfL to expand its financial freedoms, and to use practices and mechanisms that will allow it to release greater value from its financing arrangements. It is not some back-door attempt to—what was it?—allow members of the Russian mafia in to finance Londoners through special purpose vehicles.

Andy McDonald: The Minister says that the Bill is not a back-door deal to let in various nefarious characters, but how does she know that? How can she guarantee that someone will not come along and exploit this arrangement? Given the lack of transparency, we might never know who that person was.

Claire Perry: Like many Labour Members, the hon. Gentleman is displaying a complete disregard for the scrutiny role of London Assembly members, and, indeed, for the Independent Investment Programme Advisory

Group, which provides the Mayor with independent insurance and expert advice in relation to TfL's investment programme. Labour Members are displaying a blatant disregard for the devolved authority that we have given to the Mayor.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: I want to make some progress.

That disregard does not sound a very strong note of confidence in Labour's candidate for next year's mayoral elections.

I welcome the principle of introducing flexibility to the public finances at a time when the Government are seeking new mechanisms to unlock maximum value from public assets. That flexibility enabled us to build systems that we all celebrate, including many of the railways throughout the country that we all know and love, and it has been used to great effect by many other Departments.

It is no secret that the outcome of the 2015 spending review will be challenging, and it is right that we are looking for ways in which to unlock value in the public assets out there while we deliver on our stated intention to reduce TfL's operational funding over time. To hear Labour Members, one would think that this was an organisation on its knees, but TfL is a world leader in providing public transport systems in one of the most congested cities.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Claire Perry: I want to make some progress.

TfL is an organisation that manages, extremely effectively, more than £9 billion of revenue every year. It has delivered incredible increases in reliability and efficiency since 2008. Labour Members are displaying a great lack of confidence in our nation's transport systems.

Andy Slaughter: The Minister does not represent a London constituency. That is not her fault; we all have our cross to bear. However, those of us who have put up with 30 years of incompetence from TfL—both financial and operational—would beg to differ with her. Will she confirm that, as was stated in the *Financial Times* on 12 November, the London transport network is facing a loss of £700 million a year in state subsidy as a consequence of the comprehensive spending review?

Claire Perry: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned the *Financial Times*, but he will have to wait until next week to hear about the spending review. I did not quite catch his other comment, but I think he said something about our not using the tube. I suspect that I have been using it for many more years than he has. Let me return to the point, however. We are trying to find flexible ways—

Emily Thornberry: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: No, I will not.

We are trying to find flexible ways to allow the public sector to use its assets more effectively. Only a party whose face is firmly turned to the past—preferably the nationalised past of the 1970s—would find that an unpalatable mechanism.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: No, I will not.

TfL has already implemented a savings and efficiency programme that will enable it to invest in infrastructure while holding down fares. I have not heard any Labour Members stand up for their constituents who have to get on to the tube every morning, and who are delighted that fares have been kept down.

Clive Efford: Will the Minister give way?

Catherine West: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: No, I will not.

Those constituents are delighted that fares have not been charged for children who are travelling, and they are delighted by the improvements that have been made to stations, including the provision of step-free access throughout the network.

Several hon. Members: *rose*—

Claire Perry: I will not give way.

However, TfL still needs to continue to identify further savings, and I understand that this private Bill—

Mr Gareth Thomas: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am greatly enjoying the Minister's performance and hope it continues for at least another 20 minutes, but is it not part of the traditions of this House that Ministers should take interventions from Members wanting to raise constituency concerns? A series of interventions—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not a point of order. It is entirely up to the person who has the Floor whether or not to take interventions. The hon. Gentleman may find it unfortunate that the Minister is not doing so, but that is entirely her choice.

Claire Perry: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and, to be clear, I am afraid that we heard all sorts of rather pointless interventions earlier, and what we would like to do is make some progress, I think, so we can understand what this Bill is all about.

So let me put some numbers in front of Opposition Members to give them some facts, rather than having them shroud-waving. I understand from TfL that this private Bill could immediately generate savings in excess of £50 million by improving its hedging power, enabling it to borrow money in a cost-effective way and make the most of its assets. If Opposition Members do ever take the tube, they will see the money the tube generates is reinvested in investment programmes, delivering the sorts of transport investments their constituents need.

The Department supports TfL's commercial programme. We want TfL to better maximise its unique commercial position. We want it to generate the maximum potential from the public assets that it will continue to own, and we believe—

Andy Slaughter: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Claire Perry: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman.

We believe that giving TfL greater flexibility—

Emily Thornberry: *rose*—

Claire Perry: Oh, do tempt me so I can make some more jokes about vans.

Catherine West: *rose*—

Claire Perry: I will take an intervention from the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) instead.

Catherine West: I thank the Minister for giving way. Does she accept that transport providers are often not the best organisations to launch into a business programme, particularly where we have examples such as that of Earls Court, which has been well and truly exposed tonight, where TfL did not get the best value for money or the best value for Londoners? There has been virtually no affordable housing in that scheme and that is the key concern for Londoners. That therefore proves that transport providers are not necessarily the best property developers.

Claire Perry: I am a bit confused by the hon. Lady's intervention. I think what she is suggesting is we should not give TfL powers—that somehow we should retain these powers or not give it powers at all to try and maximise the commercial value. I will agree with the hon. Lady on this: most state-owned institutions are not good at maximising the value from these particular developments. The same is true across the railway network, but we have to look at different mechanisms to enable organisations to unlock the value from that public-private partnership which is so crucial.

TfL runs a world-class transport system. It is led by an expert transport commissioner.

Emily Thornberry: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way.

The hon. Lady has just talked about TfL running a world-class transport system. There are concerns about some of the changes that have been made, however, such as the closure of the ticket offices. Women in my constituency are very concerned about safety on the lines as a result. The hon. Lady referred to children, but children are unable to get their tickets because the ticket offices are closed and they are not able to get their tickets through the machines.

Claire Perry: I do not know when the hon. Lady last took the tube, but there are such things as Oyster and contactless, which mean in many cases that ticket offices are not required by those taking the tube. I also gently remind the hon. Lady that the 21st-century investments TfL has made are now being looked at by transport systems across the world. I wish Members representing London would realise what we have is a public transport system that moves more than 4 million people on a daily basis and that is the envy of the world in its technology and its investments in the ticketing system. There is this idea that somehow we should be keeping ticket offices open, but in many cases they are kept open. By the way, the British Transport Police, which again the hon. Lady does not appear to recognise, plays an incredible job in keeping people safe. Its Operation Guardian has led to a great jump in the reporting of sexual violence on the tube, the number of cases of which I am determined to drive down. If she would ever like to write to me about transport-related matters, I would be delighted to share such information with her.

Ms Buck: I wonder whether the hon. Lady saw the *Evening Standard* on Wednesday of last week. It reported a list of shame of London tube stations, where passengers were often queuing for up to an hour in order to get their tickets following the closure of the ticket office. Although she is painting a rosy picture of everything being wonderful on London transport, will she reflect on the fact that not everybody is able to use Oyster ticket machines and there is still a need in some cases for ticket offices?

Claire Perry: I did not see that report—[*Interruption.*] Well, I do not read the *Standard* every day; I apologise. The hon. Lady says that in some stations in central London people are queuing for up to an hour to buy a ticket because they do not have an Oyster card or a contactless card. I find that absolutely astonishing. Frankly, I might have to question the veracity of the reporting.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: May I just finish what I am saying? I will be delighted to hear more speeches after that.

Taking into account the fact that the Bill will deliver real savings and efficiency for council tax payers and fare payers, that it will allow TfL to do what it was set up to do—namely, to take responsibility for the world's greatest transport system—and that with the Bill we are effectively supporting the role of the devolved Mayor and the crucial scrutiny role of the London Assembly, I can only think that anyone who votes against us tonight does not believe in devolved mayoral accountability, does not have confidence in the scrutiny role that the London Assembly plays and does not give a stuff about their constituents, who will benefit from lower fares and the opportunity to get on the housing ladder through the housing development that the Bill could provide.

9.11 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): I am not a London MP—

Claire Perry: No? You're kidding!

Ian Lavery: I think the Minister has recognised that fact from my accent.

I am not a London MP, and I believe it is really important to understand that it is not just London MPs who have a view on this serious issue. Although I live 300 miles away, I can smell a rat. This is not just about meandering on about Transport for London; it is much more detailed than that. It involves the housing crisis. It involves housing that is really unaffordable. Coupled with the issue faced by TfL, this is about the casino world of property development rather than a conscious decision by that wonderful public service to improve the transport infrastructure of our great capital city, and that really does pose a great threat. The deal being sought under clause 5 of the Bill could expose huge swathes of public finance to unlimited liability.

The Minister has said on more than one occasion that Transport for London is doing a fantastic job and that it is one of the best companies in the world, operating one of the finest transport systems in the world, but is it

not a fact that the Government reduced its operational funding by 25% in the 2013 spending review? That has put a huge financial burden on TfL.

Mr Gareth Thomas: In the light of what my hon. Friend has just said, does he understand the surprise felt by London Members on hearing the Minister talking about the benefit of lower fares that the Bill will bring? Part of the context for the Bill is that fares for journeys between outer London and central London—from Harrow to Baker Street or Westminster, for example—have risen by 60% under the present Mayor.

Ian Lavery: I fully agree. The fares issue was absolutely outrageous. Does anyone really think that, if this Bill is passed, the impact will be a reduction in fares in central London or the outskirts? By the way, I am part of this as well, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just because I come from a different part of the country and do not live in London does not mean that I should not have a say.

Mr Thomas: My hon. Friend should not feel intimidated because he is not from London. He would be very welcome to come to Harrow, particularly to use Harrow on the Hill station, which is crying out for investment and for the sort of lifts that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) has plenty of in the Caledonian Road station—she has four and we do not have any. My constituents have been waiting for an extremely long time to have that sort of accessible service. I do not see this Bill delivering that service—I hope I am wrong, but at the moment I do not see it. I hope that my hon. Friend might be persuaded to come not just to central London where we are now but out to Harrow to see for himself the sort of investment that we need in Harrow on the Hill.

Ian Lavery: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Of course I welcome the opportunity to visit his constituency to see what he has described.

Emily Thornberry: While my hon. Friend is doing a tour of London's stations, perhaps he could visit Angel tube station, which has the longest escalator in the country, but no lifts. In fact, a Norwegian student skied down the escalator, which my hon. Friend can see on YouTube. Disabled people are unable to get to the Angel, because there are no lifts available for them.

Ian Lavery: I have never had so many kind invitations in my life. I will enjoy the two visits that have been lined up. I wonder whether there is a third such visit.

Catherine West: My hon. Friend could not possibly fail to come to Finsbury Park, because that leads into the Stroud Green part of my constituency. Indeed, we have a problem with step-free access. Perhaps I will use this opportunity to lobby the Minister on that matter. We have long been promised step-free access at Finsbury Park. We have also been promised proper ticket barriers; ours is the only station in London without proper ticket barriers. My hon. Friend is welcome at any time to join us in Finsbury Park.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. If we go through this debate station by station, we will be here for a very long time. This Bill goes rather wider than individual stations. Perhaps Members can bear that in mind and move along a little bit.

Ian Lavery: I am pleased that you said that, Madam Deputy Speaker, rather than me making that determination. Of course I will go to Finsbury Park station on my visit in the not too distant future. I have listened to all the experts—the people who live in the city and the Members of Parliament who discuss this issue with constituents. It has just been said by colleagues that there is a huge underinvestment in the transport system in London, and there is no doubt about that.

I mentioned the fact that there had been a 25% reduction in operational funding, which was announced in the 2013 spending review. Some £16 billion of savings were also identified to be made by 2021. That is enormous, and will have a hugely detrimental effect. How can we fix the stations to which my hon. Friends refer if Transport for London has not got the finances to do it? That is what the Bill is about. It has been mentioned that the spending review next week could see a further cut of £700 million from the Transport for London budget. That will be a disaster. This is a world class city in which people live. The tourists who come to this fantastic city have to use a system that is totally and utterly underfunded. That does not portray us as the best capital city in the world.

What is the history? TfL promoted a Bill in the last Parliament that would give the organisation new financial powers. The Opposition could live with parts of this Bill, following, of course, more debate and discussion. Parts of it are vaguely acceptable, but the main problem—the crux of the matter—lies in clause 5.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): As a fellow non-London MP—

Mr Gareth Thomas: Shame!

Cat Smith: It is a shame, as my hon. Friend says.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) share my concern? As Peter Hendy, who was perhaps the architect of the Bill when it began its journey at TfL, has now moved to the position of chairman of Network Rail, the provisions in the Bill, which would immediately affect London, might go on to affect his constituency and mine in the north of England.

Ian Lavery: Of course. I could not put it better myself and I fully agree.

Let me get back to the issue. The Bill is about property developments that have contained very low levels of affordable housing. It has been suggested that the likes of the now infamous Earls Court development potentially contain only 10% affordable housing.

Andy Slaughter: The master plan for the Earls Court and west Kensington area shows the construction of 8,000 properties, which will include no social rented housing additional to that currently on the site, of which only 11% will be affordable housing. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) said, “affordable” can mean 80% of market sale or rental value. I am afraid that in central London, that is unaffordable to anyone at all.

Ian Lavery: That is the point, really. The Bill is about the fact that Transport for London has been totally underfunded. It has undergone a huge reduction in funding and there will be more reductions in the spending review. The Minister let the cat out of the bag when she

said that we will have to take difficult choices. As far as the Conservative party is concerned, that means taking money away. Wait until next week and see what the reduction in the spending review will be.

Andy Slaughter: We all noticed that the Minister did not deny that £700 million might be withheld from TfL, but it is also the case that in any of the proposed developments in zone 1 or 2, about which the sponsor of the Bill talked, TfL has no intention of providing any affordable housing at all.

Ian Lavery: Again, that is extremely concerning. I am not from the area, but I am sure that such cases have been experienced many times in many constituencies in the city. If any of my hon. Friends wanted to give any examples, I would be interested. The House should be prepared to listen to past experiences and to what has happened, as that is what we are likely to see if clause 5 is agreed to.

Catherine West: Will my hon. Friend accept as an example what happens now in the private rented sector, as opposed to the possibilities we might have had under a social housing deal? An income of £75,000 is needed for a household to rent in Finsbury Park. This is not Chelsea: in Finsbury Park, a family with three children wanting to rent in the private sector needs an annual income of £75,000. Is not that why we have such a desperate need for affordable homes? TfL has proved severely wanting as regards the Earls Court scheme and other schemes and that is why we are so desperate to stay in the Chamber at this late hour debating this important matter.

Ian Lavery: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; £75,000 is a king's ransom to many people. It is not affordable in any way, shape or form.

Emily Thornberry: I can give my hon. Friend another example of public land that has been frittered away by the Mayor of London: Mount Pleasant, which used to belong to Royal Mail. It was privatised and has since been used for luxury flats. There are no affordable homes there for Islington residents. It is a disgrace. The Mayor of London railroaded that change through, in the teeth of united opposition from local people who are desperate for housing.

Ian Lavery: I thank my hon. Friend for that fine example. It appears that there is huge potential for land development in central London. Property developers snap up public sector properties for luxury homes, driving those who cannot afford to buy them out of central London. This will keep going, believe me; that is what is happening in the capital. She mentioned that in her constituency alone, there are 21,000 people on the housing list. How will the proposal help any one of them, in any way, shape, or form? How many children are associated with those 21,000 people? How many people just want a decent property to rent? Many people cannot even afford to rent these properties, but big property dealers snap them up. Someone mentioned gangsters, I think with tongue in cheek, but international corporations and individuals with money to burn will buy these properties in the city. They will be snapped up in seconds. That land, which is really owned by, and should be for the use of, the public—constituents—in London, will be lost for ever.

Mr Gareth Thomas: With the exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), who is no longer in his place, I think I am the only Labour Member from outer London taking part in this debate. *[Interruption.]* I beg the pardon of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury). There is a further concern for those of us from outer London who have an open mind about development on TfL sites. I think that the Harrow on the Hill site might benefit from development, but my worry is that if the Bill goes through without further assurances, it will concentrate TfL's mind purely on developing zone 1 and 2 sites. Development of outer London sites, where investment in access and other things is needed, might be delayed even further, because the Bill will be seen as a gold mine so long as there is a focus on zones 1 and 2.

Ian Lavery: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. Gold-diggers with money to burn will buy the properties, and will not use them at all.

Andy McDonald: We talk about outer-London MPs, and there are no more outer-London MPs than those from the north-east and Scotland. This is not just a matter of London votes for London laws; it is a matter for everybody. What we have been seeing in this capital city are safety deposit boxes in the sky, with nobody living in them. Those properties could provide proper housing for the population of London, rather than investments. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is indicative of the way the Government are going? I do not know whether it is true, but I strongly suspect that a contractor might be able to get away without even putting proper finishes on such properties, because nobody is ever going to live in them.

Ian Lavery: I thank my hon. Friend. That is the point that I have been making from the outset. The essence of communities in the capital city and elsewhere across the country is affordable properties. Nobody would disagree that we also need private properties. The right balance is needed, and the right balance is different in different areas. But if a huge swathe of properties without the proper finishes is bought up by property developers who live across the globe, what will that contribute to the local economy? Nothing. It will lead to the development of ghost towns in this wonderful city. That is something we must all try to avoid.

The main point of contention, as I mentioned, is clause 5, which refers to limited partnerships. Clause 5 would give Transport for London a new power which would enable it to enter into limited partnerships with private developers and to incur unlimited liabilities. That is a huge gamble with public funds. It is a casino-type economy, which we cannot afford when the economy generally is not at its best. Not only that, but if the Bill is passed, Transport for London could undertake wider activities than it is permitted to undertake now.

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend rightly focuses on clause 5. Does he agree that the reason there is such freedom in the arrangement, as opposed to the return that is going to be made, is self-evident? If somebody is given the maximum possible return, it is because of the freedoms that that delivers. There is a lack of transparency and a lack of accountability in that arrangement which is utterly dangerous. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Ian Lavery: Indeed. Although the Bill is not long, it lacks transparency. A limited partnership differs slightly from a limited liability partnership. A limited partnership is a form of agreement between parties, not a distinct legal entity, with unclear consequences for public transparency measures, such as the Freedom of Information Act. In the other form of partnership, the general partner assumes unlimited risk, whereas the secondary or limited partners are liable only for the value of any investment they make. The limited partner may not be involved in the management of the partnership.

Although it is assumed that Transport for London would primarily take the role of a limited partner, the Bill would not prevent the organisation from acting as a general partner. If it assumed the role of limited partner, Transport for London would not be able to end the arrangement without the agreement of the general partner, as has already been mentioned.

Catherine West: Does my hon. Friend agree that those on the Labour Benches would feel much more generous towards the Bill had there been examples of Transport for London achieving what Londoners want, which is 50% affordable housing on all such deals? We got that in the case of Earl's Court, rather than 10%. We need genuinely affordable homes—not the current definition of “affordable”, which is 80% of the market rate. We know that 80% of the market rate in London is completely unaffordable for the average earner, who is on about £28,000, £29,000 or £30,000 a year.

Ian Lavery: That is another excellent intervention that explains what a lot of people in this city are experiencing.

Mr Gareth Thomas: May I underline the concern that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) raised? For those who read the proceedings, as one or two poor souls in Transport for London will have to do, it is important that they take full note of the concern, at least among Labour Members, about the lack of appetite from Transport for London for genuinely affordable housing. If they gave us some reassurance on that point, perhaps the Bill would have a chance of making progress. Old Oak Common, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) so ably demonstrated, is a huge factor that hangs over the Bill and is responsible for many of the concerns that we are hearing from the Labour Benches.

Ian Lavery: I am not sure I would be comfortable with assurances from the likes of Transport for London on the split between private and public. I have the simple view that Transport for London, as its name suggests, should look after the transport systems in London. It should involve itself in upgrading and updating the transport infrastructure in London, and perhaps not in property development. I would draw the line there. Perhaps my view is wholly different from that of other people on that issue.

Emily Thornberry: That is a point well made, but if there is land that can be developed, I, for one, would not stand in the way of that. If we get a promise from TfL that half the property will be social housing—that, frankly, is what affordable housing means in inner London—it may well find that it has more friends than

it thinks it does. At the moment, we are nowhere near that. In fact, we have the exact opposite. We are told that zones 1 and 2 will not even have what is laughably called affordable housing.

Ian Lavery: That is interesting. It shows that Labour Members are open to the potential development of land, as long as assurances are given by Transport for London that guarantee the split of the asset. I am not sure whether I would accept such guarantees, but it is important that people recognise that if guarantees were given, there would be room at the table for much more consultation and discussion.

Ian Mearns: A question has to be posed if there is no guarantee from Transport for London. There is no doubt that London has a housing crisis, particularly in the affordable housing sector. If not Transport for London with its property portfolio, who will provide the land for the much needed affordable housing that must be provided for the workers of London?

Ian Lavery: That raises a whole new question that has not been discussed by anyone on either side of the House. It is a valid question that needs answers.

Ms Buck: I, like a number of colleagues, am keen to see land released for development, as long as it is fair and balanced, includes affordable housing and does not substitute for significant cuts in spending on services. Does my hon. Friend agree that a number of people are very jaundiced by the sale of police stations by the Mayor of London? Two police stations in my constituency were sold off, but that did not provide affordable housing; nor did it lead to an investment in front-line policing, which we were told would be a guaranteed consequence of the property sale. We are therefore very jaundiced at the idea that the experience with Transport for London will be any different.

Ian Lavery: Are not people right to be jaundiced? They are sick to death of austerity. When the Government close fire stations, police stations, public buildings and public toilets, they always give the excuse that it will result in a better service for the public purse, and on every occasion the opposite is the case. That is why we need to ensure that this issue is discussed and that the people involved—not just the politicians, TfL and the developers, but everybody—understand what is likely to happen if the Bill is passed.

There have been many arguments about this issue. It has been suggested that TfL should not be able to enter into these partnerships until it proves that it can manage them properly, and I think that is fair. Why should an organisation—a first-class organisation, as the Minister called it—that was created to look after transport infrastructure be allowed to go into property development without proper accountability? I think that is a fair and reasonable question. The Bill would give TfL more power to enter into speculative developments on the sites it owns. We have discussed whether the property prices for these developments are affordable. That needs to reflect what people in the city actually need.

There is also an argument about whether TfL should be getting involved in these limited partnerships, and whether it has the financial competence to do so, because the people it will be getting into bed with under clause 5 are no mice or shrinking violets; they will be used to

delivering development projects not just in this country but around the globe, so they will be shrewd cookies. We want to ensure that, whatever happens, the people of London get the best deal.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to be very suspicious of those partners. He said that he thought it might be a slight exaggeration to say that we are dealing not only with people who might take commercial advantage, but with actual fraudsters. That is not so. In relation to the Earls Court development, TfL's partner, Capco, went into partnership for another part of the site with the Kwok brothers, one of whom is currently serving a five-year sentence for corruption in Hong Kong. If they are the sorts of people who will be involved in the deals, frankly we should have nothing to do with them.

Ian Lavery: I think that it is really wise counsel to scrutinise the qualifications of the people involved with TfL, to see whether they have any nous at all with regard to this. Somebody mentioned gangsters earlier, and perhaps gangsters are getting involved in this. I am sure that more than one has ended up with a five-year prison sentence. Who knows what has been happening behind the scenes, and who knows what is likely to happen if the Bill goes ahead?

Claire Perry: I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's speeches, but I just want to reassure him on a couple of points. First, for TfL to participate in one of these limited partnerships, the Secretary of State's consent must be sought, and that has to be done through the affirmative resolution procedure. Secondly, before the House gets carried away vilifying limited partnerships, let me point out that the Electoral Commission suggests that since 2010 the Labour party has accepted donations of £3.1 million from limited companies and limited liabilities partnerships—about 5% of its donations. Let us not get carried away vilifying a corporate structure that is used perfectly legitimately right across the country, and, indeed, that has raised funds for the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman should accept the reassurance that the Secretary of State has to sign off any of these partnerships that are put together.

Ian Lavery: I thank the Minister for that intervention. I am not criticising limited partnerships but the potential for bad limited partnerships, and I am wondering whether it is in the best interests of people in the capital city for transport in London to become part of these limited partnerships. She mentioned the donations that the Labour party has received from limited partnerships. I wish I had done my homework to find out exactly how much the property developers, rather than limited partnerships, have donated to the Conservative party.

Andy McDonald: Is there not also a concern about the stamp duty arrangements that are made on these potential transfers down the track? As I understand it, if those are transferred to the limited liability partnerships there will be an exemption from stamp duty. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that before this debate is out we should hear from the Minister the assessment made of the loss of stamp duty as opposed to the returns that will be got on this deal?

Ian Lavery: I am sure that the Minister will have heard what my hon. Friend says about stamp duty and respond accordingly.

Claire Perry: Again, I would like to give some facts. I cannot answer on stamp duty, which is a good point, but let me gently point out that the sector that has donated the most to the Labour party after the trade unions is the property sector, with £2.1 million raised from individuals or companies involved in that business. If Labour Members would stop scaremongering and consider the benefits that these sorts of flexibilities could bring to their constituents, we might make some progress and get this Bill sorted.

Ian Lavery: I am not sure whether that was an intervention or another speech, but I thank the Minister.

Catherine West: This is not about the private sector per se, but the track record. In a large investment such as Earls Court, 10% affordable homes is not acceptable. The fire station in Clerkenwell closed because the Mayor of London was keen to see posh flats instead of services. Muswell Hill police station closed and is about to be sold for half a dozen posh flats. There is the continual sense that we are being ripped off. Transport providers are not necessarily the best people to be running property developments.

Ian Lavery: That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who mentioned that ordinary people in London are jaundiced by the experiences they have had before. The police station or the fire station is bulldozed, there are the luxury flats that people do not live in, and then we have ghost towns, which means that there is a downward spiral in the local economies. The only people who make anything from it will be the property developers.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. The fact is that our communities are being hollowed out. We do not object in principle to people coming from all over the world to live in London, as they always have done, so long as they do live here—it is buying properties and leaving them empty that is the problem.

Ian Lavery: That is a good point. London is a fantastic multi-cultural community, and we welcome people from all corners of the globe. We welcome them coming here to spend their money—of course we do. What is unacceptable is what the people of London could face if this Bill goes through. Property developers will be coming in, snapping up the land, and giving money to Transport for London that it should have had in the first place if it had not had these huge cuts, with more to come. That is the real issue.

Mr Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friends and I have dwelled on the experience of Old Oak Common. One would think that TfL would have learned from that experience and sought to reassure Members about its commitment to building affordable housing in future. In actual fact, it has created an advisory board to drive its property development, and no one on that advisory board has experience of building, developing and owning social housing—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. There are several Members who still wish to speak. The hon. Gentleman knows that that was too long for an intervention. He is seeking to catch my eye, but if he makes a very long intervention, his chances of catching my eye go down considerably.

Ian Lavery: I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas). I wonder whether he could repeat exactly what he said. [*Laughter.*] I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker; I was taking liberties and it was said merely in jest.

In conclusion, it is widely accepted by many of the British public that Transport for London needs to be saved from itself. It faces financial challenges that we had all, in the main, hoped would be different.

Andy Slaughter: I know my hon. Friend is about to conclude, but Transport for London is being saved from itself by the process of scrutinising this Bill. The Minister, who has become garrulous now that she does not have to take interventions, should have added that the only reason the Secretary of State's consent is needed on clause 5 is that that concession was achieved in the Bill Committee.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker isn't happy.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman questioning something?

Stephen Pound *indicated dissent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I did not think so.

Ian Lavery: I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). This great city cannot afford TfL's being speculative and gambling on the property market, which will only benefit people who have the money to buy hugely luxurious properties. Simply put, TfL needs proper funding, not the projected cuts of £700 million. I hope the Minister will say that there will be no further reductions in central Government funding to TfL. It will be interesting to see whether that actually happens.

We need to look after the people we represent. I and the Labour party firmly and clearly believe that this dangerous Bill should be opposed, for the simple reason that it is not about enhancing the lives of people in London or of people who use the capital city, or about enhancing transport infrastructure, whether it be tubes, trains or buses. It is about underfunding a great service and putting strains and pressures on Transport for London to look elsewhere to raise finances so that it can keep its head above water.

9.53 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am glad to be able to make a contribution to this debate. I am not from the city of London—I am from the city of York, which is a railway city—but I have many concerns about the Bill, and many of my hon. Friends have touched on them this evening.

At the heart of the motion is the desire to revive the Bill, which started its journey five years ago. As we have heard, the housing situation in London has changed so much during that time that the Bill is no longer relevant. It left the House of Lords 20 months ago, so there have been plenty of opportunities to debate it. London's housing situation has changed so considerably that the Bill must be called into question. We need a new Bill to address the real issues faced today, rather than a Bill that is clearly outdated. We are talking about a property market that largely did not exist five years ago.

Catherine West: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in just the past five years, Haringey, which includes Tottenham, has been considered a higher-value London area, with homes on sale for in excess of £500,000, and that first-time buyers are unable even to get on to the housing ladder? Indeed, on the Government's flagship scheme to incentivise people to get a mortgage, one person has benefited—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I am not having any more long interventions. There have been far too many.

Rachael Maskell: I have grasped the point of my hon. Friend's intervention. House prices have escalated out of control since the Bill was originated. The reality is that we are dealing with a different situation and a different world from when the Bill was put together. I therefore believe that we should not proceed with the motion today, but call a halt and go back to the drawing board to address the real problems we have heard so much about.

I want to touch on some of the issues that have not been addressed today about the consequences of the Bill. The reality is that there will be so many unintended consequences. I asked questions earlier, which were not answered, about the financial modelling and the financial risks that may arise.

Ian Mearns: It is not just about consequences, but about responsibility. In the context of London, particularly when it has land assets to dispose of, Transport for London has a social responsibility to make sure that the land at its disposal can be used to help to rebalance the housing market and give Londoners a chance to live in London.

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that responsibility has to be at the core not just of this Bill, but of government. I have the same concerns as my hon. Friend. The Bill is full of risk, and we have heard about many of those risks today.

Mr Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend rightly seeks to draw attention to the unintended consequences of the Bill. Does she accept that one of them may be to divert the focus of TfL's attention to property development in zones 1 and 2? Might she be tempted to come out to Harrow on the Hill to understand that point even more acutely?

Stephen Pound: Via Ealing.

Rachael Maskell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) for the invitation to Harrow on the Hill station. I am sure that I will join

many hon. Friends in going round the tube stations of London to examine the works that are waiting to be completed.

My hon. Friend makes the point that Transport for London needs a sharper focus on its work in improving our railway network and stations, including by making sure that stations are accessible to disabled people. Why should a disabled person have to wait to access transport? Surely that should be a priority for the Government. The reality is that so many questions are not answered in relation to the Bill.

One of the things we have heard a lot about is the price of housing and its consequences. We are not talking about the development of housing for people to live in, but about the building of assets on which people can make further money at the expense of others. As their assets build, inequality grows further and further in our city. Such inequality has an impact not only at the top end, but on others. If we look at one of the real consequences of inequality, we can see that there are serious skills shortages in the city. If we think about the impact on recruiting to the NHS because people cannot afford to live in central London—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) is gesturing on the Conservative Benches, but the reality is that the constituents of some Conservative Members will face lots of consequences from not having enough nurses in their hospital. In fact, the Government are concerned about agency workers in our hospitals. Are we surprised when trained staff cannot even work in our NHS because they cannot afford to live nearby? Those are some of the consequences of not developing land for its social value and to put something back into our services. In fact, rail workers working for Transport for London will not be able to afford—

Catherine West: Is my hon. Friend aware that key workers cannot gain access to such housing because the key worker category has shot up so high in relation to the market?

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend makes a reasoned point. The centre of London is becoming void of key workers, teachers, people who work in hospitals and people who work in our railway system, and we will suffer the consequences. In fact, the construction workers who will be asked to work on these sites will not be able to live in central London and access those services.

As I did at the start of the debate, I ask about the financial modelling behind the Bill. There are many risks, but my concern was roused by a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). She talked about the new chair of Network Rail, who has come from Transport for London. Network Rail has a major footprint in my constituency, and once the principle is introduced, we could see these limited partnerships extended to many other areas. Sir Peter Hendy has transferred to Network Rail and he could bring the principle with him. I have a site in my constituency of 35 hectares of Network Rail brownfield land on which 1,100 houses could be built, but they would be high-value houses—

Claire Perry: How does the hon. Lady know that?

Rachael Maskell: How do I not know? The Opposition's job is to scrutinise the Government and these provisions—

Claire Perry rose—

Rachael Maskell: I am not going to give way. I heard the point the Minister made from a sedentary position. It is clear that the Bill carries a potential risk. We have heard about financial risk, housing risk and the skills risk. As a result, and given the changing world we live in, we have serious questions about what the limited partnerships would bring. Opposition Members are concerned that we are seeing the social remodelling of London. Housing that is inaccessible is being built in the heart of the city, in zones 1 and 2 and further afield, which means that people cannot afford to live where they work.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend began with the important point that the property market has changed so much in recent years. Is she aware that overseas developers have been especially active in the land market, accounting for nearly three quarters of the £1.8 billion spent on land for development in central London in the second quarter of 2015?

Rachael Maskell: I thank my hon. Friend for sharing that fact. Those figures were not quite on the tip of my tongue, but it does show that the level of overseas investment in the city is pricing everybody else out, leaving the centre of the city void of community life. People are spotted around the city, but do not actually live in a community.

We are not looking at the infrastructure needed to support these developments—social areas, additional staff, schools and other facilities—because that is not part of the legislation either. One concern is this: we talk about limited partnerships being agreed, but what happens after that agreement? Plans and proposals can change. Ultimately, we could end up with a very different animal to what we started with.

Andy Slaughter: We know what happens, because TfL has given the game away: a 100% market housing development in zones 1 and 2. The only guard against that are councils—Labour councils, principally—insisting on affordable housing. The provisions in the Housing and Planning Bill will remove that guard. This is the dirty little deal between the Government and TfL to ensure there is no affordable housing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Talking about housing tangentially to the Bill, because it has an effect on property and the owning of land, is in order. Having a debate almost entirely about housing and the provision of social housing is not in order when discussing the Bill.

Rachael Maskell: I very much take on board my hon. Friend's point. There are real questions left hovering over the Bill. My hon. Friend refers to the Housing and Planning Bill, which relates to the use of land. That is the issue that concerns Labour Members: what will the land be used for? We highlighted the use of land and what kind of housing will be built on it. Clearly, there is concern about infrastructure and other possibilities, even use for business and other modelling on land in the future. The Bill does not specify a certain type of housing. The limited partnerships model proposed does not list the scope of use of the property and the development in the future.

I would like to return to my initial point before I close, which is the ageing of the Bill. We have seen very clearly that the world has changed so much since it was first drafted. What is the Bill's relevance to the modern economy? We have heard much about the structure and direction of our economy. The Bill will build more of an asset-based economy than one that is social-based.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not discussing academic economic issues; we are discussing transport.

Rachael Maskell: The Bill is about more than transport and that is why it is a real concern. It is about an organisation in charge of running our transport expanding its business opportunities into other areas, largely property development on its land. We would like TfL to focus on addressing the needs of constituents' stations, about which we have heard so much today, but the Bill goes far beyond that.

Twenty months after the Bill was last debated, it is now clearly out of time. It is time that this House agreed to pursue another route to use vital land in London.

Stephen Pound: On my hon. Friend's tour of the metropolis, as she passes through Harrow would she care to join me in Northolt, where she will see that Dave Francis Autos is about to be closed down and turned into a car park by TfL in a way that is nothing to do with sustainable transport, local needs or the wishes of local people? Does she not agree that TfL should concentrate on transport? It should be talking about transporting Londoners, not developing land.

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend makes a perfect point.

Stephen Pound: I wouldn't say that.

Rachael Maskell: Well, I would—TfL needs that focus. The reality is that the Bill is about the Government's austerity measures and the fact that TfL will have to plug the gaps. It is one thing to say to the public that it will ensure ticket prices are held for one, two, three or five years, but what happens after five years when the asset runs out? The sponsor, when pressed about financial security, could give the House no assurances. We therefore call on the Government not to proceed with this out-of-date Bill. It is time for a fresh Bill to address London's social needs.

10.10 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I acknowledge, as have others from both sides of the House, that TfL, like many other public bodies, is trying to deliver savings against a tough backdrop. We recognise how difficult that is at a time of deep spending cuts, and we all want TfL to be able to utilise its unused assets, but we think it should be done without damaging future transport provision and in a way that works with local communities.

The Minister delivered a eulogy on the joys of travelling in London that I am not sure all our constituents would recognise, so I make her an offer—she referred to a white van: would she like to join us on our pink bus for a tour of London so that her eyes might be opened to these very joys? *[Interruption.]* We'll stick with the pink bus.

In 2013, TfL's operational funding was slashed by a quarter, which, combined with earlier funding reductions, has required it to identify £16 billion of savings by 2021. We have asked the Government for an insight into what is going to happen next, but they are keeping shunt about next week. It is no great secret, however, that the Department for Transport's budget is facing another deep cut—perhaps about 30%. We do not yet know what the consequences will be for TfL, but it is hard to see how they might be positive. So we appreciate the difficult background against which the Bill is being brought forward—it has been coming forward for a long time—and we understand TfL's desire to maximise the value of its assets and to increase its revenue to reinvest in the capital's transport network, but we are deeply concerned about some aspects of the Bill and are disappointed by the lack of progress made during the long period that has elapsed since it began its slow progress in the last Parliament.

TfL, caught, like so many bodies across the country, between a rock and a hard place, faces difficult spending decisions. With some 5,700 acres of land and more than 500 major potential development sites, it is one of the capital's largest landowners. As we have said, Labour supports TfL earning revenue by utilising its underused facilities, but we have to be absolutely sure that such activities do not risk having an adverse impact on the current provision of transport services and, importantly, on TfL's ability to expand transport services in the future. We do not want it rushing to sell its assets, given that we have to build a future transport system for the city. We saw the same issues in my city of Cambridge: had we rushed into the same decisions a few years ago, some of the excellent initiatives there would not have been possible because the land would have gone.

The changes must allow us to meet increasing demand. I heard your warnings, Madam Deputy Speaker, about discussing housing, but Labour Members' points about the desperate need for affordable housing in our city are real. When we have a public landowner with so much resource, it is hardly unreasonable for us to raise these issues, and it is right that we demand a commitment to maximise affordable housing in developments in which TfL has a stake. For goodness' sake, if TfL is not going to do it, who in this city is going to do it, if people on the public side are not going to stand up for our citizens?

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is making a very considered speech. He identifies first that we expect TfL to run a proper transport system and, secondly, that if TfL as a public body is quite properly going to develop land, it must be done in the public interest. That is not what the Bill provides. Given that neither the Minister nor the sponsor was able to justify the Bill in any terms, does my hon. Friend agree that it should not be revived in this Parliament?

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right that at the heart of this debate is the issue of whether public bodies exist just to make a quick buck or to act in the public interest. On the Labour side, we understand that public bodies need to exercise some responsibility in the long-term interest of our citizens.

Let me return to my point. It is TfL's proposal to enter into limited partnerships with private companies in order to develop its land and increase revenue that is at the heart of tonight's discussion. That is aspect on which I shall focus most of my comments.

Let me first reflect on the controversial developments at Earls Court, to which several Members have unsurprisingly drawn our attention. It exemplifies the problems that clause 5, which would allow TfL to enter into limited partnerships, would bring about. The dismantling of Earls Court exhibition centre to make way for, exactly as we have heard, totally unaffordable flats in what some have described as London's worst major regeneration scheme, is the result of an agreement between TfL and a private developer, Capital & Counties. Our concern is that aspects of the Bill make it more likely that TfL will use limited partnerships more extensively for more ventures, based on the model of the Earls Court development. Let us reflect for a moment on what that might mean.

Just looking at this development within the Earls Court project area, facing prospective demolition are the Gibbs Green and West Kensington housing estates, containing 760 homes. Labour Members continue to watch closely the discussions about the future between Capital & Counties and Hammersmith and Fulham council. According to the council's own consultation in 2012, a huge majority—80%—of residents oppose demolition. Hammersmith and Fulham's Labour leader Stephen Cowan has described the scheme for the redevelopment of the estates, which was agreed by the predecessor Conservative administration, as

“a bad deal for residents”—

and it seems that the residents agree.

The issue goes beyond housing. Just a few weeks ago, the 1,300 tonnes roof of Earls Court exhibition centre was removed and there have been justifiable fears about asbestos exposure and worsening air quality in the area as a result. The consequent health impact of the proposed demolition on nearby residents is clearly a cause for concern. Let us be clear: we want improvement and regeneration, but with the consent of local people, not at their expense and not while private property developers obstinately stick their fingers in their ears and wilfully ignore local objections.

Andy Slaughter: I would like to thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the issue of Earls Court. I have the fortune to have both the Earls Court development site and the Old Oak site—the two sites most mentioned today—in my constituency. What is being proposed by TfL and Network Rail amounts to a terrible deal for residents, but also for TfL itself. Despite being the freeholder of the land in Earls Court, it is ending up with a 37% stake—evidence that TfL does not do good deals and that the developer always wins.

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend makes a very good point that a number of other Members have made: we are not convinced that TfL gets good deals, so why should we make it easier for it to make even less good deals in the future? We worry about that.

Our fear is that the really contentious clause 5 will make it still harder for local people to have influence over major decisions that affect their community. Our view is that regeneration is much better done from the bottom-up, with the assent of those who will be most directly affected—not top-down. Given that the land has already been sold off, the Earls Court development seems to be a bit of a done deal. What we seek to prevent are further lopsided private-public agreements

[Daniel Zeichner]

that steamroll over neighbourhoods in the name of regeneration. We understand that TfL wants greater commercial freedoms, but those freedoms cannot come at the cost of denying a voice to ordinary people in London.

The core of the issue is the imprecise nature of the limited partnership itself. A partnership of that kind is not a distinct legal entity, and a lack of clarity surrounds the roles that would be played by each party in the partnership, where responsibility and accountability would lie, and who would really benefit most, the private developer or the public. We are advised that a limited partnership is able to change its general partner, but the partnership agreement would be unlikely to be made public, and its terms would not be open to public scrutiny. To be in the public body interest, genuine partnerships need far more transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, unless it is agreed for a fixed term, a limited partnership will be at will. A limited partnership at will may be dissolved on notice by a general partner, but, unless the agreement provides otherwise, not by a limited partner, which TfL is likely to be. Limited partnerships clearly vest a large amount of risk in their ventures, and we do not believe that these issues have been properly addressed. There is a real danger that TfL would be taking very large risks—indeed, unlimited risks. We do not think that it has considered carefully enough the long-term impacts of introducing powers to enter into such partnerships. For those reasons, we are cautious about the potential precedent, and we believe that the Government should also assess very carefully the appropriateness of other public transport authorities' entering into limited partnerships.

Some of my hon. Friends have made powerful points. Much of what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry)—who is no longer in the Chamber—hit the nail on the head. She was particularly critical about the prospect of a partnership's changing at some future stage. It was telling that, when she challenged Conservative Members to explain how the process might work, they looked thoroughly uncomfortable and were unable to provide any reassurance.

I think that what my hon. Friend said about the price of a flat being £826,000 was one of the most telling comments that we have heard tonight. It told us so much about the current crisis. I feel deeply about that crisis, being an almost outer-outer London Member. Cambridge, which I represent, reflects all the attributes of the London housing market nowadays. [Interruption.] These are serious issues. Conservative Members are chuntering away as though it did not matter that people cannot afford to live in our great cities, but it does matter. The point that we are making is that if public bodies like TfL do not take this seriously, we are not relying on anyone else to do it.

Catherine West: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. Conservative Members are making light of what is the most important issue in London. Does he agree that it is outrageous that people need an annual income of £75,000 to be able to afford to rent a property in Finsbury Park—not Chelsea—for their families? [Interruption.]

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hear Conservative Members saying, from sedentary positions, that these are spurious points. I must tell them that for the hundreds of people who marched through my city of Cambridge at the weekend, it is not a spurious point that people cannot afford to live in our great cities. It is not a minor point in terms of our future economic prosperity either, because unless people can afford to live in our great cities, that future prosperity is not assured, for Cambridge or for London. These things really matter.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the lack of concern shown by Conservative Members for the consequences of the Bill may be explained by the fact that, during Prime Minister's Question Time a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister said that an appropriate price for a starter home was up to £450,000?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber when I made it very clear that we were not discussing housing. We are discussing Transport for London, and housing is tangential to that. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) is absolutely in order when he is talking about clause 5.

Daniel Zeichner: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Our worry is that, as a major landowner in London TfL, has a real responsibility. That is why Opposition Members have made it so clear that we feel that once that land is gone, it is gone forever, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) put so well. That is a very powerful point. She also pointed out that we have a deep unhappiness about these limited partnerships. She put that very well, too—partnerships with who knows who; the risk being nationalised, the profit being privatised. That point is absolutely right.

I enjoyed the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), whose ability to smell a rat at 300 miles is legendary. He, too, has spotted exactly what is going on in this Bill.

I also endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). She pointed out that the financial consequences of this Bill are very poorly explained, which gives us yet further cause for concern.

We appreciate that TfL needs to be looking at a long-term strategy for London's transport infrastructure. It is absolutely right to do so; it is its job. But there is a real fear, which has been raised by many of my hon. Friends as well as by trade unionists and London residents, that elements of this Bill would lead not to a long-term investment strategy, but to profiteering in the short term on property development, an outcome which is totally unacceptable.

As a number of my hon. Friends have said, we do not feel the way the powers provided in this Bill would be used has been scrutinised adequately, and we are not assured that local councils and communities will be properly protected.

I think we all recognise that this Bill has been on something of an odyssey through Parliament over the years, but we are not persuaded the proposals in clause 5 should ever make it to Ithaca—that is a reference for the good Mayor to pick up. Given the bad feeling generated

over this Bill for years, it is now time for TfL to reflect, go back to the drawing board and bring forward new legislation in this Session that we trust will command greater consensus and confidence and genuinely allow TfL to utilise its assets in ways that are consistent with the wider long-term public good.

Bob Blackman *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

The House divided: Ayes 141, Noes 29.

Division No. 123]

[10.27 pm

AYES

Andrew, Stuart	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Argar, Edward	Hayes, rh Mr John
Baldwin, Harriett	Hinds, Damian
Barclay, Stephen	Hoare, Simon
Barwell, Gavin	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Berry, Jake	Hopkins, Kris
Bingham, Andrew	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Blackman, Bob	Johnson, Gareth
Boles, Nick	Johnson, Joseph
Bone, Mr Peter	Jones, Andrew
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Jones, Mr Marcus
Bradley, Karen	Kirby, Simon
Brazier, Mr Julian	Kwarteng, Kwasi
Brine, Steve	Lancaster, Mark
Brokenshire, rh James	Latham, Pauline
Buckland, Robert	Leadsom, Andrea
Burns, Conor	Lefroy, Jeremy
Burrowes, Mr David	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Burt, rh Alistair	Lewis, Brandon
Cairns, Alun	Mackintosh, David
Cartlidge, James	Mak, Mr Alan
Churchill, Jo	Mann, Scott
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Maynard, Paul
Colville, Oliver	McCartney, Jason
Crabb, rh Stephen	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
Davies, Byron	Menzies, Mark
Dinenage, Caroline	Metcalfe, Stephen
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.	Milling, Amanda
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Milton, rh Anne
Duddridge, James	Mordaunt, Penny
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Morgan, rh Nicky
Dunne, Mr Philip	Morris, Anne Marie
Ellis, Michael	Morris, David
Ellison, Jane	Morris, James
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Mundell, rh David
Elphicke, Charlie	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Evans, Graham	Newton, Sarah
Evennett, rh Mr David	Nuttall, Mr David
Fallon, rh Michael	Offord, Dr Matthew
Foster, Kevin	Opperman, Guy
Freeman, George	Patel, rh Priti
Freer, Mike	Pawsey, Mark
Gale, Sir Roger	Penning, rh Mike
Gauke, Mr David	Penrose, John
Gibb, Mr Nick	Perry, Claire
Glen, John	Phillips, Stephen
Griffiths, Andrew	Pincher, Christopher
Gummer, Ben	Pursglove, Tom
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Quin, Jeremy
Halfon, rh Robert	Raab, Mr Dominic
Hancock, rh Matthew	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Hands, rh Greg	Robinson, Gavin
Harper, rh Mr Mark	Rudd, rh Amber
Harrington, Richard	Rutley, David
Harris, Rebecca	Scully, Paul

Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Shelbrooke, Alec
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Soubry, rh Anna
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stride, Mel
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Syms, Mr Robert
Timpson, Edward
Tomlinson, Justin

Tracey, Craig
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wragg, William

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margot James and
George Hollingbery

NOES

Austin, Ian	McDonald, Andy
Blomfield, Paul	Mearns, Ian
Buck, Ms Karen	Pound, Stephen
Burgon, Richard	Shannon, Jim
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Slaughter, Andy
Coyle, Neil	Smith, Cat
Davies, Geraint	Smith, Jeff
Foxcroft, Vicky	Spellar, rh Mr John
Gardiner, Barry	Stevens, Jo
Glendon, Mary	Tami, Mark
Hanson, rh Mr David	Thornberry, Emily
Healey, rh John	West, Catherine
Lavery, Ian	Zeichner, Daniel
Lucas, Caroline	
Marris, Rob	
Maskell, Rachael	

Tellers for the Noes:
Ruth Cadbury and
Grahame M. Morris

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put forthwith.

The House divided: Ayes 141, Noes 29.

Division No. 124]

[10.38 pm

AYES

Andrew, Stuart	Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Argar, Edward	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Baldwin, Harriett	Duddridge, James
Barclay, Stephen	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Berry, Jake	Dunne, Mr Philip
Bingham, Andrew	Ellis, Michael
Blackman, Bob	Ellison, Jane
Boles, Nick	Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Bone, Mr Peter	Elphicke, Charlie
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Evans, Graham
Bradley, Karen	Evennett, rh Mr David
Brazier, Mr Julian	Fallon, rh Michael
Brine, Steve	Foster, Kevin
Brokenshire, rh James	Freeman, George
Buckland, Robert	Freer, Mike
Burns, Conor	Gale, Sir Roger
Burrowes, Mr David	Gauke, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair	Gibb, Mr Nick
Cairns, Alun	Glen, John
Cartlidge, James	Griffiths, Andrew
Churchill, Jo	Gummer, Ben
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Colville, Oliver	Halfon, rh Robert
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hancock, rh Matthew
Davies, Byron	Hands, rh Greg
Dinenage, Caroline	Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howlett, Ben
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kirby, Simon
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Mackintosh, David
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Mann, Scott
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David

Morris, James
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Newton, Sarah
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stride, Mel
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond

Syms, Mr Robert
 Timpson, Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James

White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margot James and
Gavin Barwell

NOES

Austin, Ian
 Blomfield, Paul
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gardiner, Barry
 Glindon, Mary
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Healey, rh John
 Lucas, Caroline
 Marris, Rob
 Maskell, Rachael

McDonald, Andy
 Mearns, Ian
 Perkins, Toby
 Pound, Stephen
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stevens, Jo
 Tami, Mark
 Thornberry, Emily
 West, Catherine
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Grahame M. Morris and
Ruth Cadbury

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the promoters of the Transport for London Bill [Lords], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2010-12 on 24 January 2011, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of Bills).

Illicit Arms Trade (Africa)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jackie Doyle-Price.)

10.49 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, Egypt, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Algeria, Tunisia, Burundi, Angola, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mozambique—all countries in Africa, and all countries in which ongoing conflict, fuelled by the ready availability of small arms and light weapons in particular, continues to claim lives; but—and this is important—the story that informs this debate, which I am grateful to have secured, does not end there.

For across Africa, and most notably in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, armed violence outside conflict—all too often untouched by law enforcement—has reached epidemic proportions, destroying communities, hampering development efforts and undermining efforts to improve the lives of many of the poorest and most vulnerable in our world.

With UK aid pouring into the continent alongside that of our partners who are meeting their commitments, we can and should ask why and what the Government can do and are doing to prevent the flow of illicit arms that fuel this tale of sorrow, death and destruction in a continent to which significant development aid is dedicated. On all these issues, I hope the Minister can be clear with the House tonight.

Two things that the Government have been clear about: first, the obligation of this country and our partners to meet the target of spending 0.7% of gross national income on international aid, not only because it is the right thing to do but because it is critically important for British security; and secondly, the profound and negative consequences for individuals, societies and, yes, even the citizens of this country if we fail to tackle, at source, the endemic poverty which fuels violence, extremism and hardship, and which ends up manifesting itself on the streets of western capitals in the manner that we saw in Paris last week.

Let us be very clear, as I was on the last occasion I troubled the House on a debate on the Adjournment this late into the evening, when I spoke of the effects of corruption in the developing world and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular: if we fail to tackle the root causes which lead to the disenfranchisement and extremism of whole sections of this ever-closer world in which we live, that will end up affecting us just as much as it affects those whose lives are poorer, meaner and harder than anything that we or our constituents ever have to contemplate.

The fight against the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, particularly in Africa, is part of that fight. As the UN Secretary-General pointed out when the matter was debated in the Security Council in May,

“Over the last decade, the world has been afflicted by over 250 conflicts. While no two have been the same, the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons, and their ammunition, is common to all. More than 50,000 men, women and children are killed each year as a direct consequence, and the number of those displaced has reached levels not seen since the Second World War. Civilians, including children, suffer the most.”

The ease of access to illicit small arms in particular—a glut at present, as recent upgrades to assault weapons have led to the ready availability of still lethal arms that have been superseded, but whose price on black markets has fallen considerably—thus undermines much of the effort that the international community puts into ensuring stability and sustainable development.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way and indicating before the debate that he would be willing to do so, and I congratulate him on securing a very important debate. He will be aware that there was a debate in Westminster Hall recently on the legal arms trade. It was well attended. In that debate, the point was made that the arms trade is always a choice, not a necessity. It stands to reason that many weapons traded illegally must have had a legitimate point of origin or point of manufacture. Does he agree that the Government must continue to work towards their commitments in the arms trade treaty and encourage their global counterparts, especially in Africa, to do likewise?

Stephen Phillips: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He will know that we have signed and ratified the arms trade treaty, and that a number of countries have done the same, though it remains for many other countries to do so. I am sure he would join me—this is what I think his intervention is really about—in encouraging the Minister to ensure that others sign up to the treaty, as 48 countries have without yet having ratified it, and ratify the treaty as well.

The point that I was coming to is the need to ensure sustainability and stability in our world, especially in Africa. Across Africa, a politician who loses an election, or at least fails to stuff the ballot boxes sufficiently, hands out weapons to their supporters. A politician who experiences disenchantment at the hands of those supporters as a result of economic failure, all too often caused by corruption, fabricates an enemy and deflects criticism by directing armed violence against the scapegoats created. If someone sees the wealth of others and wonders why their own life is mean and brutish, they arm themselves and use violence to take what they should have. All that is made possible by the ready availability of arms too often diverted from the stockpiles of state actors without the means properly to control them.

The electoral violence experienced in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 and 2011 is as good an example as exists. Following the disputed presidential election of 2010, supporters of both rival candidates armed themselves, a crisis ensued, thousands died and the UN and its peacekeepers had to become involved. Côte d'Ivoire is a long way from the United Kingdom, but notably, in both 2011 and 2012, this country and our allies across Europe saw a marked increase in asylum claims and illegal immigration by Ivorians. What goes on in Africa matters directly here—maybe not immediately, but inevitably in due course.

Monsieur Diakité, the president of the west African network on small arms and himself an Ivorian, told the United Nations of his experience:

“I was peacefully sleeping in my room at the University of Bouaké, where I was in my first year of law school, when I was abruptly awakened by weapon fire from all sides. Some frustrated individuals who had been denied Ivorian citizenship had decided to take up arms—too readily available—to make their claim. We were terrorized for days, hunted like animals, without water,

[Stephen Phillips]

without food, without receiving help, constantly living in the fear of being killed. And we were not the only ones. The rest of the inhabitants suffered as well, regardless of age, sex or status. We all paid the price, but for what? And why? When I returned to the neighbourhood, one of my neighbours was forced, in order to feed her family, to yield to the intimidation and threats of armed individuals. I will never forget the tears on her face depicting her pain and the shame of having been a victim of forced prostitution and rape.”

The truth of the matter is that the availability of illicit small arms across Africa is such a problem that it has become part of the way of life. The question for the Minister, as I have hinted, is what he will do about it given the billions of pounds that British taxpayers pour into development aid in the continent with the best of motives, which are naturally undermined by the threat to stability and security that those arms pose.

I have used the Ivorian crisis as an example and it is a good one, but I have mentioned it for another very good reason. The arms and ammunition that have fuelled the violence over the last decade in that country have come not just from illegal sources internationally, but from so-called leakages from the stockpiles of state actors and the abandoned arsenals made readily available following the fall of al-Gaddafi in Libya.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on bringing this very important subject to the House for its consideration. I have friends who are involved in security in the middle east and who have been active in Libya. They tell me that Libya is awash with illegal arms and that some of those arms have made their way to France. I am not saying that they were involved in the terrorist attacks over the past few days, but I tell the House that some weapons from Libya have made their way to France and are in the hands of terrorists. Does he agree that we need to put pressure on the Libyan authorities, such as they are, to use what power they have to ensure that the illegal trail of arms is curtailed?

Stephen Phillips: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, to which I will turn shortly. The arms that were in Libya have been available to terrorists not only in west and sub-Saharan Africa, but across the world. Indeed, it seems that those arms may well have been used in Paris and elsewhere in terrorist attacks. Today, those arsenals continue to flow into west Africa. They fuel terrorism in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. The borders are porous.

There are three specific questions that the Minister will wish to consider answering when he replies to this debate. First, what are the Government doing to make sure that no more of these weapons reach sub-Saharan Africa? Secondly, what is being done to deprive terrorists, in particular Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, of the weapons they have already got their hands on? Thirdly, what strategy do the Government intend to deploy to ensure that next time a heavily armed regime is overthrown in Africa or elsewhere, its weapons do not find their way into the hands of those who would harm either us or their fellow countrymen?

In truth, however, although these are specific issues on which the Minister will wish to reflect, there is a much broader question that he needs to answer: what is being done, and what more can be done, to stop the

flow of illicit light weapons and small arms more generally? What efforts are the Government making to disrupt supplies internationally and deal with the glut of assault weapons to which I have already referred—a glut that, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has made clear, may well have made it easier for the terrorists who carried out the attacks in Paris last week? What support—both direct budget support and technical assistance—are the Government giving to countries across Africa to ensure that arms and arsenals are properly protected and do not suffer the leakage rates, estimated to be as high as 5% annually, that place small arms into the hands of black marketeers, criminals and terrorists?

The Minister will wish to discuss those issues, in so far as he has not already done so, with his counterparts in the Department for International Development. Indeed, he will have to do so, for hidden among the probably too numerous sustainable development goals to which we and the rest of the world have just signed up, he will find in goal 16 the need to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. That cannot happen without the scourge of highly mobile weapons that kill being removed from circulation, in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. It certainly cannot happen without action being taken to suppress an illicit trade that places light weapons and small arms into the hands of any disgruntled faction or individual minded to take steps to acquire them.

Manufacturers and brokers operating at the borders of the law, if not beyond it, but at present able to buy their way out of any difficulties they face, must be dealt with. So too, as I have already said, must the security of arsenals and stockpiles. Again, lest it be thought that this does not matter to us here, let me say that it does. It is the taxes of our constituents that fund the international aid that the UK deploys; it is their security that demands that we tackle the root causes of migration and terrorism; and it is their future that mandates that we avert the sorts of crises that fuel the scourge of terrorism threatening us all.

I want to end my remarks with a reference to another country that should be in the headlines of the world press but is at present largely not, although for perfectly understandable reasons, given the events of the past week: Burundi. There is growing evidence, as I told the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary last week, that if a genocide principally involving the use of small arms against civilians has not yet started, it is on the cards. *Libération*, the French newspaper, has said that it has started already. The President of the Senate of Burundi has reportedly called on supporters of the Government to “pulverise” and “exterminate” opponents who he described as “good only for dying”. Cockroach metaphors familiar to those who recall the Rwandan genocide of 1994 have been used. The ultimatum given to opponents of the Government to disarm and fall into line ended yesterday.

That this matters—not least because once a civil war starts, as the experience of Rwanda teaches us, it is almost impossible to stop—is obvious, but it also matters in the context of this debate, because Burundi, with its history of past conflicts, is awash with small arms, despite past efforts to ensure the disarmament of the civilian population. Yesterday, according to the mayor of the capital, Bujumbura, his house was attacked with grenades

and automatic weapons. There were other attacks across the capital and, reportedly, four deaths, all from small arms or grenades.

Not only is Burundi in a bad way, as the Minister no doubt knows, but it is in a place that, if the violence does get worse following President Nkurunziza's decision to secure a third term on the face of things barred by the constitution, is likely to descend into armed violence and humanitarian crisis at speed—and if Burundi, then maybe Rwanda, and maybe, given porous borders, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The real point for tonight's debate, however—separate, I accept, from the need to act over Burundi recognised last week by the Security Council—is that if the country was not awash with the illicit arms that the five outbreaks of mass violence since independence from Belgium have ensured, we would have to worry a lot less about the current situation.

It is those illicit arms that fuel violence, threaten civil society, undermine development aid, drive migration and render us here in the United Kingdom a lot less safe. For all those reasons, the Government need to be clear what they are doing and to focus on this issue rather more than I suspect is at present the case. I look forward to hearing from the Minister tonight that that will happen.

11.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing this debate. He is, if he does not mind my using this word, an Afrophile—a lover of all things Africa. He regularly speaks up for Africa in this Chamber, be it on sustainable development goals or on women's rights, in a recent debate on corruption, and today on countering the illicit arms trade in Africa—all issues that have a very direct impact on the people of Africa. Small arms in Africa are far too prevalent: estimates of over 2 billion being available are about right. In fact, every minute a person is killed in Africa as a result of small arms weapons, two thirds of whom are not in official conflict zones. My hon. and learned Friend asked a number of excellent questions that I will attempt to summarise and respond to.

As the House is only too aware, conflict and proliferation of arms continue to bring immense human suffering around the world, and that is particularly true on the continent of Africa. This is a global problem, though, that needs a global solution. That is why the Government worked hard with international partners to secure the arms trade treaty in 2013. This landmark agreement has undoubtedly made it harder for illegal arms to reach the hands of criminals, terrorists and other organisations. The Government are focused on ensuring that the treaty delivers the necessary step change in the international system governing controls on conventional arms, as well as arms traded illicitly. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) eloquently pointed out the connections between the legal trade and the illicit trade, and more can be done on the connections between the two.

We have already seen African leadership in pushing forward the universal implementation of the arms trade treaty. As we have heard, some countries have signed up

to but not fully ratified the process, and we encourage those that have not already signed up to that to do so. Some positive things have been happening more recently. For example, in February Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo came together for the first time to discuss illicit weapons and their transit across their borders. I will come on to answer some of the specific questions put to me on Burundi. In relation to the support for the arms trade treaty in the financial year 2014-15, the Government set aside £350,000 for projects to assist countries in signing and ratifying. We contributed £150,000 towards a conference in August this year that helped states to look at the issue of signing and ratification. I am pleased that over 20 African nations did sign, including Mali and Nigeria. Her Majesty's Government stand ready to offer our expertise and, where possible and appropriate, to assist any state that wants to accede but currently lacks the capacity to do so.

My hon. and learned Friend raised specific concerns about, notably, Nigeria and Somalia. He is right that we must help to fight the atrocities of Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. We recognise the recent successes by Nigeria and its neighbours, but equally there have been some horrific recent attacks in Abuja and in the north of Cameroon. That is a sobering reminder that Boko Haram still represents a significant threat that is made worse by the easy availability of small arms and fuelled by criminality, kidnapping and the illegal arms trade. That is why my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have underlined to President Buhari the UK's commitment to increasing support for Nigeria in our unwavering resolve to help in the fight against terrorism in that part of Africa. We are also expanding our military and counter-terrorism support in Nigeria, supporting a regional taskforce to tackle the insurgents, and providing humanitarian development support to those affected by violence.

Hon. Members will be aware of the United Kingdom's role in Somalia, and particularly the Prime Minister's leadership on the Somali issue. As recently as 26 October, we authored a UN resolution extending the arms embargo on Somalia. The UN and the EU play a significant role in these arms embargoes, as does the African Union. Those embargoes, particularly in Somalia, will restrict the flow of arms to al-Shabaab in the region. They will also allow us to support the legitimate security forces of the federal Government in receiving arms. If there are arms embargoes in certain countries, it is essential that they do not get in the way of the provision of small arms to the federal Government and security services. The embargoes will also allow the brave men and women serving the African Union mission in Somalia to continue to diminish and degrade al-Shabaab's grip on the area.

Jim Shannon: Stability before elections is crucial to future peace in Somalia, so control over illegal weapons is critical. Has the Minister had any direct contact with the Somali Government about their control of port facilities?

James Duddridge: Last year I met the then Somali Prime Minister and a number of Cabinet Ministers in Lancaster House, where we discussed our support for the Somali national army. Earlier today I met our ambassador to Mogadishu, who is doing an excellent job. The Minister of State, Department for International Development,

[James Duddridge]

my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), recently visited Mogadishu—I was going to accompany him, but was unable to do so—to look at the issues, particularly those relating to armaments. We will continue that ongoing dialogue with Somalia.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham mentioned Burundi. Alas, the situation there is incredibly troubling and I cannot offer him enormous amounts of reassurance about the stability of that area. When I took on the role of Foreign Office Minister a year ago, my one-page briefing on all the issues in the countries that I look at, including across Africa, highlighted Burundi as the country that could most easily slip into civil war. Sadly, the situation has not changed much in the past year, despite our efforts. In many ways, things have gone backwards.

Stephen Phillips: If we do not ensure that Burundi stabilises in the next few weeks, there is a real risk that it will descend into civil war and that the United Nations and perhaps this country will have to get involved. Is it not time for the Minister to make it clear to his Government colleagues that we have to do something before it is too late, so that we do not end up with another genocide of the type that happened in Rwanda in the mid-1990s?

James Duddridge: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right: there needs to be a genuine, inclusive dialogue that respects the Arusha agreement and that has the consent of all Burundian people. On Sunday week, I spoke to a number of key players. That was the night of the key turning point, when the President made a statement saying, “Unless we have control, terrible things will happen.” My hon. and learned Friend referred to the language used, which was reminiscent of what happened before the civil war in Rwanda and which threatened violence. I and a number of international colleagues talked to the key interlocutors, including the vice-president of the African Union and the special envoy to the African Union. I also spoke to the Foreign Minister of Burundi and there was some rowing back on that language. However, as my hon. and learned Friend has said, there was still violence and the situation is still very much a tinderbox in a place where non-governmental organisations say it is possible to get a Kalashnikov for \$20. There are always going to be lots of problems in addition to the ethnic dimension.

We are worried about the hardening of the rhetoric. It is of deep concern. We will continue to work with other parties, particularly the South Africans, Ugandans and Tanzanians, in reinforcing the message in Burundi, working through our high commission in Rwanda.

Elsewhere across Africa, the UK is working through more traditional measures of arms control. For example, the Sahel—long characterised by its porous borders

and its mobile trading populations—in many ways provides ideal conditions for the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons to thrive. The improvement in weapons and munitions security in the Sahel has therefore become a priority in stabilising the region. We must provide better co-ordination within and between Sahel countries, improving technical capability, but also working with external partners to restrict weaponry on the ground.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned Libya. We continue to urge all parties in Libya to endorse and sign the Libyan political agreement as soon as possible. It is vital that a national code is established as soon as possible. That remains the most effective way to tackle that terrorist threat and the traffickers of arms and munitions, and to bring peace and security to Libya. It is true that some arms have already left Libya. I would be interested to speak privately to him about his comments about arms coming from Libya into Europe. However, I would point out that there is a pretty easy availability of arms from the Balkans and ex-Soviet countries, so I suspect that is the principal source of arms, especially with the slightly more porous borders than we are used to. Given the Schengen agreement within Europe, it is relatively easy for arms in Europe to be moved across. The EU will certainly need to look at that again while the security situation is as tense as it is.

We need to increase our pool of capability at African Union and United Nations level, making sure that our peacekeepers, collectively throughout the world, have world-class training. In some places, that will be by the UK providing financial support, which makes their work possible; in some cases, it will be by providing individual support. We are supporting security sector reform to help African countries to tackle smugglers, criminals and terrorists. That is primarily through the work of the British peace support teams in eastern and southern Africa, where we are deploying capability and accountable leadership for the longer term. We are leading in stabilisation, security and justice programmes across the continent.

All that of course sits alongside our international development work. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham mentioned Côte d'Ivoire, which is perhaps a good place for me to draw together my conclusions. He said that what happens there can have a direct impact on the UK. Illicit arms in Africa can have a direct impact on the UK so there are good reasons for us to deal with this problem, both because it is the right thing to do for African countries and because it is the right thing to do for the United Kingdom.

Question put and agreed to.

11.18 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 16 November 2015

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 16 November in Brussels. I will be representing the UK.

As the provisional agenda stands, there are two main items; the simplification of the common agricultural policy and international agricultural trade issues including market conditions and support measures.

There are currently four confirmed Any Other Business items:

Information from the presidency on regulations regarding the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in educational establishments;

information from the presidency on amending regulations determining measures on certain fixing aids and refunds related to the common organisation of the markets in agricultural products;

information from the Czech Republic on the results of the meeting of directors-general on hunting and game management in the 28 member states (requested by the Czech Republic); the future of the sugar sector in the EU (requested by Italy); a discussion on the sanitary embargo by the Russian Federation on pork products (requested by Belgium).

[HCWS304]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

European Councils

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 November. My right hon. Friend, Minister of State and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords, Lord Howe will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (Defence) on 17 November. I will attend the General Affairs Council on 17 November. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise will attend the GAC cohesion discussion on 18 November. The Foreign Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council (Defence) will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Luxembourg presidency. The meetings will be held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)

Ministers are expected to discuss the recent heightened tensions and violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The High Representative will brief Ministers on her recent meetings with President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Syria

Ministers will have an exchange of views on Syria, following the international meeting in Vienna on 30 October. Ministers will discuss how the EU and member states can further support the resumption of a Syrian political process, based on the principles of the Geneva Communiqué of 2012.

Eastern Partnership

Ministers are expected to exchange views on recent developments in the six Eastern Partnership states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.

Migration

The FAC will discuss the outcomes of the Valletta summit on migration which will take place on 11-12 November, and the conference on the Western Balkans route which took place on 8 October. The UK places high importance on working with EU and international partners on migration and will encourage rapid implementation of the action plan due to be agreed at Valletta in order to tackle the causes and consequences of irregular migration.

Libya

The FAC will possibly consider latest developments in the UN-led political process. At a UK/UN co-hosted Senior Officials meeting in London on 19 October, all international partners, including the EU, agreed to co-ordinate their assistance to Libya under a UN lead, using a draft structure to be agreed with a Government of National Accord (GNA). The UK will encourage the EU to maintain momentum by urging the House of Representatives and Libyan parties to reach agreement and establish a GNA.

Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)

Ahead of the FAC (Defence), the European Defence Agency (EDA) steering board will focus on the EDA budget and preparatory action on Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)-related research. The EDA will present its three-year planning framework, including possible new projects, contribution to hybrid threats and incentives to encourage greater defence co-operation. The FAC (Defence) will focus on three main agenda items: the Commission's work to develop and implement a European action plan to ensure that the European defence market is ready to meet future security needs; capacity building for security and development (CBSD) to build capacity in third countries to manage crises; and current operations, with a focus on the naval operation to interdict people smugglers in the Mediterranean and the mission in the central African Republic.

General Affairs Council

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 17 November is expected to focus on: preparation of the agenda for the European Council on 17 and 18 December 2015; Rule of Law; the inter-institutional agreement on better regulation; the 2016 Commission Work programme; and the European semester.

Preparation of the December European Council

The GAC will prepare the agenda for the 17 and 18 October European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend. The draft December European Council agenda covers: migration; economic and monetary union; the single market; the UK's renegotiation; and external relations issues, likely to include Russia and Ukraine.

Rule of Law

The presidency will host the first annual dialogue on promoting the rule of law in the European Union at the GAC. The Luxembourg presidency has outlined ‘rule of law in the age of digitalisation’ as the theme which member states will discuss. First Vice-President Timmermans will also report on October’s human rights colloquium, hosted by the European Commission, on combating anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred.

Inter-institutional agreement on better regulation (IIA)

The GAC will receive a presentation from the Luxembourg presidency updating Ministers on the progress of the IIA negotiations, including the recent political talks between the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. We expect the discussion to be focused on the anticipated amended IIA text on Chapter 3 (better regulation) and 4 (legislative instruments) of the existing draft text.

2016 Commission Work Programme

The GAC will discuss the 2016 Commission Work Programme (CWP): “No Time for Business as Usual” published on 27 October.

We want a more effective EU—a dynamic, competitive, outward focused Europe, delivering prosperity and security for the benefit of all its members. A CWP focused on jobs, economic growth, trade, competitiveness and through the use of regulatory fitness and performance programme (REFIT) measures and withdrawals, a better regulatory environment for business is a step towards this goal.

Annual growth review and roadmap for the European semester 2016

The GAC will receive a Commission presentation on the 2016 annual growth survey (AGS), to be released on 18 November. The AGS marks the beginning of the European semester process and is published alongside the alert mechanism report, the joint employment report and the Commission draft budgetary opinions on eurozone member states. The AGS sets out broad EU level economic and social objectives for the year ahead and is expected to contain a focus on euro area level priorities, as set out in the European Commission’s 21 October communication on steps towards completing economic and monetary union.

The GAC will also receive a presentation from the Luxembourg presidency and incoming Dutch presidency on the timeline and next steps in the 2016 European semester process.

General Affairs Council cohesion

The 18 November GAC will focus on issues relating to the EU’s cohesion policy. The presidency plans three discussions, with Council conclusions agreed on each; first on the contribution of the European structural and investment funds to support the transition to a low carbon economy; second, on European territorial co-operation (or Interreg) programmes; and third, on steps that might be taken to simply the implementation and administration of European structural and investment funds.

[HCWS305]

PRIME MINISTER**Machinery of Government**

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This written ministerial statement confirms that Infrastructure UK will be merged with the Major Projects Authority to form a new organisation called the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. The new organisation will report jointly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, and will sit formally within the Cabinet Office. This change will be effective from 1 January 2016.

[HCWS307]

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The written ministerial statement confirms that the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation and Co-operation in Europe is as follows:

<i>Lord Bowness MP (Leader)</i>	
<i>Full Representative</i>	<i>Substitute Members</i>
Ian Austin MP	Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom
Sir Simon Burns MP	Victoria Atkins MP
Lord Dubs	James Cleverly MP
Peter Grant MP	Stuart Donaldson MP
Baroness Hilton of Eggardon	Marcus Fysh MP
David Jones MP	Stephen Hammond MP
Caroline Nokes MP	James Heappey MP
Laurence Robertson MP	John Mann MP
Gavin Shuker MP	Bob Neill MP
Royston Smith MP	Nick Smith MP
Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP	
John Woodcock MP	

[HCWS306]

Petition

Monday 16 November 2015

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Barclays Bank branch on Woodhill (Leicester)

The petition of residents of Leicester East,

Declares that local Barclays Bank customers are greatly concerned that their local Barclays Bank branch on Woodhill (Leicester) will be closed in the coming months and further that residents of Woodhill and the surrounding area fear that they will have to travel much further to an alternative Barclays branch in Leicester city which poses serious difficulties for some residents.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Barclays Bank to reconsider the decision to close the Woodhill Branch in Leicester, as there are no other Barclays branches in the vicinity.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Keith Vaz, *Official Report*, 17 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 1298.] [P001546]

Observations from The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): The Government thanks Keith Vaz MP for his petition on the planned closure of the Barclays branch on Woodhill in North Evington.

The Government are sorry to hear about the disappointment of the residents of Leicester East at the planned closure of their local Barclays branch. Although we can understand their concerns, decisions on opening and closing agencies are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis.

As with other banking service providers, Barclays will need to balance customer interests, market competition, and other commercial factors when considering its strategy and the Government do not seek to intervene in these decisions.

However, the Government believe that banks should act in the best interests of their customers and continue to serve the needs of the consumer as well as the wider economy. In March this year, the major high street banks, consumer groups and the Government signed up to an industry-wide agreement to work with customers and communities to minimise the impact of branch closures and put in place alternative banking services. This protocol commits the banks to:

- work with local communities to establish the impact of the branch closure, prior to its closure;
- find suitable alternative provision to suit individual communities;
- put satisfactory alternative banking services in place before a branch is closed.

Options for this will include free to use cash machines, the proximity of alternative branches, and Post Office branches and mobile banking arrangements.

The protocol will be reviewed by an independent reviewer after one year.

It may be useful to note that many bank account providers already have an arrangement with the Post Office to provide access to their bank accounts, where customers can withdraw money, deposit cash and cheques and check balances at all 11,500 Post Office branches in the UK.

If other banks in the local area have more extensive facilities, and the residents of Leicester East wish to consider moving to an alternative bank, they may be interested in using the current account switch service. The switch service is free to use, comes with a guarantee to protect customers from financial loss if something goes wrong, and redirects any payments mistakenly sent to the old account for 36 months, providing further assurance for customers.

Ministerial Correction

Monday 16 November 2015

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Human Rights (Egypt)

The following is an extract from the Urgent Question on Human Rights (Egypt) on 5 November 2015.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): What assessment has the Minister made of how effective the parliamentary elections in Egypt will be in tackling human rights and will the Prime Minister raise that in his discussions with President Sisi?

Mr Ellwood: The elections were well overdue and we are pleased that the first round has taken place, as I have just mentioned. This is a new Parliament. There is an awful lot of work to be done as it takes its infant footsteps in understanding how it, as a legislature, needs to hold

the Executive to account. I am pleased that the Arab Partnership scheme and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and funds from the FCO will provide financial assistance to help train the Parliament and ensure that it is as effective as possible in holding the Executive and the presidency to account.

[Official Report, 5 November 2015, Vol. 601, c. 1130.]

Letter of correction from Mr Ellwood:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) during the Urgent Question on Human Rights in Egypt.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Ellwood: The elections were well overdue and we are pleased that the first round has taken place, as I have just mentioned. This is a new Parliament. There is an awful lot of work to be done as it takes its infant footsteps in understanding how it, as a legislature, needs to hold the Executive to account. **I am pleased that the UK Government will provide financial assistance** to help train the Parliament and ensure that it is as effective as possible in holding the Executive and the presidency to account.

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Monday 16 November 2015

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Barclays Bank branch on Woodhill (Leicester)	1P	

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 16 November 2015

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Human Rights (Egypt)	3MC

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