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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 29 June 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

1. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What her policy is on the investment case for the replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. [905508]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): Before I answer Question 1, may I briefly offer my voice to the many tributes that have been made in this place to Jo Cox? I know that I speak for the entire development community when I say that she was an incredibly impressive Member of the House. We also had the chance to work together on Syria. Indeed, the Order Paper does not show it but she should have been asking topical question 5. I believe that the House is a much, much poorer place for not hearing from her today.

I also welcome the shadow Front-Bench team and welcome the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor), to her role. I wish her well.

In response to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile), we welcome working through the global fund. This country has helped to keep 8.6 million people alive with HIV therapy. We have distributed 600 million mosquito nets and have treated 15 million cases of TB. We are actually the third largest funder. The UK is planning to support a successful replenishment of a strong, value for money global fund later this year.

Oliver Colvile: Mr Speaker, as you can see from my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, I visited Zambia last year with RESULTS UK and saw for myself the excellent work that global fund investment is doing, particularly on TB-HIV co-infection. Will the Minister do everything possible to ensure that the fund's replenishment target of \$13 billion is met as a minimum?

Justine Greening: Yes we will. The global fund is a novel but powerful model for delivering improvements on AIDS, TB and malaria at scale. We therefore want to see it do better. It still needs to focus on delivering value for money, but we will be lobbying other Governments, countries and organisations to continue supporting it.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): May I press the Secretary of State on whether she accepts the case for a 20% increase in the UK's contribution to the

global fund, something which the global fund has specifically asked us to contemplate and which several other countries are doing? Might she also take the opportunity to make a speech on the continuing worldwide HIV and AIDS crisis?

Justine Greening: That is an important question. Following the announcement of the multilateral aid review, which is coming out shortly, we are looking at how we approach the forthcoming replenishment. The key thing is to ensure that we lobby other countries and players to provide support alongside the UK, but, as the hon. Gentleman says, it is important that we show leadership ourselves.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Before I ask my question, may I express our solidarity with the people who were involved in the bombing in Istanbul last night?

The cap is a bizarre self-limitation. If Britain wants to give £1.2 billion to the global fund, why do we set a cap that prevents us from doing so?

Justine Greening: It has been done precisely to incentivise others and to make it clear that the fund will work best if it is supported by a broad donor base. While we have always been key supporters of the global fund, it is important that countries such as the UK do not let up on challenging other players and countries to play their role. Although we are a strong supporter of development and can be proud of our work, we want other countries to follow our lead, not lag behind.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I would first like to congratulate the Secretary of State on coming out over the weekend. I look forward to future exchanges across the Dispatch Box.

The global fund replenishment conference in September presents an incredibly important moment for the fund, which provides more than three quarters of all international finance to the fight against TB. Without renewed commitment, we will not realise the global plan's targets, so when exactly will the UK commit to the global fund?

Justine Greening: We will make an announcement following the publication of the multilateral aid review. I can assure the hon. Lady that two things are being focused on: ensuring that the global fund offer is strong so that countries are persuaded to invest in it and having a smart investment ourselves, as we have had in the past, to encourage other countries to join us.

Kate Osamor: The global fund has a remarkable record, having saved more than 70 million lives and treated over 13 million people for TB. Notwithstanding that record, Canada, Italy and Japan have each significantly increased their contributions to the fund by at least 20%. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the UK also increases its contribution?

Justine Greening: As I have said before, we will finally announce what we are doing on the replenishment after our multilateral aid review. I can assure the hon. Lady that we are very keen to see a successful replenishment of the global fund. Our country has supported that for a number of years now. Looking at the progress on

malaria, TB and AIDS, it is clear that we need to keep our foot on the pedal if we are to eradicate these diseases, because, in the end, they are holding back their countries from developing.

Burundian Refugee Safety

2. Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What assessment she has made of the safety of people from Burundi in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. [905509]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Nick Hurd): May I associate myself with the remarks of the shadow Secretary of State about the Secretary of State, and with the remarks about standing in solidarity with Istanbul?

More than a quarter of a million Burundians have fled their country since 2015. We remain very concerned about their wellbeing, which is why we are the second largest bilateral donor to the regional refugee appeal.

Stephen Phillips: My hon. Friend will be aware of reports over recent months of Burundian refugees being followed over the border into camps and attacked by those from whom they have tried to flee, often to punish remaining family members or silence those with stories of abuse. What are the Government doing to offer support to authorities and non-governmental organisations running refugee camps in Rwanda, Tanzania and other neighbouring countries to ensure that those fleeing Burundi are safe?

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that question. We are aware of the reports. Indeed, I have spoken personally to a number of Burundian refugees in camps, and we have made it very clear to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that we expect it to protect all refugees, and in Rwanda we have funded it to provide additional protection in the Mahama region refugee camp.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): May I welcome what the Secretary of State said about Jo Cox? We particularly miss her today, as she had a track record on these important issues.

There is concern in all parts of the House about the crisis in Burundi. Can either the Department for International Development or the Foreign Office come to the House soon with a full statement on the crisis and how we can best address it?

Mr Hurd: If that is the wish of the House, I am sure that both Departments will listen to it carefully. We are extremely concerned about the situation and have been for very many months. I am in regular contact with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), who has responsibility for Africa, about what he is doing on the diplomatic front and what we are doing in terms of planning contingencies in the event of an escalation of the humanitarian crisis.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Young people from specific communities are being taken from their homes, tortured and then killed. We have a deep crisis in Burundi:

a President in denial who refuses to accept the validity of the Arusha peace process. What can the UK Government do to encourage other neighbouring African countries to take this matter even more seriously than they appear to be doing at the moment?

Mr Hurd: I share my hon. Friend's concern and passion about this situation. I assure him that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I work together extremely closely to put whatever pressure we can on countries that may have influence, and to ensure that we are in a position to do the right thing in providing support for the Burundian people.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): May I too associate myself with the remarks about showing solidarity with Turkey?

In 2012, the UK Government closed DFID's office in Burundi despite the history of electoral turmoil in the country and an understanding that the next election would be just three years away, in 2015. The election was identified as a key possible flashpoint for future violence by many NGOs and the International Development Committee, which criticised DFID's decision to close the office. As the refugee crisis in Burundi escalates, will the Minister assure me that DFID has in place clear and effective measures to ensure that it identifies where crises may occur and is fully able to react and respond to them?

Mr Hurd: Yes, I think I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. This has been an issue that has been glowing red on our radar screen for some time now. As I have said, we are the second largest bilateral donor to the regional appeal. We have contingency plans in place. We have announced an additional £15 million to support Tanzania in its preparedness for an escalation and we have released money and technical expertise to be deployed in Burundi to support any escalation in the humanitarian crisis.

Food Insecurity: Eastern and Southern Africa

3. Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): What steps she is taking in response to food insecurity in eastern and southern Africa. [905510]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Nick Hurd): DFID has provided an additional £200 million since mid-2015 to respond to the impact of El Niño-related climate shocks in Africa. More than 4 million people have already been supported by DFID programmes in the horn of Africa and southern Africa.

Carol Monaghan: The drought in Africa is affecting millions of people and is predicted to continue until November and possibly beyond. If the rains do come, there will be a hunger gap for families across the region while they wait to see whether there is anything to harvest in the next three to five months, so what steps are the Government taking now to make sure that food and other essentials are ready to be delivered then if it becomes necessary?

Mr Hurd: I thank the hon. Lady for throwing a spotlight on a humanitarian crisis that is under-reported and underfunded. I am proud to say that the UK has shown genuine leadership in making large amounts of

funding available early—as I said, £200 million in the past year alone—and we are reviewing what more needs to be done, but critically we are also picking up the phone and speaking to all the other donors in the international community to encourage them to do more, as well as working very closely with domestic Governments such as Ethiopia's to make sure that they have the right plans in place to protect their people.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I congratulate DFID on the support that it is giving, particularly to Ethiopia. On a recent visit to that country, I learned of the work that is being carried out and also of the funding gap in the support programme. I also learned that there is a need for donors to be there on a long-term basis because the problems are not going to go away. Will the Minister redouble his efforts to bring in more donor countries and make sure that they are there for the medium to long term?

Mr Hurd: Yes, I can reassure my hon. Friend of that, and I thank him for his letter after his visit. We are making those calls and encouraging other donors. I should place on record our respect and recognition for the work that the Ethiopian Government have done in making domestic resources—\$700 million—available to be part of this response.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): In many instances charitable institutions are doing great work in trying to provide clean, plentiful water supplies in sub-Saharan Africa, which allows those nation states to produce food on a much greater scale. What is being done to supplement those efforts and help those institutions provide that much needed water supply?

Mr Hurd: DFID is extremely proud of its co-operation and partnership with NGOs in many areas. In the context of making sure that people have access to clean water and sanitation, we have a manifesto commitment to support 60 million people achieve that, so partnership working is fundamental to our approach. A large amount of that £200 million funding has been to help people access the most basic services.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I am pleased to hear the Minister acknowledge that climate change is having a huge impact on food security in the region. What efforts is his Department making to look at the impact on fish stocks, which very many people in that region depend on?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Lady is entirely right that we have to factor in climate change, not least because on our assessment there is a 75% probability of La Niña following El Niño. A large part of the work that we are doing involves doing the best we can to help people now, as well as to plan for the future and build in greater resilience so that those countries and those populations are better protected in the future.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): May I associate those on the SNP Benches with the good wishes and congratulations that have been extended to the Secretary of State in recent days, and also welcome the new Labour spokesperson to her post?

Will the Minister recognise the role of faith and civil society organisations in developing countries in the delivery of food and emergency aid? Given the need for forward planning mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), what steps is he taking to make sure that DFID can support such organisations in responding to the food crisis?

Mr Hurd: The key thing is to act early and to act decisively. The British Government have made a lot of money available and have acted early, which is critical to being cost-effective. Fundamental to our approach is working through other organisations. That includes the best NGOs, which are passionate about trying to provide basic services and keep people alive.

Bilateral and Multilateral Aid Reviews

4. **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): When her Department plans to publish the findings of its bilateral and multilateral aid reviews. [905511]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): The reviews will ensure that we allocate our budget to the right places and in the right ways based on solid evidence, translating our UK aid strategy into a set of delivery plans for DFID that are ambitious in driving development and tackling poverty, but also deliver value for money. That is in our UK national interest. We are planning to publish the outcome of the bilateral and multilateral aid reviews in the early summer.

John Nicolson: May I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State on her recent announcement? In a time of great political uncertainty, surely these reviews should not be delayed any further, so may I ask her what impact she thinks Brexit will have specifically?

Justine Greening: Part of our work has been through the European development fund, so work is now under way to understand where the end point of Brexit is and, critically, the transition plan in the meantime. That work is under way, but I emphasise that overwhelmingly our work is not through the EDF, and that, of course, is unaffected.

15. [905522] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I am proud of our international aid record, but we have to take the public with us. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the target were to apply over a longer period, thereby allowing for annual variations to reflect need, taxpayers could have the greatest possible comfort that they were seeing value for money?

Justine Greening: Value for money comes from how we take decisions and monitor their impact in the Department, and less from how we structure the budget. We have a commitment to investing 0.7% of our gross national income in international development each year, and we are going to stick to that.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Will the Secretary of State reassure the House that following the withdrawal of our overseas aid portion given through the EU, the absolute percentage that we spend on the world's poorest people will be maintained?

Justine Greening: This Government came in on a manifesto of maintaining the 0.7% commitment. Under

the coalition Government that we led, it was brought in and achieved for the first time. We legislated for it, and we stand by that.

Palestinian-Israeli Co-existence Projects

5. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What support her Department provides to projects facilitating peaceful co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. [905512]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Sir Desmond Swayne): We support projects that bring Palestinians and Israelis together, to which end we have made provision for funding through our conflict, security and stability fund to support co-existence projects, but I am keen to identify what more we can do.

Stephen Metcalfe: As I am asking my question in slot No. 5, which would have been taken by Jo Cox, may I, too, add my tribute to her excellent work in this area? Why do my right hon. Friend and his Department think that it is a good use of taxpayers' money to continue to support the Palestinian Authority?

Sir Desmond Swayne: I agree with my hon. Friend about Jo Cox. The reason we think it is a good idea to support the Palestinian Authority is that they deliver essential public services, not least healthcare and the education of 770,000 pupils. I believe that it is in our national interest to build up Palestinian institutions so that in a future Palestinian state, they can be reliable and effective partners for peace.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I endorse the tributes that have been made to the work of Jo Cox for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine. Will the Minister join me in recognising the contribution to peaceful co-existence of Israelis who speak uncomfortable truths, whether that be the Mayor of Tel Aviv speaking out against occupation, the veterans of Breaking the Silence speaking out against the reality of occupation, or Peace Now mapping settlements that are undermining the chances of a two-state solution?

Sir Desmond Swayne: Yes, and I am concerned about any potential closing of space for non-governmental organisations.

Mr Speaker: I will call the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) if he undertakes to ask a single, short-sentence question.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend examined Save a Child's Heart, an initiative by the Israeli Government to treat Palestinian children and save their lives?

Sir Desmond Swayne: Yes, I hosted a delegation of Members from across the House who brought this excellent organisation to my attention recently, and my officials are conducting due diligence.

Topical Questions

T2. [905524] **Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

Justine Greening: Alongside visiting refugee camps in Kenya, at the end of May I headed the UK delegation at the world humanitarian summit where we helped to

secure widespread agreement on the need to reform the humanitarian system. I committed £30 million of support to a new joint fund for education in emergencies to help to make sure that no child misses out on an education. Our commitment to international development is, and will continue to be, firmly in our national interest as well as the right thing to do.

Dr Mathias: I note we have UK advisers in the refugee camps in Europe. I hope they will remain. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that the best people do this essential work? Will the Secretary of State look into a Teach First-style scheme so that we get the best graduates?

Justine Greening: Britain is working with Greece, Turkey and others in Europe. The first UK team has arrived in Greece, and it includes experts in supporting vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and those trained to tackle people trafficking. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, and I will certainly take it up with my colleagues at the Home Office and the Department for Education.

T3. [905525] **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Given what the Overseas Development Institute has called the misrepresentation of its recent report on the state-building grant to Palestine, will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to confirm that UK aid to the Palestinian Authority is for wholly legitimate purposes and is essential to peace-building in the region?

Justine Greening: I believe the hon. Gentleman is right in his assertion. Indeed, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has just set out, the work we are doing is helping to provide not only health facilities for people in that area but, critically, education for children who so badly need it. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. There are a lot of very noisy private conversations taking place. It is incredibly discourteous to the Secretary of State and discourteous to Members treating of matters affecting some of the most vulnerable people on the face of the planet, and I rather doubt it does much good to the reputation of the House at this important time, so if Members who are chattering away privately could stop doing so, that would help.

T5. [905529] **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Tanzania saw some great progress against the millennium development goals, but areas of the country still lack access to basic services such as water. I am glad that the Secretary of State met Councillor Louise Richardson, but will she comment on how her Department is working with Tanzania on those vital areas?

Justine Greening: I very much appreciated the time that my hon. Friend's local councillor took to meet me and to talk about the work she has been involved in. DFID is helping Tanzania to improve access to clean water in rural areas and rural water sustainability. Alongside that, we have a strong focus on improving electricity access, off-grid energy solutions and, of course, rural road infrastructure, which is so important.

T4. [905528] **Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the appointment of Dr Alasdair Allan as the new Scottish Government Minister for International Development and Europe? As she never managed a one-on-one with his predecessor, will she make it a priority to meet Dr Allan?

Justine Greening: I regularly visit our joint headquarters office in East Kilbride, Glasgow. We work alongside the Scottish development programme, which very much focuses on Malawi. I am very happy to meet the new Minister.

T6. [905530] **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Encouraging business growth in developing countries helps to cut poverty and to create new markets for British exports. Will the Secretary of State update the House on what the Government are doing to help entrepreneurs in developing countries?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we will end aid dependency through creating jobs. DFID has doubled its bilateral work on economic growth. That includes supporting entrepreneurship through expanding access to finance and easing the cost and risk of doing business.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Given the support that the Government provide to the Government of Sri Lanka for reconciliation and human rights, will the Secretary of State give a commitment that her Department will make the strongest representations to the Government of Sri Lanka that there will be no peace or reconciliation without international involvement in the prosecution of historic war crimes during the Sri Lankan civil war?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, and I will certainly relay it to my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

T7. [905531] **Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on what she is doing to bring economic empowerment to women, especially in the world's poorest countries?

Justine Greening: What a very important question my hon. Friend asks. I am very proud to be a founding member of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, which will report in September. This is central to DFID's work. Indeed, since 2011 we have helped 2.5 million women to improve their land rights and 35 million women to access financial services. With financial independence comes much broader independence, so this is absolutely vital.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): Even in the United Kingdom, adverse childhood experience is a major cause of dysfunction in families. In conflict zones, it will of course be much worse, particularly where a family have suffered a bereavement. Will the Secretary of State look at a package to include mentoring, parenting, and child development, as well as all the other good work that her Department does?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in our Syria response we very much focused on children, not least in making sure that there is no lost

generation of children out of school. The broader point about understanding the impact of conflict on children in the longer term is extremely important. Mentoring, psychosocial support, and counselling need to be in place to help children get through situations that would be hard for most of us adults, let alone small children.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [905448] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 29 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I know the whole House will join me in condemning the horrific terrorist attacks in Turkey last night. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who were killed and injured, and their families. As yet, there are no reports of any UK casualties, but the Foreign Office is working urgently with the Turkish authorities to establish the full facts. I spoke to President Erdogan this morning to express the UK's condolences and to offer assistance. Details are still emerging, but we stand as one in our defiance against these barbaric acts.

This week marks the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, and there will be a national two-minute silence on Friday morning. I will attend a service at the Thiepval memorial near the battlefield, and it is right that the whole country pauses to remember the sacrifices of all those who fought and lost their lives in that conflict.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mr Carmichael: May I first associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks of condolence to all those who have been affected by the dreadful attack in Istanbul?

May I offer my personal best wishes to the Prime Minister and his family for life after Downing Street? He has served his country, but he has not done it alone. It is right that we should acknowledge the support that he has had, as we all have, from our families in public service.

Before the Prime Minister goes, though, will he attend to one matter that, when he was in opposition, he described as doing enormous moral damage to the moral authority of our country—the involvement of our security services in rendition? Now that the Crown Prosecution Service has decided that it is not going to prosecute Sir Mark Allen for what he did, will the Prime Minister reconstitute the Gibson inquiry so that we can know what was done in our name, and on whose authority?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generous remarks. I am very proud to have served this country, and proud to be the first Prime Minister for, I think, 30 years to get to both Shetland and Orkney to make sure that I fully looked into his constituency.

The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the Libya rendition issue. The Government co-operated fully with the police investigation. The CPS set out its position recently, concluding that there was

insufficient evidence to prosecute. I would say—I can say these things now—that very few countries in the world would have had such an independent and thorough investigation into an issue like this. The right approach, as Sir Peter Gibson has finished the report on what he was able to do, is that the Intelligence and Security Committee has agreed to look at the issues raised in his report, and it should continue to do so.

Q3. [905450] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As my right hon. Friend has said, perhaps putting current events into perspective, at 7.30 am this Friday we will start the process of commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. Will he join me in thanking all those involved in organising the Forget Never project in Basildon, who have done so much to ensure that our young people will learn the lessons of the past? Forgetting our current challenges, will he join me in encouraging everyone to remember, salute and commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join my hon. Friend in commending all those who are organising these important events, particularly the event he mentions in his constituency, but also the events up and down the country. It is important, not only because of the appalling slaughter—57,000 people were killed or wounded on the first day of this battle—but because so many people are learning so much about their own family's involvement. In many ways, there is a link between the current events we are discussing and what happened 100 years ago: the importance of keeping peace, security and stability on our continent. It was noticeable at last night's European Council dinner that the French President mentioned the Somme commemorations and how proud he was that we would be standing together to remember those sacrifices all those years ago.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I echo the words of the Prime Minister concerning the 36 who died and the 100 injured in the vile terrorist attack at Ataturk airport. I am sure that our consular services will be doing everything they can to assist those affected. I thank him for referring to the memorial service in the Somme on Friday; I look forward to being with him for the memorial service for those who died in that dreadful battle.

I think it would be appropriate to pay tribute to Lord Patrick Mayhew, who died last weekend. As Northern Ireland Secretary, he was the driving force behind the Downing Street declaration in 1993, which led to the first ceasefire. I think the relative peace we have now in Northern Ireland is in part thanks to him and of course his successor Mo Mowlam, who achieved so much.

What people in the country are worried about is the extra insecurity for their living standards, jobs, wages and pensions following the EU referendum. In recent days, we have heard uncertain words about the future of some of the major companies in Britain, such as Siemens, which has been here for a very long time. What meetings has the Chancellor had with major companies—Siemens, Visa, Vodafone and others—to try to stabilise the situation?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to mention Patrick Mayhew, who played a huge role in the delivery of the peace process, and he was also a brilliant Attorney General. He exuded a

belief in public service in the national interest, and he was a kind and goodly man. I was very sad to hear of his passing. I sent a message to him via his wife shortly before he died, and I know that many people in the House will want to send their good wishes to his family.

The Leader of the Opposition rightly asked what conversations we are having with business and what preparations we are making to deal with the economic challenges we face. We are in a strong position to meet these challenges, because we have paid down so much of our deficit and we have had strong growth and job creation, but I do not at all belittle the fact that the consequences will be difficult. There are going to be very choppy waters ahead—I do not resile from any of the warnings I gave during the referendum campaign—but we have to find the best way through them.

One of the things we must do is to talk to businesses and reassure them about the stability that there is today and the strength of the British economy. The Business Secretary has met a whole range of businesses already. I have a meeting of my business advisory group tomorrow, and I am inviting other companies to it, including Siemens, which plays a huge role in the British economy. We need to discuss the reassurances about stability that we can give now and the fact that our circumstances do not change until we leave the European Union, and then I will want to hear from them—as we draw up possible blueprints for Britain's future position with Europe—what they think will be the right answer.

Jeremy Corbyn: The credit rating agencies have cut the UK credit rating to double A from double A plus. The Chancellor pledged to keep the triple A rating. What estimate have the Government made of the cost to the Exchequer of this downgrade in borrowing costs and risks to pension funds?

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right that the credit rating of one agency has been taken down by several points and another has put us on watch. To answer his question directly, the cost to the Exchequer and to the taxpayer will depend on what happens to the interest rates in the market at which Britain can borrow, and it is absolutely right to draw attention to that.

As I have said—Mario Draghi, head of the European Central Bank, confirmed this last night—all the warnings were that if we voted to leave the EU there would be difficulties in our own economy, growth rates and instability in markets. We are seeing those things, and we are well prepared for them in the reaction of the Bank of England and the Treasury, but there is no doubt in my mind that these are going to be difficult economic times. We must make sure we maintain our strong economy so we can cope with them, but we should not belittle the challenges: they are going to be difficult and we are going to have to meet them.

Jeremy Corbyn: All Members of the House should be concerned about indications from business and investors that suggest they see the UK as less attractive, thus putting current and future jobs at risk. In those circumstances, will the Prime Minister consider suspending the Chancellor's fiscal rule, which is in effect preventing investment?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that would be the right approach. Business, consumers, investors, and those concerned about our economy want to hear that

we have taken huge steps over the past six years to get the budget deficit down, to make the British economy more competitive, and to make us an attractive destination for investment. They want those things to continue, and one way to react to economic difficulties is to ensure that our public finances and economy remain strong. We should not have taken all the steps of the last six years to get the deficit down just to get us on to a more difficult path. I do not think it would be right to suspend fiscal rules and, as I have said, there are three phases: first, volatility, which the Bank of England and Treasury must cope with; secondly, uncertainty about Britain's future status, which we must bring to an end as fast as possible by examining alternative models and by my successors choosing which one we should go for; and, thirdly, we should bear in mind that long-term damage to the British economy will be based on how good our trading relationship is with the European Union. For my part, I think we want the closest possible trading relationship with the European Union, and that can be discussed and debated in this House as well as by the next Government.

Jeremy Corbyn: This week, sadly, there has been more evidence that racist incidents are increasing. Evidence collated by monitoring groups shows that in the past three or four days alone there have been attacks and abuse from Stoke to Stockton, and from Dorset to the Clyde. What monitoring systems have the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary put in place, what reports have they received from the police, and what extra resources will go to communities that have been targeted in those vile racist attacks?

The Prime Minister: I agree that those attacks are appalling. They need to stop, and it is right that all Members of the House, and on both sides of the referendum debate, utterly condemn them. That is not what we do in Britain, and at last night's meeting I reassured the Prime Ministers of countries such as Romania, Poland and the Czech Republic, who were concerned about the issue. We do monitor these attacks. The Home Secretary receives regular reports, and we will soon publish a new action plan on tackling hate crime to step up our response. We want new steps to boost the reporting of hate crime and to support victims, new CPS guidance to prosecutors on racially aggravated crime, a new fund for protective security measures in potentially vulnerable institutions, and additional funding for community organisations so that they can tackle hate crime. Whatever we can do we will do to drive those appalling hate crimes out of our country.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. The vote last Thursday was a rejection of the status quo—a status quo that clearly is not delivering. There are now 13.5 million people living in poverty in Britain, which is up by 300,000 over the last year. Some 4.5 million people in England and Wales are in insecure work, and two thirds of children in poverty are living in households where at least one adult is in work. The Prime Minister has two months left. Will he leave a one nation legacy that includes the scrapping of the bedroom tax, banning zero-hours contracts, and cancelling cuts to universal credit?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that of course we need to do more to tackle poverty and to spread wealth and opportunity. However,

to try to pretend that last Thursday's vote was a result of the state of the British economy is complete nonsense. The British economy is incomparably stronger than it was six years ago. We must all reflect on our role in the referendum campaign. The right hon. Gentleman says that he put his back into it; all I say is that I would hate to see him when he is not trying.

Jeremy Corbyn: Government figures released yesterday show that the number of children in this country who are living in poverty has jumped by 200,000 in a year to a disgraceful total of 3.9 million. Should the Prime Minister at the very least apologise to them and to parents who have been failed by his Government, and do something about it so that we reduce child poverty in this country?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman wants to deal with the figures, let me give them to him. Income and inequality have gone down. Average incomes have grown at their fastest rate since 2001. He asks about poverty. There are 300,000 fewer people in relative poverty since 2010 and half a million fewer people in absolute poverty since 2010. If he is looking for excuses about the referendum and the side that he and I were on, frankly he should look somewhere else. I have to say to him—he talks about job insecurity and my two months to go—it might be in my party's interests for him to sit there; it is not in the national interest. I would say: for heaven's sake man, go!

Q8. [905456] **Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): While media attention seems to be focused elsewhere, all of us in this House have constituents who have problems that need to be addressed. For weeks and weeks, my constituents have been struggling with the impact of unofficial industrial action on our railways—not over jobs, not over wages, but over who gets to press a button. Will my right hon. Friend condemn this in the strongest possible terms and help to resolve those issues?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our transport infrastructure is a crucial part of our economy. I condemn any industrial action that disrupts the travelling public, and rail passengers will not thank the RMT and ASLEF for their recent unnecessary disruption. Frankly, the performance of Southern has been unacceptable and passengers deserve better. I can tell the House we will be providing more generous compensation to passengers affected by the latest strike and the Transport Secretary will be announcing further details soon.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): We on the Scottish National party Benches join the Prime Minister and the Leader of the official Opposition in our condemnation of the terrorist tragedy in Turkey, and we send our condolences to the people of Turkey.

A strong majority voted for Scotland to remain in the European Union. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon is in Brussels today, where she is meeting the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Parliament. Yesterday, there was a standing ovation in the European Parliament when the case was made to protect Scotland's place in Europe. What will the UK Government do to protect Scotland's place in Europe?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he says about the terrorist attacks and how we should stand together against them.

On the United Kingdom's future and our relationship with the European Union, we need to negotiate the best possible deal for the United Kingdom and the closest possible relationship. That will also be the best possible deal for Scotland. That is what we need to focus on. That is what needs to be done.

Angus Robertson: On the contrary, the Prime Minister is wrong. Yesterday, the Scottish Parliament, including the Labour party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Greens, passed a motion that

“mandates the Scottish Government to have discussions with the UK Government, other devolved administrations, the EU institutions and member states to explore options for protecting Scotland's relationship with the EU, Scotland's place in the single market and the social, employment and economic benefits that come from that”.

Every party in the Scottish Parliament voted for that except the Conservative party, which abstained. When will the Conservatives finally join all the other parties in Scotland in protecting Scotland's place in Europe?

The Prime Minister: The best way to secure Scotland's place in the single market is for the United Kingdom to negotiate the closest possible relationship with the European Union, including, in my view, the closest relationship with the single market. Our membership of the European Union is a UK membership and that is where we should take our negotiating stance.

Q11. [905459] **Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Market traders in Rossendale and Darwen make a huge contribution to our local economy. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend call, with me and literally thousands of Darreners, to stop Blackburn Council going ahead with its plan to bulldoze Darwen's three-day market?

The Prime Minister: Let me join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all the hard-working market traders across the country who provide us with their excellent goods, often locally produced and sourced. I know how important these markets are. I certainly hope the local council will listen carefully to my hon. Friend's campaign and make sure this historic market is not lost from Darwen altogether.

Q2. [905449] **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Prime Minister will recall visiting the Vauxhall car plant in my constituency as part of the referendum campaign. Now that we have voted to leave the EU, we face a fight to keep those jobs in this country, so I will urge General Motors to recognise its responsibility to build vehicles where many are bought. I ask the Prime Minister to ensure that there are early talks with General Motors and the wider motor industry, so that it is given the reassurance needed that it will still be able to export motor vehicles to the EU at a competitive price.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The story of the automotive industry in Britain over the past decade has been a remarkably positive one: 150,000 people are directly employed, and another 300,000 people are in the supply and components industry,

more of which has been coming onshore in recent years. I remember my visit to his constituency very well. We need to secure the best possible deal for Britain and to ensure that we have that full access to the single market, because one of the reasons why so many companies, including General Motors, Nissan, Toyota and Jaguar Land Rover, have invested in Britain is access to that market. I urge General Motors and others to make their voices heard, and we will certainly be listening to them in the weeks ahead.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Yesterday, a former member of my staff was verbally abused and attacked while out shopping in London because of the colour of his skin—he is of Pakistani origin. He was chased down the road by a lady shouting about how we had voted out, and that people like him shoot others and blow people up. Will the Prime Minister reiterate the commitment he has given this morning to do everything in his power to eradicate that evil hatred, and reiterate that leaving the EU should not be used to breed racism but, in fact, the opposite—it should provide us with an opportunity to be much more international rather than just European?

The Prime Minister: We have many imperfections in this country, but we do have a claim to be one of the most successful multi-race, multi-faith and multi-ethnic democracies anywhere on earth, and we should do everything we can to safeguard that. That means having the clearest possible statements from all our political leaders, which we have heard today and should go on hearing. More to the point, we want action by the police and the prosecuting authorities. The laws are there to prosecute people, they should be used, and we will strengthen the guidance in the way that I have suggested. We should absolutely not put up with that in our country.

Q4. [905451] **Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Turning to the Chilcot report, is the Prime Minister satisfied with the arrangements announced for prior access for the service families of soldiers who died in Iraq, given that Mr Blair has had months to prepare his PR defences and that he has seen the relevant passages? What are the parliamentary arrangements for secure prior access, so that the House can properly examine the findings and express any relevant views concerning future suitable accommodation for Mr Blair?

The Prime Minister: First, in terms of members of service personnel families, we have ensured that they will not face the cost that they originally were going to face to access the report. I will check the details on the time they get to access the report and write to the right hon. Gentleman. On the parliamentary process, I can put that in a letter to him so that we are absolutely clear about what time the statement will be, how much time people, including the Leader of the Opposition and other right hon. Gentlemen, will have to study the report in advance. I remember how important having access was to me when I was Leader of the Opposition.

As for those people who could be criticised in the report, the right hon. Gentleman will know that there is a process—letters have to go out so that people have a chance to respond to what is in the report. That is entirely independent of the Government. Ministers have

not seen it and I have not seen it—it has been dealt with by the Chilcot report under long-standing conventions. Again, I will put that in my letter to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Moving to more cheerful matters, would my right hon. Friend educate the House from his experience as Prime Minister on how, in terms of their countries' reputation and success, he would compare the undemonstrative, competence and dignity of Angela Merkel with the theatrical and comical antics of Silvio Berlusconi?

The Prime Minister: Fortunately for my answer, neither of the people my right hon. Friend is talking about is a candidate in the election—an election that I will stay firmly out of. I was given lots of advice on becoming Prime Minister, and one was not to go to a party with Silvio Berlusconi. That is one piece of advice I took and stuck to.

Q5. [905452] **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): I thank the Prime Minister for giving us last week's great exercise in democracy—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will be heard. It is about us and this place, and he will be heard.

Mr Carswell: We on the leave side should recognise that although we won, it was a narrow mandate and plenty of decent, patriotic people voted for remain. Does the Prime Minister agree that both sides now need to come together to achieve a new post-EU national consensus, whereby we have close links with our friends and allies in Europe and beyond, while reclaiming our sovereignty?

The Prime Minister: Let me thank the hon. Gentleman for making the point that there were people with a deep sense of patriotism on both sides of the argument. I also agree that it is time for people and our country to come together. What is more, he is right that we now have to work very hard on the alternatives. Of course, they were discussed and debated in the referendum campaign, but they were hypothetical alternatives; they are now real alternatives, and one of the roles for the Government in the next few months is to set out the different blueprints—the Canada blueprint, the Swiss blueprint, the Norway blueprint and any other blueprints—and to look at the costs and benefits. That way, people can make a reasoned assessment, now that this is a real choice, rather than a hypothetical one.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I know that all Kent's Members of Parliament will wish to be associated with my right hon. Friend's tribute to the memory of Paddy Mayhew. He was a scholar, a gentleman and a great friend to his younger colleagues.

There are hundreds and thousands of expat United Kingdom citizens living around Europe who did not vote in the referendum. Many are elderly and frail and live on UK pensions and benefits. Will my right hon. Friend seek to ensure that his successor defends their interests?

The Prime Minister: Let me add to my hon. Friend's comments about Sir Patrick Mayhew. He was a wonderful man and a great public servant, and I know he meant a lot to my hon. Friend and many others.

On the issue of British citizens living overseas, we should reassure people that until Britain leaves the EU, there will be absolutely no change in their status. In the coming weeks, this unit at the heart of Whitehall can go through these issues very methodically and work out what might need to change in all the different scenarios in order to give these people certainty about their future. It is obviously very important that we do that.

Q6. [905453] **Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): London is the greatest city in Europe and in the world—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I have enjoyed listening to the hon. Gentleman for 25 years, and I want to continue to hear him. Let us hear Mr Gapes.

Mike Gapes: Its prosperity and tax revenue are vital for the whole of the United Kingdom. London voted remain. Does the Prime Minister agree with the Mayor of London—a Labour winner, Sadiq Khan—that London now needs to remain in the European single market, and that it needs additional devolved powers to deal with the problems caused by the vote last week?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with the Mayor of London not only that London is the greatest city on earth but that London needs to make its voice heard in these vital negotiations. Obviously, there are many vital industries in London, but it is the capital not only of the UK's financial services but of Europe's financial services, and securing the best possible access to the single market will be a very important challenge in these negotiations. So London should have its voice heard. This is a UK negotiation, but we should listen to the nations of the UK as well as to the cities and the regions.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for his premiership and for the many achievements of his Government, of which we can be proud? I also commend his condemnation of the vile racist attacks that have been reported from all over the country. Will he take this opportunity to condemn the ridiculous and revolting behaviour of a certain MEP in the European Parliament yesterday and make it clear that that MEP does not represent this country and he does not represent—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot have people adding their own take on these matters. [*Interruption.*] Order. The hon. Gentleman has the Floor—[*Interruption.*] Order. I do not need any help from the Scottish National party Benches; I am perfectly capable of discharging my responsibilities. The hon. Gentleman will be heard, and that is all there is to it.

Mr Jenkin: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. That MEP does not represent this country and he does not represent even the vast majority of patriotic and law-abiding people who voted leave in the referendum.

The Prime Minister: Let me thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and congratulate him on the role he played in the campaign. As for what MEPs and others have said, people should judge them by the remarks they make. I have made clear what I felt about Nigel

Farage and that appalling poster in the campaign. I think the motive was absolutely clear and everyone can see what he was trying to do.

Q7. [905455] **Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): My constituency of Torfaen has received substantial amounts of EU funding. The leave campaign in the referendum promised that that funding would continue even if we left the European Union. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that if my constituency loses a penny piece of its funding under his successor, that would be a gross betrayal?

The Prime Minister: It is the case that Wales as whole is a net beneficiary of EU funds. As I said throughout the campaign, if the vote was a no vote, I would want to do everything I could to make sure that we continued to help disadvantaged regions and our farmers. Obviously it is difficult for anyone to give guarantees, because we do not know exactly what will happen to our economy in the event of a leave vote, and our economy does face challenges. It will be a matter for my successor as we leave the EU to make good on what they said at the time.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am pleased to announce that residents from across Erewash have chosen the Rocking Horse nursery entry as the winning card for my “design a birthday card for the Queen” competition. Will the Prime Minister congratulate the 207 children who entered the competition—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear about these pupils—[*Interruption.*] Order. I want to hear about these pupils who should rightly be congratulated. Let us hear the hon. Lady.

Maggie Throup: Will the Prime Minister congratulate the 207 children who entered the competition on their amazing designs, and will he agree to present the cards to Her Majesty at his next audience?

The Prime Minister: There are many ways in which Members of Parliament are able to interact at a more human level with our constituents, and getting them to make birthday cards and Christmas cards is an excellent idea. I once got it slightly wrong. Having Brize Norton in my constituency, someone did a Christmas card with Santa letting presents out of the back of a C-17. I thought it was excellent, but some of my constituents felt that Santa was carpet bombing rather than handing out largesse. With that proviso, it sounds a very good idea, and I am sure Her Majesty will be delighted to receive these cards.

Q9. [905457] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Sheffield city region was set to receive £180 million in European structural funds through to 2020. Much of that money is now at risk. Those leading the leave campaign did give guarantees that no area and no sector would lose out as a result of Brexit. We know that those promises were worthless, but will the Prime Minister join me in urging his successor to ensure that Sheffield city region is compensated by the UK Government for every pound of funding lost as a result of last Thursday’s decision?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, as we negotiate our way out of the EU, a whole range of decisions will have to be made. What a future Government must do is make sure that we help our universities, the sciences and disadvantaged parts of the country and continue to support farmers. There is going to be a challenge, but we will be able to judge for ourselves whether we will have more money to do this because we have left the EU or less money because of the impact on the economy. But that is something that we will all be able to judge for ourselves in the years ahead.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Unfortunately, earlier this morning the Supreme Court ruled against a right of return for the Chagos islanders to their homeland. I know that my right hon. Friend will be pleased that I will not be pestering him much more on this issue, but may I suggest that a fine legacy of his premiership would be to allow these British citizens to return to their homeland?

The Prime Minister: The National Security Council has been considering the issue. We have looked at the options and the costs and benefits of the various things that we could do, and we will make an announcement in the coming months.

Q10. [905458] **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): Grade I listed Rochdale town hall has been described as possessing a “rare picturesque beauty”, but a bid to renovate that iconic building was rejected by the Heritage Lottery Fund in April. All five of the projects that were awarded grants are based in the south of England. Would the Prime Minister consider supporting the renovation of this fantastic municipal building?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is a beautiful building, and it is an historic town that he represents. As for what he said about the Heritage Lottery Fund, I think he was being a little unfair in focusing on those last five projects. If he looks more broadly, he will find that, for instance, the Blackpool Museum—I think—received a grant of more than £13 million. I believe that the position is fairly balanced across the country, but I will look into it further, and, perhaps, write to the hon. Gentleman about both the general point and the specific issue of his town hall.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): As well as Brits living abroad in the European Union, there are a number of EU nationals living in this country—including my constituency—who are working hard and paying their taxes, entirely legitimately. What reassurance can the Prime Minister give them that their position is secure? I know that a number of them are very concerned.

The Prime Minister: I think that the first thing we should do is appraise the contribution that those people make to our country. There are 50,000 EU nationals working in our NHS and 60,000 working in our care sector, looking after our elderly as they approach the end of their lives. There are also many working in education.

As I said quite exhaustively on Monday, we can obviously say that all rights are guaranteed, as we are members of the European Union. In the future, we will have to make sure—and I have heard members of the

leave campaign make this point—that people who are already here, people who are already studying or working, must have their rights and their access guaranteed. However, we cannot say that now; we will have to say it as part of the negotiation that will shortly take place.

Q12. [905460] **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): May I join in the tributes paid to the Prime Minister for all that he has done during his time in office? Does he agree that, whatever the disagreements about the European Union—he was in the remain camp, while my party and I were part of the leave campaign—the Union that really matters is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and preserving it should be of the utmost importance? It works, and it is staying together. What is being done to ensure that that continues during the Prime Minister's remaining time in office?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I agree with him that keeping the United Kingdom together is an absolutely paramount national interest for our country. Because of the decision that has been made about Europe, there need to be exhaustive conversations between officials in Whitehall and in Northern Ireland, and we need to have very strong relations with the Republic of Ireland, so that we can keep the benefits of the common travel area.

The hon. Gentleman has always supported one blue team, Leicester City. I hope that one day he will support another blue team, but there we are.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Having been members of the single market for more than four decades, many businesses have deeply embedded supply chains and customer relationships throughout the European Union. Does the Prime Minister agree that any future deal with the EU must include access to the single market?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but, obviously, the term “access to the single market” has many potential meanings. Countries that are outside the EU have access to the single market, some through a trade deal and others through World Trade Organisation rules. Obviously the best access is through membership of the single market. What the country will have to decide—and what the next Prime Minister will have to decide—is what sort of access we want, and what are the costs and benefits of that access. I am sure we will talk about that in a moment when I make my statement on the European Council.

Q13. [905461] **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The Prime Minister will be aware that Terex Trucks in my constituency is consulting its staff and unions this week about the shedding of a sixth of its workforce. The company has approached the UK Government for support from UK Export Finance, but from a £40 billion fund it has received only a guarantee to the value of one of its trucks. Will the Prime Minister commit himself to meeting me to discuss the perilous position of the company and its workforce, and what support his Government can provide?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the recent announcement about the further job losses. This is obviously going to be a difficult time for the workers and their families. I understand that both the Scottish and UK Governments have been working closely together with the company over the past couple of years as part of the partnership action for continuing employment scheme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is also keeping a close eye on the situation, and I am happy to arrange a meeting between him and the hon. Gentleman to talk about what more can be done.

EU Council

12.40 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on yesterday's European Council. This was the first Council since Britain decided to leave the European Union. The decision was accepted and we began constructive discussions about how to ensure a strong relationship between Britain and the countries of the EU, but before the discussion on Britain there were other items on the agenda. Let me briefly touch on them.

On migration, the Council noted the very significant reductions in illegal crossings from Turkey to Greece as a result of the agreement made with Turkey in March, but it expressed continued concern over the central Mediterranean route and a determination to do all we can to combat people smuggling via Libya. Britain continues to play a leading role in Operation Sophia with HMS Enterprise, and I can tell the House today that Royal Fleet Auxiliary Mounts Bay will also be deployed to stop the flow of weapons to terrorists, particularly Daesh, in Libya.

On NATO, Secretary General Stoltenberg gave a presentation ahead of the Warsaw summit and the Council agreed the need for NATO and the EU to work together in a complementary way to strengthen our security.

On completing the single market, there were important commitments on the digital single market, including that EU residents will be able to travel with the digital content they have purchased or subscribed to at home. On the economic situation, the president of the European Central Bank gave a presentation in the light of the outcome of our referendum. Private sector forecasts discussed at the Council included estimates of a reduction in eurozone growth potentially between 0.3% and 0.5% over the next three years. One of the main explanations for that is the predicted slowdown in the UK economy, given our trade with the euro area. President Draghi reassured the Council that the ECB has worked with the Bank of England for many months to prepare for uncertainty and, in the face of continued volatility, our institutions will continue to monitor markets and act as necessary.

To return to the main discussions around Britain leaving the EU, the tone of the meeting was one of sadness and regret, but there was agreement that the decision of the British people should be respected and we had positive discussions about the relationship we want to see between Britain and our European partners and the next steps on leaving the EU, including some of the issues that need to be worked through and the timing for triggering article 50. Let me say a word about each.

We were clear that, while Britain is leaving the European Union, we are not turning our backs on Europe—and they are not turning their backs on us. Many of my counterparts talked warmly about the history and values that our countries share and the huge contribution that Britain has made to peace and progress in Europe. For example, the Estonian Prime Minister described how the Royal Navy helped to secure the independence of his country a century ago. The Czech Prime Minister paid tribute to Britain as a home for Czechs fleeing persecution. Many of the countries of eastern and

central Europe expressed the debt they feel to Britain for standing by them when they were suffering under communism and for supporting them as they joined the European Union. President Hollande talked movingly about the visit that he and I will be making later this week to the battlefields of the Somme, where British and French soldiers fought and died together for the freedom of our continent and the defence of the democracy and values that we share.

Therefore, the Council was clear that, as we take forward this agenda of Britain leaving the European Union, we should rightly want to have the closest possible relationship that we can in the future. In my view, that should include the strongest possible relationship in terms of trade, co-operation and of course security, something that only becomes more important in the light of the appalling terrorist attack in Turkey last night.

As I said on Monday, as we work to implement the will of the British people, we also have a fundamental responsibility to bring our country together. We will not tolerate hate crime or any kind of attacks against people in our country because of their ethnic origin, and I reassured European leaders who were concerned about what they had heard was happening in Britain. We are a proud multi-faith, multi-ethnic society and we will stay that way.

I now turn to the next steps on leaving the EU. First, there was a lot of reassurance that, until Britain leaves, we are a full member. That means that we are entitled to all the benefits of membership and full participation until the point at which we leave. Secondly, we discussed some of the issues that will need to be worked through. I explained that in Britain there was great concern about the movement of people and the challenges of controlling immigration, as well as concerns about the issue of sovereignty. Indeed, I explained how those had come together. In turn, many of our European partners were clear that it is impossible to have all the benefits of membership without some of the costs of membership, and that is something that the next Prime Minister and their Cabinet are going to have to work through very carefully.

Third, on the timing of article 50, contrary to some expectations there was not a great clamour for Britain to trigger this straightaway. While there were one or two voices calling for this, the overwhelming view of my fellow leaders was that we need to take some time to get this right. Of course, everyone wants to see a clear blueprint in terms of what Britain thinks is right for its future relationship with the EU, and, as I explained in my statement on Monday, we are starting this work straightaway with the new unit in Whitehall, which will be led by a new permanent secretary, Oliver Robbins.

This unit will examine all the options and possibilities in a neutral way, setting out the costs and benefits so that the next Prime Minister and their Cabinet have all the information they need with which to determine exactly the right approach to take and the right outcome to try and negotiate. But the decisions that follow from this, including the triggering of article 50, are rightly for the next Prime Minister, and the Council clearly understood and, I believe, respected that.

I do not think it is a secret that I have, at times, found discussions in Brussels frustrating, but, despite that, I do believe we can be proud of what we have achieved,

whether it is putting a greater focus on jobs and growth, cutting the EU budget in real terms for the first time, reducing the burden of red tape on business, or building common positions on issues of national security, such as sanctions to stop Iran getting a nuclear weapon, standing up to Russian aggression in Ukraine, and galvanising other European countries to help with the lead that Britain was taking in dealing with Ebola in Sierra Leone.

In all these ways, and more, we have shown how much more we have in common with our European partners as neighbours and allies and friends who share fundamental values, history and culture. It is a poignant reminder that while we will be leaving the European Union, we must continue to work together, for the security and prosperity of our people for generations to come. I commend this statement to the House.

12.46 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for providing an advance copy of his statement. As he took part in what I assume will be his last ever EU Council summit, I was very pleased he took a more conciliatory tone in relation to our European neighbours than Nigel Farage did in the European Parliament yesterday.

As we negotiate our exit from the European Union, the British people are relying on the Government to facilitate as positive a transition as possible, and if we are to achieve this, we must proceed in a constructive and decent manner. I look forward to joining the Prime Minister, as I said at Question Time, at the commemoration of the Somme on Friday. He was right, too, to emphasise the role played by Britain in Europe in negotiating agreement with Iran and securing support for action to tackle the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone. So I thank the Prime Minister for that.

Yesterday the Prime Minister said at the EU Council summit that in order to strike a new relationship between Britain and the EU, European leaders would have to offer the UK more control over immigration. The threat of losing access to the single market means we are already seeing a negative effect on investment and business in this country. On Monday, the Prime Minister said access to the single market without accepting free movement was impossible. Does the Prime Minister now believe that Britain can negotiate an unprecedented deal? Can he also spell out a little more clearly than in his statement what further discussions were held in this area? This is an issue on which there needs to be an open debate—dare I say, an open and “straight-talking” debate, that absolutely failed to materialise during much of the referendum campaign.

The Prime Minister stated in the House on Monday that article 50 will not be triggered until his successor is in place. I heard what he just said about the views of other leaders at the summit. When does he expect article 50 actually to be triggered so we will know what the negotiating timetable is?

As I raised in my response to the Prime Minister on Monday, we in this House have a duty to act in the national interest and ensure we get the best agreement for all our constituents. Does the Prime Minister feel that, without the structures in place for this House to debate the alternatives and lead a discussion in our

communities, there is a risk of leaving Britain in a state of paralysis at a time when people need clear answers to their concerns? Will he also be able to tell us if there has been any further thought about the role of devolved Governments in future negotiations with the EU? We have seen today the First Minister of Scotland creating her own separate negotiating group and starting talks with the EU and it appears the Chief Minister of Gibraltar is doing the same. What conversations has the Prime Minister had with the First Ministers in Scotland and Wales and what legal advice has he received on separate negotiations by devolved Administrations and, indeed, overseas territories? I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment that HMS Enterprise will continue to play its part in Operation Sophia.

Last week's vote to leave the EU means that this country is currently in an unstable position. The next steps we take may be our most important and they must be taken with care. We have a duty now to reshape and rebuild an economy for the future—one that protects social and employment rights and builds new policies on trade, migration, environmental protection and investment, in order to deliver a country in which the prosperity that we create is shared by all. Therefore I urge the Prime Minister, and whoever his successor may be, to recognise that what our economy needs now is a clear plan for investment, not the further austerity and cuts to public services that the Chancellor put forward yesterday. I also urge the Prime Minister and his successor, one more time, to look at the suspension, and preferably the termination, of his now even more counterproductive fiscal rule.

I thank the Prime Minister for his assurances and his condemnation of racist attacks and abuse, wherever they occur in this country. I join him in that. We all need to calm our language and tone, and Members in all parts of the House must condemn the rise of racism in our society. Will he also reiterate absolutely his assurance to European Union nationals who are working here, providing support in our health service and in so many other services, that they are welcome and will remain welcome because of the work they do and the contribution they make? Our country is divided, so we must heal that division. Our economy is fragile, so we must begin to rebuild it. Our duty now is to move forward in a calm and conciliatory manner to build a new relationship with Europe and to build a Britain that works for everyone in every part of this country.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his response and for the way he has gone about it. He is right to say that “constructive” is the correct word. I was pleased that the discussions last night did not have a tone of European Union countries demanding this set of actions while Britain argued for that set of actions. There was a mature and calm understanding that we need each other and that we need this negotiation to proceed well and have a good outcome. That is in all our interests. I think we got off on the right foot, and I will do everything I can—whether in this job or as a Back-Bench MP—to ensure that we keep those strong relationships with our European partners, because we are going to need to.

On the issue of immigration versus the single market, the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that this is the biggest and most difficult issue to deal with, whether we

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are in the European Union arguing for changes or outside it and trying to secure the best possible access to the single market. My answer to the problem was to bring in the welfare restrictions that I negotiated. It was incredibly tough to negotiate them, and I am sad that they will now fall away as a result of the referendum decision. There is no doubt that the next Government are going to have to work very hard on this. I personally think that access to the single market and the strength of our economy will be the single most important issue that they will have to deal with.

On the question of article 50, that will be a matter for the next Prime Minister, and there is a very good reason for that. Before we go into the tunnel of the article 50 negotiations, which have a two-year time limit, we will want to have made the best possible preparations for the precise blueprint that we want to achieve at the end. That will help Britain, and frankly it will help the other European Union countries to understand what it is that we are shooting for. They have said that there can be no negotiation without notification, but I do not think that that excludes discussions between the new Prime Minister and partners or institutions, so that we can continue to get off on the right foot. That is the strong advice that I would give to them.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the devolved institutions. I have had conversations with the First Minister of Scotland, the First Minister of Wales and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and I shall continue to do so. I want them to be as involved as possible and I want their voices to be heard loud and clear.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about legal advice, and the legal advice that I have seen is that this is a UK decision to be made by the United Kingdom Government and the United Kingdom Parliament. It has to be done in that way. I completely agree with what he said about racism. We should all reiterate the statements that we have made to the EU nationals who are here. We should thank them for their contribution and say that their rights are guaranteed while we remain in the EU and we will be working hard on that question. I am sure that all the contenders in the Conservative leadership campaign will want to make it clear that they want to safeguard for the future the rights of people from the European Union who work here and study here, but that will be a matter for them.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asked about suspending the fiscal rule. This feels a little bit like a stuck record. Whatever the problem or issue, his answer always seems to be: more borrowing, more spending, more taxing and more debt. I have to say that you do not get investment unless you have economic stability, and you do not have economic stability if you do not have a plan for dealing with your debts and your deficit. This has been proved the world over, including in some of his favourite countries such as Venezuela, and I really would argue against going down that route.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. Friend has quite rightly referred to trade and co-operation with the European Union, and we on the leave side have always argued for that. Will he, however, give us some further advice? He is talking about very precise blueprints

and about alternative models. Will he give us an absolute assurance that any such models or blueprints will be exclusively based on the assumption that we are repealing the European Communities Act 1972?

The Prime Minister: We are leaving the European Union, so surely that must be the case. The reassurance that I can give my hon. Friend is that I am not saying that there are only four or five blueprints and that Britain has to follow any one of those. Obviously, we can try to amend blueprints and have Norway-plus or Norway-minus or a better trade deal than Canada. It is important for colleagues in the House and people in the country to understand that there are some quite fundamental questions about whether we want full unrestricted access to the single market and the price we might have to pay in return, or whether we will be satisfied to have less than full access along with some other compensating advantages. We have to go through all those questions, and the more we can attach facts and figures to them, the more we will enable people to make an informed choice.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Since the Prime Minister returned from Brussels, for the first time in 40 years member states from the rest of the EU have remained there to discuss the future of Europe. While the Prime Minister is not in Brussels, Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon is in Brussels. She has gone there to protect Scotland's interests in Europe and to preserve our place in Europe. She has met the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Parliament. She is also meeting one of the key European negotiators on Brexit, the former Prime Minister of Belgium, Guy Verhofstadt. The First Minister has also spoken to the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, and will be meeting diplomats from other EU member states. Nicola Sturgeon is doing this with a mandate from the Scottish Parliament, with support from the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Green party. An expert group has been established to advise on protecting our place in Europe. It includes eminent diplomats, economists and constitutional experts. These include a former British judge in the European Court of Justice, the former British ambassador to NATO, the former economic adviser to the European Commission and the former permanent under-secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and head of the UK diplomatic service.

We all need to explore ways to protect Scotland's relationship with the European Union, Scotland's place in the single market and the social, employment and economic benefits that come from that. I want to ask the Prime Minister whether he even raised the question of Scotland at the Council of Ministers. Did he say that Scotland wanted to stay in the European Union? Did he say that Gibraltar wanted to stay in the European Union? Did he say that London wanted to protect its important position in Europe? When are we going to get some leadership on this from the UK Government? Or is he just going to stand by and watch England leave the European Union and declare independence from the rest of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Yes, there is a meeting of the 27 other members of the European Union this morning, and that was always going to happen if we made the

decision to leave because, just as we must prepare our negotiating position, they will want to prepare theirs. The good thing about last night's conversation was that it started off on a very reasonable, fair and constructive basis. I am glad that the First Minister of Scotland is having those meetings. It is always useful to meet and talk to our European counterparts, but at the end of the day, the best way we can secure the best possible access for Scotland into the single market is for the United Kingdom to negotiate as hard as it can, as one.

To answer his specific question about whether I talked about Scotland last night, yes I did; I talked about this Parliament and I talked about Scotland. In managing last night's meeting, we took a bit of a cue from what happens in this House. I set out what I thought was the result of the referendum and why. I set out what I believe would be the aims of Britain and the United Kingdom and I explained how different parts of the United Kingdom voted. All the other 27 members then spoke, many asking questions, and I answered all their questions at the end of the dinner as fully as I could, as I do in this House. A little bit of British parliamentary practice was introduced into the European Council and I think it was a good way of doing things.

Mr Speaker: It was without a shadow of a doubt very good for the European Council as well.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): On that subject, did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reiterate to the European Council that the United Kingdom does not have a federal structure? We did not vote in the referendum as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, or even London, but as British citizens, each with an equal voice and equal weight. All future decisions must be taken by the United Kingdom Government and no one else.

Such was the importance of free movement of people in the referendum, does the Prime Minister also accept that any future deal with our European partners that includes free movement would be regarded as a betrayal by the millions who voted to leave?

The Prime Minister: I did emphasise that it was a UK decision, but also that the UK will want to listen carefully to all the constituent nations and to the views of their Ministers and their Parliaments in setting out the negotiation that we want to carry on. As for the free movement of people, that will be for the next Prime Minister, Government and Parliament to decide on. I am in no doubt, however, that it is the difficult issue. Frankly, it is a difficult issue when inside the EU and with all the negotiating ability to try to change things. In many ways it will be even more difficult from outside, if we want full access to the single market, to secure changes. Nevertheless, that is the challenge.

I explained very clearly to the meeting that that was my reading of the referendum result and that it was a coming together of concern about free movement of people and migration combined with a sense of control and sovereignty over that. I said that I was very sad at the result. The economic case for staying in was very strong, but if we want to make this relationship work, whether out or in, we have to listen to people and try to find a way through this.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. In his discussions yesterday, was he aware of a growing mood among Heads of Government across the European Union—I certainly saw it among the seven Liberal Prime Ministers to whom I spoke yesterday—that given that three quarters of Britain's young people voted to remain in Europe, they should be permitted, as far as possible, to remain in Europe? What can be done to ensure that young people are allowed access to Europe—perhaps even over and above the rest of us?

Is the Prime Minister also aware of the great concern among many communities that depend on European funding? Most important perhaps are Britain's farmers, many of whom are deeply worried about the loss of CAP payments at some point in the next two years. Will the Prime Minister guarantee today that British farmers, particularly livestock and dairy farmers, will continue to receive direct payments to keep them in business even after we leave the European Union—if we do?

The Prime Minister: On young people, the hon. Gentleman is right that people want the opportunities to work, to travel and to study. One of the things that the EU unit will need to do is to work out the precise nature of agreements such as the Erasmus programme and what access we can have to them from outside the EU.

On funding, the European budget between 2014 and 2020 has been set out, including the amount of money that goes to our farmers. What I can guarantee is that those payments will continue while we are in and that contracts will obviously be honoured, but it will be for a future Government to determine at the point of departure what payments we should continue to make to our farmers. If it was me making that decision, I am keen to have a living, working countryside, but we will have to go through those options and a future Prime Minister will have to decide.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree with the unanimous view of the Foreign Affairs Committee that the construction of article 50 means that it is perfectly likely that there will be no agreement on the other side of the negotiations, which will require qualified majority voting, or agreement in the European Parliament at the end of the two years? As such, we would still have access to the single market but would be subject to World Trade Organisation most-favoured-nation terms. Since that would mean no free movement of people and no payments into the budget, that would represent a perfectly sound bottom line for the United Kingdom in the negotiations. It is likely that other advances will be made on that before we arrive at a deeper, comprehensive free trade agreement.

Will the Prime Minister also tell us about the fate of the British presidency next year? We will still be a full member, so are we going to take up our responsibilities?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must practice. We will be hearing from him regularly given the illustrious position that he holds, but I am afraid he must be briefer than that.

The Prime Minister: I did look at the Foreign Affairs Committee report, and while I am not fully liberated and able to say what I think, I thought that the conclusions

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were—[HON. MEMBERS: “Go on!”] I was thinking of a place in London close to Dagenham, but I won't go there.

If we leave the EU and have no deal in place, the WTO tariffs involve 10% on cars, 12% on clothes and 36% on some dairy produce. It would not be a good outcome for the United Kingdom. I will look at the Foreign Affairs Committee report as we get this unit up and running and look at all the alternatives, but I really think that that would not be a good outcome for the United Kingdom. On the presidency, no decisions have been made.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): May I thank the Prime Minister for his service to this country, for his support of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive through very difficult times during his premiership and for his support of the United Kingdom? He and his family have my very best wishes for the future.

Regarding the EU summit, will the Prime Minister spell out again our commitment to NATO, not least to reassure our partners in central and eastern Europe? Our European partners, who are now speaking somewhat ill of our decision last Thursday, should be reminded that the UK is one of NATO's main contributors and a firm supporter of European defence and security and that they should play a greater role in contributing to European defence, along with the Americans and ourselves. The wider perspective needs to be considered in all of this. The EU is an important single market, but NATO and the defence and security of Europe, not least with regard to Russian aggression, need to be strongly borne in mind.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. He is right that our commitment to and membership of NATO, an important organisation, continues. He is also right that our spending of 2% of national output is now responsible for a large share of the overall European commitment and that we should be encouraging others to increase their spending. We must ensure that our membership of NATO continues and that we are not disadvantaged by being in one and out of the other.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): My right hon. Friend consistently made the case for British car workers. Indeed, he made his final appeal to the country from Birmingham, which was much appreciated. Does he agree that reciprocity between the UK and the EU is absolutely vital in protecting the hundreds and thousands of jobs that depend on our access to that principal market?

The Prime Minister: I grateful for what my right hon. Friend says. Anyone who thinks that something of a manufacturing renaissance is not happening in Britain should go to that Jaguar Land Rover plant. Seven or eight years ago there were 4,000 people there; there are now 14,000. It is about not just manufacture and assembly, but design, R and D and technology. The company is taking on hundreds of apprentices every year. It is a magnificent car plant and we want to see more of them. It is absolutely crucial for companies such as that that

we keep the European market open, and it is crucial that they keep investing in our country rather than in countries inside the European Union. That will always be an alternative, which draws into sharp relief the importance of maintaining strong access to the single market.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): There is obviously a difference between future free movement reform and the position of existing residents. The Prime Minister said earlier that we could not confirm residency or employment rights for EU citizens who already live here until the negotiations were under way, but why is that the case? Given that the matter is being exploited by awful “go home” or repatriation campaigns, we should take a firm stance against them and pass some swift motions or legislation or new immigration rules in this House before the summer recess to put an end to that speculation and to provide reassurance to EU citizens who may have worked here for many years. I urge the Prime Minister to consider that because it would be a wise thing to do for the sake of community cohesion.

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I will look very carefully at what the right hon. Lady says. I have tried to answer the question as accurately, factually and legally as I can. If we come out of this negotiation arguing for visa requirements, restrictions on numbers, quotas, work permits or whatever for European nationals to come here—this will be for a future Government—other countries might take reciprocal action against British citizens trying to travel, work and live in other countries. Even if that were to happen, the answer would be to guarantee the status of anybody here now. We can say that while we are in the European Union, but it is for a future Prime Minister to make that decision.

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I readily understand that, on economic issues, negotiations will be long and protracted, but on our automatic co-operation on matters of security, both at formal and informal meetings, we have seen a big improvement in the past few years. I cannot see that that should be much of a weighty negotiating piece. Surely it makes sense to ensure that those formal and informal meetings continue in order to deal with both terrorism and economic crime.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend puts it very well. There are a number of informal mechanisms that have grown up, including the counter-terrorism group of countries, mostly from the European Union, and very high-level meetings between our intelligence and security services. There are also quite a lot of now growing mechanisms within the EU, such as the Schengen Information System and the watch lists for people travelling between European Union countries, some of which are very much bound up in EU institutions and rules. People may like that or not, but the fact is they exist and we will have to work out—we can start that now—how to maintain access to as much of that as is possible for our national security.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister explain to the millions of people who voted to leave why, in the next few months while we await a new Prime

Minister, this country, using all the professionalism of Her Majesty's Government, cannot start talking and negotiating—informally perhaps—with Canada, Australia, Malaysia and all those other countries that will be desperately keen to sign up to a trade agreement? Why can we not do some of those things? If we are still paying our full amount into the European Union, will we have to sign up to every single directive that comes through in the next two years?

The Prime Minister: On the hon. Lady's point about Canada, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia, of course we can start those conversations. It is difficult to start full-on trade negotiations because until we know the relationship between Britain and the European Union single market it would be quite difficult to get into an intensive discussion, but we can certainly have some pathfinding discussions. On the issue of EU directives, we must be very clear that we are members of this organisation and that we pay into this organisation. That continues until the day we leave. Therefore, we have to obey the rules and laws—we would not expect other EU countries suddenly not to obey the rules with respect to us. That is important. On the decisions that have to be made right now, there are those that must be made for legal and practical reasons. There may be some decisions that can be put off for a month or two so that we can get in place a new Government who can think of them in the context of the renegotiation, but we should not do anything that breaks the law.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Although we are naturally focused on our future role in Europe, our friends in the Baltic nations are concerned about their immediate risks across the border—risks related to both military and cyberspace matters. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that all that can be done to stand by our friends is being done both within NATO and the European Union?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Yes, enough is being done. We have the Warsaw summit coming up where we will be playing quite a big role in ensuring that there is a visible military presence in the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. We will be playing our part and the Americans will be playing theirs. It is important that we keep up that reassurance, because, for those states, this is the key thing that Britain brings to help their security.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I was at the passionate pro-EU demonstration outside the House of Lords last night, and I have to report that I did not see the Prime Minister or the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) there. The most popular chant that was repeated over and over again was "Eton mess! Eton mess!" Many of the people there were students and young people, and that is because universities have benefited greatly from membership of the European Union. My own university in Bangor reckons that £100 million has come our way over seven years. What can the Prime Minister, his Government and the future Government do to ensure that that funding, or similar funding, is secured?

The Prime Minister: Obviously I was not there because I was in Brussels at the time. While I am all for having my cake and eating it, I have not yet worked out how to

be in two places at the same time. I think that I have said what I can about funding for universities. It is important that we continue to get it through the European Union under the Horizon programme while we are a member. Afterwards, decisions will have to be made, but we will support our universities. The hon. Gentleman and I have to be frank with each other: Wales did not vote to remain in the European Union despite being a net beneficiary. Welsh farming does well out of Europe, and the Welsh steel industry will do far better if we are in rather than out. I take my share of responsibility that we did not win this campaign. Even now we are leaving, we all have to think about how we can make better arguments about how Britain can remain as engaged as possible.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May I thank the Prime Minister not just for his statement today, but for all the work he has done over the past six years to protect UK interests at these European Council meetings? With respect to the meeting yesterday, did he detect any regret on the part of other EU leaders that they did not make more concessions when he sought to renegotiate our terms of membership?

The Prime Minister: That is a very good question, and one that I am quite keen to answer. The sense in the European Council was that it had bent over backwards to give to a country that already had a special status—out of the euro and out of the Schengen System—things that they found profoundly uncomfortable. Many of those countries really do believe in ever-closer political union however wrong we might think it is here in this country, and they hated saying to Britain, "Right, you are out of this." That really pained them, but they did it. They particularly disliked having to agree to cut welfare benefits for their own citizens, because that is what they signed up to do. I believe, and will always believe, that it was a good negotiation. It did not solve all of Britain's problems, and I never said that it did, but it certainly addressed some of the biggest concerns that the British people had. I would like to know whether there is more that could have been done, but the very strong sense that I get is that this issue of full access to the single market and reform of free movement is very, very difficult. We achieved some reforms of free movement, but the idea that there is an enormous change to free movement, particularly from outside the EU, is a very tough call and people have to think that through very carefully before we get into the negotiations.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): The referendum was about our membership of the European Union and not about our membership of the single market. Given the very grave damage that is already being done to our economy because of the uncertainty, will the Prime Minister call on all of those in this House who aspire to lead this country to commit themselves to keeping Britain in the single market with full access?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. This is one of the key arguments. When I examine why I have always believed that we are better off in, even though I have wanted to see reform, it has always come down to this: the single market exists, we are in it, and it will go on existing even if we leave it and it has a profound effect on our economic, business,

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political and national life. I certainly urge my colleagues to aim for the greatest possible access, but, obviously, they will have to think about what the benefits and disbenefits of that route are.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Does the Prime Minister accept that, when negotiating with the EU, we should remember our many strengths? One of the strongest economies, Britain has many competitive advantages that would more than compensate for any tariffs, which the World Trade Organisation will ensure cannot be punitive even if they were imposed. Furthermore, nations around the world, including Australia and New Zealand, are already knocking at our door with regard to trade deals.

The Prime Minister: Certainly no one is more impressed by the strength of the British economy than I am. It is strong, and it has a lot of advantages and many key industries that are admired the world over. We have to recognise that it will be a hard and difficult negotiation in many ways, because we are negotiating with a bloc of 440 million people, but we should make the most of our strengths. I would avoid tariffs, though. The idea that tariffs can be compensated for in other ways is quite dangerous talk. If we think of the car companies and others that want to come and invest here, they do not want to do that and then pay tariffs as they sell into the European single market, so I think tariffs are, on the whole, to be avoided.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): The leave campaign undoubtedly made totally false pledges, which have all been exposed accordingly, but on the issue that has been raised on a number of occasions today, does not some of the responsibility for the result lie with the EU leadership, which showed no flexibility whatsoever over an issue that is certainly important in the area that I have the honour to represent—the issue of free movement of labour? EU law did not come down with the 10 commandments.

The Prime Minister: For once, I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman. That was why I chose to aim at the issue by saying that people could come here and work, but could not get full access to our welfare system for four years. That addressed the concern that his and my constituents have that there should not be something for nothing. The point that we have to understand is that European Union countries see the single market as consisting not only of the free movement of goods, people, services and capital. They see those things bound together, but they also see the single market as including the payments that countries make into the EU to strengthen the weakest members and those that have recently recovered from communism. Of course, one can try to negotiate amendments to these movements—and I did—but one has to think about that mindset as we go into the negotiation.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that North Hertfordshire voted to stay in the EU. Many of our businesses rely on the single market, and many of my constituents work in London in insurance, financial services and legal work.

Does he agree that part of this negotiation must be about the passporting arrangements that enable these service interests to do so well? I do not know whether that was mentioned at the European Council. May I also thank him for everything he has done?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his remarks. The issue of passporting will loom large in the negotiations because financial services are 7% of our economy and two thirds of the jobs are outside London. We are the financial centre for Europe—40% of financial services are in Europe—and we will be strong in that area whatever the outcome, but it is undoubtedly true that the passport does help British firms, and it helps other countries' firms come to Britain. One of the reasons why the Swiss banks are here in such large measure is that they do not get passporting rights through Switzerland. This should be a very important feature; it is one of the aspects of what access to the single market actually means.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): I thank the Prime Minister for all his efforts. Does he fully recognise the very difficult position that Northern Ireland is now in? We voted to stay and we want to stay, yet we are hostage to the mistakes of others who were misled by false promises—unlimited funding for the NHS and lorry loads of money for farmers. Does he recognise that Northern Ireland will need to open up opportunities to protect its interests and maintain a closer relationship with Europe? In particular, has he had time to give any thought to how the settlement of 1998—the Good Friday agreement—is undermined by the dismantling of much of the legislation that hinges on the EU?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, we will look very closely at the specific questions that the hon. Gentleman raises. That is something that officials in Northern Ireland and in Westminster can start with straightaway. I want us to keep all the benefits that we have had from the common travel area, and I think we will have the closest possible co-operation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. The Taoiseach last night made a very moving speech about Britain and Ireland. I think he said that we had been fighting each other since 1169. I have not checked my dates—

Dr McDonnell *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is nodding, so I think I have got that right. The Taoiseach then went through some of the key elements of the conflict, in which relatives of mine were probably involved, but who knows? He said he was very proud that relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have never been stronger than today, and we must not let that go.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): My constituency is home to a number of significant manufacturing and technology businesses, which play a major role in our local economy. What reassurance can the Prime Minister give me that this trade will continue to grow, not least after Warwick's very strong vote to remain?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. This comes back to the issue of manufacturing and access to the single market, and that needs to loom very large in the negotiation. Nothing changes for probably the next two years at least while the negotiation carries on, but we need to make sure, as we come out of the end of the article 50 process, that we have that access properly set out so that our manufacturers know what they are doing.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister for his strong condemnation of the racist attacks on members of the Polish community and others, and may I pay tribute to him for the respect and commitment that he has shown to Britain's ethnic minority community over the past six years, and for creating the most diverse Administration of any Conservative Prime Minister in history? In respect of the summit yesterday, was there a discussion of the comments made by the Mayor of Calais or the French Economy Minister that the juxtaposed borders should be taken out of France and returned to the United Kingdom? Does he agree that that deal was made between Britain and France and has nothing to do with the referendum?

The Prime Minister: First, let me thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments about my support for Britain's ethnic minorities and the diversity that we see on the Government Benches. That has been a very important change in our politics and one that I hope will continue. We did not discuss last night the juxtaposed border control issue or the remarks of the Mayor of Calais. My view is that this is a treaty between Britain and France. We certainly want to keep it, and we hope that the French do too, but I do not resile from anything I said in the referendum campaign about the risks that there are. We need to redouble our efforts to try to make sure that the borders remain where they are.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Can the Prime Minister confirm that 100,000 migrants is about the maximum number that people are willing to accept at the moment, especially outside London and the home counties?

The Prime Minister: I would not put it like that. The point that I have always made is that I think we should have a sense of what the net migration should be. In a modern advanced world and a modern advanced country such as Britain, often well over 100,000—many hundreds of thousands—British people and EU nationals here move to Europe and elsewhere, and European nationals come here. Measuring the net number, which is obviously imprecise and difficult, because people leave Britain for all sorts of reasons, is a good way of measuring the pressure on public services. As recently as 2008, the number of people leaving the UK and the number arriving from Europe was a little bit negative. That is why I have always focused on the net migration issue, but the overall numbers should be measured at quite a large level, because the gross movements can be much bigger than the net figure at the end.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the Prime Minister recognise that whoever becomes the next Prime Minister will have no mandate to negotiate on behalf of the people of this country, not least because the leave campaign failed to set out any serious

plan for what Brexit looks like in practice, and so the fairest, clearest thing to do would be to go for an early general election?

The Prime Minister: I would argue that we are a parliamentary democracy, so the new Prime Minister and the Cabinet should draw up their negotiating mandate based on the work that is going to be done over the next few weeks and months to set out all the alternatives, and then they will have to bring it here, explain it and defend it in this House. That seems to me the right way forward.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The formal negotiation will start when article 50 is triggered, but does the Prime Minister agree that our first piece of negotiating leverage is when we decide to trigger article 50, and that there is no reason—legal or moral—for us to do that until we are ready and we have sight, month by month, of what will happen in the 24 months after it has been triggered?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that when to trigger article 50 is a British decision. It is important to recognise that our European partners have concerns, too. The economic problems that we are currently suffering and may have more of are also affecting them. The Dutch Prime Minister said to me last night that he thought that his growth rate would be materially affected by the position in Britain and the uncertainty. Given that negotiations are, yes, hard work and hard graft, but they also rely on a certain amount of goodwill, we do not want to put too much of that goodwill at risk by how we proceed.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): With the pound going down 10% against the dollar, with our future trading position completely unknown, with the unity of the UK under threat and with appalling racist attacks happening on our streets, does the Prime Minister agree that, as a response to the referendum, the setting up of a unit in the Cabinet Office under the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin) is simply not up to the task? This is, after all, the greatest change in Britain's position in the world since the end of the second world war.

The Prime Minister: First, let me agree with the right hon. Gentleman on the issue of racist attacks. We need to take urgent action, and I announced that at the Dispatch Box today during Prime Minister's questions. In terms of the steps we need to take, there is, I believe, a limited amount that can be done before a new Prime Minister and a new Cabinet arrive, but we should not belittle that, because a lot of this is cold, hard facts about what the different alternatives are, and what the different costs and benefits are. There is a world of difference between a referendum campaign in which the leave side offered all sorts of things that went with the hypothetical new status and the real facts now of what those things look like. That is something that we need to see, and I think that the mechanisms that we are putting in place will help that to happen.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Prime Minister says that we are entitled to all the benefits of EU membership until the point at which we leave. May

[Alison Thewliss]

I clarify whether there has been any discussion about access to funding such as regional selective assistance, which has created and safeguarded 10,000 jobs and been worth £83 million to Glasgow since 2010? In addition, the long-term conditions of loans issued under the European Investment Bank, which were also worth significant amounts of money, require some clarification for the local authorities that were involved in them.

The Prime Minister: Any contracts entered into before Britain leaves the EU should be honoured in full in terms of EU funding for research or for regions of our country. The status we have with respect to the EIB will have to be determined as part of the negotiation. Again, that is the sort of technical issue that a Whitehall unit can look at now to find out what the options are so that we can discuss them in this House.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Vote Leave is so confident of delivering its overblown promises that it has recently wiped much of its website and removed from it the key claims that it made during the campaign. I disagreed with many of the claims that were made, but does the Prime Minister agree that the public will never forgive Vote Leave politicians who form part of the new Government if they break those pledges? There will be no hiding place from being held to account on those overblown promises in the next Government.

The Prime Minister: One thing we all experience and share in this House is that when we make commitments and promises, we are held to account for them, in this House and at these Dispatch Boxes, in a way that is probably more direct and often more brutal than in other democracies. Long may that remain the case.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): The renegotiations will clearly be difficult and will take some time. One area in which we must take more action now is improving the jobs, skills and infrastructure in our market towns and coastal areas, where many people feel that they have not seen the benefits of growth. May I ask the Prime Minister to work with local council leaders to make sure that the devolution deals being struck across the country deliver for those areas, not just our great metropolitan cities?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Not only do pledges such as our 3 million apprentices help to address the issue of immigration, because they mean training our own people to do the jobs that our economy is creating, but they offer hope and help to our regional economies—not just, as she says, to the city economies. We should continue with all the devolution deals. They are popular with local authority leaders and they have real teeth, and we will carry on that work.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Northern Ireland, as has already been stated, voted to remain in the European Union. My constituency, being a border constituency that contains part of Carlingford lough—one bit of it is in Northern Ireland and the other bit is in southern Ireland—and Warrenpoint port, depends on free access to goods and services and the essential access to markets, as 46% of what is exported and

imported comes from the south of Ireland. Our economy depends on membership of the European Union. How can that be guaranteed?

The Prime Minister: The vote in Northern Ireland was very strong, not least in respect of the fact that the party of the First Minister wanted to leave the European Union. It was a very strong statement. I would argue that all the constituent parts of the United Kingdom need to make their voices heard. The process over the next few months of drawing up the different blueprints is an important opportunity to influence the debate in this country and in Europe about what the outcome should be. The example that the hon. Lady gives of cross-border trade in Northern Ireland is a very good one with which to inform the debate.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): British troops are on the Polish-Ukraine border taking part in the largest military exercise since the end of the cold war. The Prime Minister has committed 1,000 British personnel to participate in NATO's very high readiness force in the event of any Russian aggression, and the ceasefire in Ukraine is on the brink of collapse. May I encourage him to use his final appearance as a NATO Prime Minister on 8 and 9 July at the Warsaw summit to urge all our European colleagues to continue to press sanctions against Putin's Russia, and not to give in to Russia's aggression in Ukraine?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We have done a lot to reassure our Polish and Baltic friends and allies; that is why the troops are taking part in this exercise. We are taking a leading role in this NATO conference. We are going to make sure that we provide visible troops. Ours will be stationed in Estonia, and I think that America and other countries are going to be in the other Baltic states so that when people look over these borders, they see not just Estonian troops or Latvian troops, but American troops, British troops or French troops. I think that that is absolutely right.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Several weeks ago, in the lead-up to the EU referendum, I asked for a personal commitment from the Prime Minister to the Tay cities deal for the city of Dundee and the surrounding areas, and he gave that full commitment. Since the EU referendum, we have heard comments from the Secretary of State for Scotland to the effect that that may be in doubt because of new Tory leadership in the near future. Can the Prime Minister reassure the people of Dundee and the surrounding areas that this city deal will be delivered in terms of funding, regardless of who is Prime Minister now or in the near future?

The Prime Minister: I cannot bind the hands of my successor, but I will say to any of the candidates that the city deals have been a great success throughout the United Kingdom. It has been quite a marked thing that even though Scotland now has a powerhouse Parliament, city deals have been popular and successful where they are being tried in Scotland. I will certainly make that clear.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Relying on the WTO or a Canadian-style free trade agreement clearly would not be the best possible deal

for our country. I think it is pretty irresponsible of some of the leading leave campaigners to have suggested during the campaign that that was somehow a good alternative to our membership of the EU. Is it not also clear, from what European leaders said both in February and yesterday, that if the Prime Minister's successor prioritises stopping free movement in the light of the referendum, we will not have the same unfettered access to the single market? The parameters of the choice are actually pretty clear.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes a strong point, and I can add to it. Although yesterday's meeting was relatively successful, it is worth pointing out that the Canada free trade deal is not yet agreed. There are countries in the EU that are getting very nervous about free trade deals—I happen to think that they are wrong, but that is worth bearing in mind. On what she says about access to the single market, if that is the most important thing, there are trade-offs that we have to consider. That is certainly the way I see this negotiation.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Denmark voted in a referendum to reject the Maastricht treaty. A year later, the country voted in a second referendum to accept it, in the fine European tradition of keeping on voting until there is the right result. We know that many millions of people in this country felt deceived by the exaggerations and lies in both campaigns. They now feel cheated by the result, and millions of people are protesting. Is it not right that we look again at the possibility of a second referendum, in the certainty that second thoughts are always superior to first thoughts?

The Prime Minister: I think we have to accept the result, and I am certainly not planning a second referendum. What we have to focus on now is getting the closest possible relationship between Britain and Europe. We can start the work in shaping that debate; the exchanges that we are having now are very constructive, and we can start that debate right now.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am getting a bit bored with this lame-duck attitude the Prime Minister is giving us. Take control, man! There are lots of things he could still do. We could be passing emergency legislation to make it absolutely clear that every EU citizen living in this country now is entitled to live here in the future. That would stop some of the horrible campaigning that has already been happening around the country. He could set up a royal commission—both Houses of Parliament—to make sure that we bind together as much of the country as possible and start creating a consensus about what we should be lobbying for as our best deal. Why does he not take control? I thought that is what it was all about.

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that I have never believed you take control or take rapid decisions by setting up royal commissions—as has been said, they take minutes and they last for years, and that is what would happen in this case. I have said that I will look very carefully at all these issues of how to reassure EU nationals who are here. I have tried to set out the legal position, and I have expressed the strongest possible

condemnation. But I think, frankly, he and his colleagues have something they need to take control of—and it is their party.

Chris Bryant: I'm doing my best. [*Laughter.*]

The Prime Minister: Well, he did. It is a topsy-turvy world: I have never felt greater support from my party, and I am leaving; and I have never seen an Opposition leader with less support, and he is staying. As someone who is about to enter the political graveyard, perhaps I could misquote my favourite band and say, "Let's meet at the cemetery gates".

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): A farmer in my constituency is thinking of emigrating, the possible impact on CAP payments being the straw that broke the camel's back. On the basis of an earlier answer, will the Prime Minister confirm that there can be certainty of income from CAP payments to 2020 only if the Scottish Government find a way to stay in the EU?

The Prime Minister: What needs to happen is for a negotiation to be completed and for the CAP payments that are set out in the negotiation 2014 to 2020 to continue up until then, and then for a future Government—the UK Government, but also, now, the Scottish Parliament, with its powerhouse financial powers—to decide the payments they want to make to Scottish farmers.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): When the Prime Minister got back from Brussels last night, was there any message from the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) about where to find the £350 million for the NHS?

The Prime Minister: It was pretty late by the time I got back, and there was not really time for anything.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I join the acknowledgements being given to the Prime Minister. I do not really think he fully appreciates—certainly, his Secretary of State does not—that when we negotiated the Good Friday agreement, common membership of the EU was taken as a given, and it is there in the fabric of the agreement. At the core of that agreement is the principle of consent, but the people of Northern Ireland now find that they are being dragged out of the European Union against their consent, as expressed when they voted for the Good Friday agreement and in the referendum last week, when 78.2% in my constituency voted to remain. It is not enough for the Prime Minister to say now that the negotiations that will take place will sort things out for us. It is clear that English politics does not have a sat-nav or a map for where it now finds itself, yet he is simply telling us that we will have to tailgate and go where the impulses and prejudices of English politics drive next. We need to achieve a better situation to protect EU access and benefits for our constituents.

The Prime Minister: I totally understand the hon. Gentleman's passion about this—he and I were on the same side—but my reading of the history of this is different. The Good Friday agreement, based on the principle of consent, was that the United Kingdom

[*The Prime Minister*]

would continue and Northern Ireland would be part of that United Kingdom. This is a sovereign decision for the United Kingdom. Now, the job of the United Kingdom Government, in full collaboration with the First and Deputy First Ministers in Northern Ireland, is to try to get the best possible negotiation in terms of Britain's place, and therefore Northern Ireland's place, so that relations north-south can be as strong as they can.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Lord Hill, Britain's European Commissioner, has decided to step down from the European Commission. Has the Prime Minister any plans to appoint somebody else, if only on an interim basis?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think we should appoint a new Commissioner. We are a full member of this organisation. We pay our dues in full. We should have a UK Commissioner. I discussed this yesterday with the President of the Commission, and we hope to come forward with a nominee shortly.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I am the proud son of Irish immigrants who encountered the signs that said, "No dogs, no Irish". We once again see fear stalking the streets, with Polish women in Erdington told to go home, a Kashmiri driver told, "We don't want you Muslims here", and an aggressive individual telling a train guard, "Don't you close those doors until I tell you to. We make the rules now." This is all a consequence of xenophobia being put mainstream in the referendum campaign. Does the Prime Minister agree that it can never be right that someone should fear for their safety because of their accent or the colour of their skin, and that we will never allow this great, dynamic, multicultural Britain to be divided by the evil of racism?

The Prime Minister: I agree with every word the hon. Gentleman said. I never wanted to see those sentiments appear in our country again. I think the difference between now and the 1950s and 1960s, when these things happened, is that the state of our laws is far stronger, the understanding of our police is far better and the ability of our prosecuting authorities to take action is much stronger. We need to make sure all those things are brought to bear.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): As far as the UK Council presidency is concerned, perhaps the Scottish Government should be invited to take it on, seeing as we are committed to the European Union. However, does the Prime Minister understand the concerns expressed by my constituents about the impact of Brexit on friends and relatives who are UK citizens but who live in the EU, particularly as regards access to healthcare and other social protections? How will that access be maintained in the future?

The Prime Minister: Of course I understand people's passions and concerns. Healthcare is exactly the sort of issue that did not loom as large in the campaign as I rather wish it had. There are some big retail benefits from being in the EU—the ability to use mobile phones

without roaming charges, the storing of digital content, the access to health services, the cheap air fares and all the rest of it. That is exactly the sort of issue that a Whitehall unit can look at. What are the rules in terms of access to healthcare? What can we secure in Europe but outside the European Union? We can start to put that forward so that people can see what the future holds.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Some 70% of those who voted in Hammersmith and Fulham last Thursday voted to remain. Hundreds of constituents have written to me since, fearing for their jobs, the stability of our local community—where 15% are EU nationals—and even their personal safety. What should I say the Government are doing, to reassure them?

The Prime Minister: What I hope the hon. Gentleman will say is that, rightly, we have to accept the democratic will of the people in a properly constituted referendum, voted for on a 6:1 basis in this House. But we should do everything we can to reassure people, first, that hate crime has no place in our country, as we have discussed today. Then we are going to conduct a negotiation, based on the best available evidence, about what we can do to achieve the closest possible relationship with Europe, on the basis of trade, co-operation and security. That is our goal, and I hope that that will provide some reassurance. But, of course, in any referendum, with a decision like this, there will be those who are disappointed by the result, myself included. We now have to make the best we can of the new situation we are in.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The already dodgy economics of Hinkley Point C have surely been fatally undermined by the decision to withdraw from the European Union. May I suggest to the Prime Minister, if he is looking to salvage something of a legacy, that he pulls the plug on this enormous folly?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The logic and the economics behind Hinkley Point C are that we need to have some base-load, non-carbon energy in order to have any ability to meet the very challenging targets we have to reduce carbon emissions in our country. I am all for, and have seen, a massive expansion of renewable energy since I have been Prime Minister; indeed, my favourite statistic is that 98% of Britain's solar panels have been installed since I have had this job. However, solar power is, by its nature, intermittent, and we do need some base-load power. That is why the case for Hinkley continues.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): If the Prime Minister is going to dig out his copy of the album "The Queen is Dead", he might want to depress himself further by listening to my favourite track, "I know It's Over", although as far as the Labour party is concerned, it would be "There is a Light That Never Goes Out". In Bristol, on Friday, our elected mayor convened a meeting of key stakeholders to try to work out what the referendum means for the city—there are clearly many worried people. Will the Prime Minister assure us that the voice of cities on the international stage will not be dimmed during these negotiations?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly do everything I can to stand up for Bristol. I am interested that the Labour party's favourite Smiths song is "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out", because it actually involves a double suicide. I think the lyrics are, "If a double-decker bus crashes into us, There's no finer way than by your side." I think I am right in saying that. I am not sure that is wholly reassuring to Labour Front Benchers. In fact, I think the next verse is, "If a 10-ton truck crashes into us." They have tried resignations—they have tried one after the other—so they are obviously going to have to look for inspiration elsewhere.

Mr Speaker: I did not know the Prime Minister had quite such a compendious knowledge of modern music. I am extraordinarily impressed.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I am not going to ask the Prime Minister to remember any more lyrics. He will have heard right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House talk about the importance of manufacturing to the midlands. In Prime Minister's questions, he will also have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) refer to the comments of Sadiq Khan about London having a voice in the preparations for negotiations and in the negotiations themselves. I absolutely agree with that. However, will the Prime Minister say something about the mechanisms that he envisages to allow regions outside of London to have a say in the preparations for negotiations and in the negotiations themselves?

The Prime Minister: What I can say, and perhaps I will set it out in more detail for the House on a later occasion, is that we need to find mechanisms—we have some already, like the Joint Ministerial Council—for listening to the constituent parts of the United Kingdom to make sure that the voices of our nations and regions can be heard as we design this renegotiation. I absolutely commit to that.

Hate Crime

1.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): Hate crime of any kind, directed against any community, race or religion, has absolutely no place in our society. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told this House today, we are utterly committed to tackling hate crime, and we will provide extra funding in order to do so. We will also take steps to boost reporting of hate crime and to support victims, issue new Crown Prosecution Service guidance to prosecutors on racially aggravated crime, provide a new fund for protective security measures at potentially vulnerable institutions, and offer additional funding to community organisations so that they can tackle hate crime.

The scenes and behaviour we have seen in recent days, including offensive graffiti and abuse hurled at people because they are members of ethnic minorities or because of their nationality, are despicable and shameful. We must stand together against such hate crime and ensure that it is stamped out. Over the past week, there has been a 57% increase in reporting to the police online reporting portal, True Vision, compared with this time last month, with 85 reports made between Thursday 23 June to Sunday 26 June compared with 54 reports in the corresponding four days four weeks ago. However, I would urge caution in drawing conclusions from these figures as a guide to the trend, as they are a small snapshot of reports rather than definitive statistics.

Much of the reporting of these incidents has been through social media, including reports of xenophobic abuse of eastern Europeans in the UK, as well as attacks against members of the Muslim community. However, we have also seen messages of support and friendship on social media. I am sure the whole House will want to join me in commending those we have seen stand up for what is right and uphold the shared values that bring us together as a country, such as those who opposed the racist and hateful speech shown in the recent video taken on a tram in Manchester.

These recent events are shocking, but sadly this is not a new phenomenon. Statistics from the Tell MAMA report, published today, show that in 2015 there was a 326% increase on 2014 figures in street-based anti-Muslim incidents reported directly to Tell MAMA, such as verbal abuse in the street and women's veils being pulled away, with 437 such incidents reported.

Worryingly, the report also finds that 45% of online hate crime perpetrators are supportive of the far right. In recent days, we have seen far-right groups engaged in organised marches and demonstrations, sowing divisions and fear in our communities. We have also seen far-right groups broadcasting extreme racist and anti-Semitic ideology online, along with despicable hate speech posted online following the shocking death of our colleague Jo Cox. Her appalling death just under two weeks ago shocked and sickened people not only in communities up and down this country, but in many other countries around the world. As we heard in the many moving tributes paid to her in this House, her loss is keenly felt, and we will always remember that a husband is now without his loving wife and two young children will grow up without a mother.

[Karen Bradley]

The investigation of hate crimes is of course an operational matter for the police. I would urge anyone who has experienced hate crime to report it, whether directly to the police at a police station, by phoning the 101 hotline, or online through the True Vision website. In this country, we have some of the strongest legislation in the world to protect communities from hostility, violence, and bigotry. This includes specific offences for racially and religiously aggravated activity and offences of stirring up hatred on the grounds of race, religion, and sexual orientation. It is imperative that these laws are rigorously enforced.

The national police lead for hate crime, Assistant Chief Constable Mark Hamilton, has issued a statement confirming that police forces are working closely with their communities to maintain unity and prevent any hate crime or abuse. Police forces will respond robustly to any incidents, and victims can be reassured that their concerns about hate crime will be taken seriously by the police and courts. Any decisions regarding resourcing of front-line policing are a matter for chief constables in conjunction with their police and crime commissioner.

Since coming to office, the Government have worked with the police to improve our collective response to hate crime. The Home Secretary has asked the police to ensure that the recording of religious-based hate crime now includes the faith of the victim—a measure that came into effect this April. We have also established joint training between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to improve the way the police identify and investigate hate crime. Alongside this training, the College of Policing, as the professional body for policing, has published national strategy and operational guidance in this area to ensure that policing deals with hate crime effectively.

But we need to do more to understand the hate crime we are seeing and to tackle it. That is why we will be publishing a new hate crime action plan covering all forms of hate crime, including xenophobic attacks. We have developed the plan in partnership with communities and with Departments across Government. It will include measures to increase the reporting of hate incidents and crimes, including working with communities and police to develop third-party reporting centres. It will work to prevent hate crimes on transport, and to tackle attacks against Muslim women, which we recognise is an area of great concern to the community. The action plan will also provide stronger support for victims, helping to put a stop to this pernicious behaviour.

We appreciate that places of worship are feeling particularly vulnerable at this time. That is why we have established funding for the security of places of worship, as announced by the Prime Minister last October. This will enable places of worship to bid for money to fund additional security measures such as CCTV cameras or fencing. We have also been working with communities to encourage them to come forward to report such crimes, and to give them the confidence that those crimes will be taken seriously by the police and courts. My noble Friends Lord Ahmad and Baroness Williams have today visited the Polish cultural centre in Hammersmith, which was a victim of disgusting graffiti, to express their support. We are working closely with organisations such as Tell MAMA and the Community

Security Trust to monitor hate crime incidents and with the police national community tensions team to keep community tensions under review.

The Government are clear that hate crime of any kind must be taken very seriously indeed. Our country is thriving, liberal and modern precisely because of the rich co-existence of people of different backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities, and we must treasure and strive to protect that rich co-existence. We must work together to protect that diversity, defeat hate crime and uphold the values that underpin the British way of life, and we must ensure that all those who seek to spread hatred and division in our communities are dealt with robustly by the police and the courts. I commend this statement to the House.

2 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): May I send our sincere condolences to the victims of yesterday's appalling attack in Istanbul, and send an uncompromising message to the terrorists that they will never prevail?

I congratulate the Minister on her excellent statement to the House. Any referendum has the potential to create division in society, and this one was no different. We have probably all felt the rising tension on the streets of our constituencies in recent weeks. In the aftermath, it is incumbent on any elected representative to do three things: first, to respect the decision of the people; secondly, to work to heal these divisions; and, thirdly, to take on directly and defeat the small minority of people who seek to use these moments to peddle hatred and violence. That is what the whole House together should resolve to do today.

Since last Thursday, there are reports of a fivefold increase in race hate comment on social media channels. The 57% increase in reported hate crimes, which the Minister mentioned, comes on top of an already rising tide of hate crime in England and Wales. Last year, the police recorded over 50,000 individual hate crimes, most of them racially motivated, which was an 18% rise on the previous year.

As the Minister said, perhaps the most disturbing reports are those of attacks on individuals and specific communities in recent days. In Huntingdon, cards have been distributed outside homes and primary schools, saying "No more Polish vermin". In Hammersmith, a Polish community centre was daubed with racist graffiti. On Monday, *The Guardian* reported that a Muslim schoolgirl was cornered by a group of people who told her:

"Get out, we voted leave".

There have been reports of more incidents in Leicester today, which my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) mentioned. Yesterday in Manchester, footage emerged of a US army veteran and university lecturer being told to "go back to Africa" by three youths on a tram. As the Minister said, there have been attacks on Muslim women, and even reports of women speaking on mobile phones in a foreign language being screamed at in the streets.

What is happening to the Britain we have known? This is not taking our country back, but turning Britain into a place we have never ever been. By its very nature, hate crime is a rejection of the British values that have always bound us together. Non-British nationals living

in Britain today will feel worried about their safety and will be in need of reassurance. I hope the Minister will be able to provide even more reassurance in her response to my questions.

I welcome the Minister's promise of a new hate crime action plan. Will she tell the House when the plan will be published, because it is urgently needed? People in need of reassurance want it to be given today, so will she confirm what extra steps are being taken to monitor reports of hate crime across the country and what immediate advice the Home Office is giving to the police on tackling such incidents?

Secondly, it is crucial people know how to report hate crime. The True Vision website the Minister mentioned is very welcome, but I guess it is not widely known. What action will she take to increase awareness of it, and is there a case for national advertising to promote it?

Thirdly, confidence to report hate crime will increase only if people believe their reports will be taken seriously. There is a feeling that such reports are not always taken seriously. I hear what the Minister says about the new CPS advice. Will she assure the House that it will encourage police and prosecutors to follow up every single report of hate crime, prosecute wherever possible and make sure perpetrators face the full force of the law? To provide further reassurance at this difficult time, will Ministers provide more reassurance to people about their immigration status in this country during the renegotiations with the European Union? In doing so, will they also inform the wider public about the issue and prevent some of the more ignorant comments from being made to people in the street?

Finally, is there not now a case for a much more proactive strategy to tackle far right extremism? Racist activity and violence have been on the rise for some time, as HOPE not hate has warned. Is it not time to take its warnings much more seriously? Will the Minister tell the House whether the security services are devoting sufficient resources and attention to this growing threat, and will she ask them to review it?

It is only 10 days ago since we lost our wonderful friend and colleague Jo Cox. As the dust settles on this referendum, we need to continue to have the words of her husband Brendan at the front of our minds:

"Hate doesn't have a creed, race or religion, it is poisonous."

Does the Minister not agree that 99% of the British public who voted to leave did not vote for an intolerant, xenophobic or racist Britain? Do not both sides of the referendum campaign now need to unite to make sure Britain remains the open and welcoming place we know and love?

Karen Bradley: I join the right hon. Gentleman in condemning the attacks in Turkey yesterday. I agree with his first three points: we do and must all respect the decision that was taken by the country last week; we now need to heal those divisions; and we must take on the minority—it is a very small minority of people—that is perpetrating this evil violence. They are committing a crime, and I cannot repeat too many times, nor can any of us in the House, that this crime needs to be reported and action will be taken.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the reports we have heard. I have heard anecdotal reports of comments made against members of the long-standing Polish community in my constituency. Such comments are

absolutely despicable and cannot in any way be accepted. I repeat that those crimes must be reported, because we cannot tackle this crime if we do not know its scale and where it is happening.

The right hon. Gentleman's response was excellent. He complimented me on my statement, and I want to return the compliment. He asked some specific questions—I scribbled them down—and I will try to address as many of them as I can. He asked when we will issue the new hate crime action plan. It will be issued shortly, but we want to get it right, as I hope he will understand.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the reporting of such crimes. The increase in the reporting of and the convictions for these crimes is very welcome, but we know that they are not all being reported. I have already made this point, but I want to reiterate that we need these crimes to be reported. We welcome the increase in reporting, but we need more to be reported. He is right that every single report should be investigated and taken seriously.

I want to confirm that there is no change to the immigration status of anybody in the United Kingdom or any UK national living abroad. The right hon. Gentleman talked about the far right. Our work on hate crime is about all its forms, including hate crime perpetrated by the far right. There may have been comments about "taking back control" and "taking back our country", but I do not want to take back a country that accepts this kind of crime. That is not the sort of country of which I want to be a part. I want to add a comment about our colleague Jo Cox: she said we have more in common, and we most certainly do.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The recent events are sickening, and it is absolutely right that we should condemn them wholeheartedly. However, if we are to find a solution, those events must be seen as part of the much broader increase over the past year in the use of racist language and abusive behaviour, much of which has been targeted at Muslim people, particularly Muslim women. I welcome the Government's announcement of renewed action, and the Minister is doing an excellent job, working across Government, but does she agree that all of us in the Chamber must, as constituency Members of Parliament, take responsibility to call out racism when we see it, to challenge it wholeheartedly and to make sure that no racism is accepted in our communities? Will she do more to help the reporting of race crime through third-party organisations, so that we get a handle on the size of the problem in our constituencies and communities?

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend makes many important points that I agree with, and we must ensure increased reporting of such crimes. That is why we have insisted that, for religiously motivated hate crime, the religion of the victim must be recorded so that we have a proper picture of what is happening. We work closely with Tell MAMA, the Community Security Trust, and other organisations to ensure that we promote that.

The right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) asked about the True Vision website, and I wanted to confirm—I realise I did not answer this—that extra funding has been allocated in the hate crime action plan and it will be available for that website.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): May I associate myself with the comments of hon. Members across the House, and offer my sincere condolences to those affected by the tragic incident in Istanbul?

Reports of a huge increase in racist abuse since the EU referendum are concerning, abhorrent and unacceptable, and we have witnessed a 57% rise in xenophobic attacks in the past week. In the wake of the particularly vicious and anti-immigrant rhetoric of the EU referendum, it has been forgotten that those people are our friends and neighbours, and positive contributors to our society. Refugees are people who have come here simply to make better of their lives and those of their children. Depictions of “swarms” or “waves” of immigrants are dangerous, incorrect, and wrong. The SNP rejects the tone and rhetoric of the debate on immigration during the lead-up to the referendum. Instead, we believe that immigration is essential for the strength of our economy and our cultural fabric.

Tolerance, respect and inclusion are the values and principles that we must foster in a modern and inclusive society, and we are working towards encouraging those values in Scotland. Will the UK Government get a grip and show some leadership, follow the example of the First Minister of Scotland and the Mayor of London, and make a statement that speaks directly to citizens of other European countries who are living here, to tell them that they remain welcome, that the UK is their home, and that their contributions are valued?

Karen Bradley: I truly believe that the vast majority of people who voted last week, no matter which way they voted, did so for the right reasons, and I am sure that that majority will be horrified by the deeds of some who claim that they are acting in their name—they simply are not; it is abhorrent and despicable. The Government will do everything we can to ensure that hate crime reporting increases and that hate crimes are properly and appropriately investigated, so that victims get the support they need. The hon. Lady asked about people living in this country, and I will repeat my earlier point: there is no change to the immigration status of anybody in this country, and I for one welcome people who are here to contribute to and be part of our society, and who share my values and want to be part of this country.

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Before I became a Member of the House I was leader of Bradford Council, so I was familiar with walking the streets with councillors from other political parties, community leaders and the police, with no real certainty that my city would be there the following day. I never believed that I would receive a telephone call in Brentwood and Ongar from someone—a Pole, perhaps, or a Frenchman—who was frightened, and whose kids were being bullied at school. Unless we take action now, this will eat us alive from inside. We know from dealing with anti-Semitism and those who are against Muslims, that we need a proper working definition for and understanding of this issue. We have a good one for anti-Semitism that has been adopted by the police, and last month it was adopted by 32 countries as part of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. We must ensure that someone who goes to a police station will be met with

sympathy, understanding and—most importantly—that prosecutions take place. People must understand that, as the Minister rightly says, these actions are a crime.

Karen Bradley: As Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government my right hon. Friend did an enormous amount of work in this area and he speaks with great authority. He makes an incredibly important point, and I agree that we need prosecutions to increase. We started from a very low base of reporting, prosecuting, and successful convictions. We are doing well and improving, but there is still a long way to go.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I welcome the Minister’s statement and the measured way that she put forward her programme. That is the right approach to adopt. The Home Affairs Committee will meet today to consider some of those matters, and whether we can inquire into the activities of the far right. The Minister mentioned an increase in the number of people who have been reported, but how many have been arrested and charged? Is there consistency between police forces, because some will be more experienced than others, and what are we doing about internet companies and their failure to take down tweets that are racist or that encourage people to commit those crimes? They are simply not doing enough.

Karen Bradley: The Chair of the Home Affairs Committee asks detailed technical points, and it will be for police forces to gather information on some of those. If he will allow me, I will write to him with the specific details on some of those technical points. His point about internet companies is incredibly important. We have seen and worked with internet providers to combat indecent images of children online, and I pay tribute to them for the work that they have done and the progress made. However, companies and individuals simply have not yet done enough. We say that what is illegal offline is illegal online, but we need companies and businesses to take responsibility for the actions of some people whom they allow to appear anonymously and get away with saying things that are unacceptable.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): Like many Members I am so saddened by recent events. Derby is a wonderfully diverse city with a great richness from all its cultures. What assurances can the Minister give that that will be taken into account in order to protect those minorities and embrace those cultures?

Karen Bradley: I agree that Derby is a wonderfully diverse and great city. I do not live too far away from Derby, so I get the pleasure of visiting it, although not as frequently as I would like. We are working with communities on the point raised by my hon. Friend. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but we must work with local communities and police forces to ensure the right response.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Many Members will be aware that my constituency sits right next door to Batley and Spen. Yesterday, people in my constituency received a leaflet from the BNP that said that Jo Cox took misguided action by helping Muslims in the country who may now go on to join ISIS, alongside some other horrendous allegations. I have received a significant

number of communications from constituents. One seven-year-old Muslim girl and her family were told—I have removed the expletives for the purpose of reading it in the House—that last Friday was the “best day ever—go home all of you”, and I continue to hear about a number of similar incidents. Like many others, I am proud to be British, but I am also proud to be the daughter of a mother who is half-Polish. On Monday I asked the Prime Minister about establishing a cross-party commission to consider race hate crimes. Has any progress been made on that? The time to act is not tomorrow, next week or next month—it is now.

Karen Bradley: I am shocked by what the hon. Lady says and I am sure the whole House is shocked. That is utterly, utterly unacceptable. I would like to meet her, if she would allow, to discuss specific action to ensure such crimes are reported and action is taken against them.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Any racist attack on anyone from anywhere is an attack on all of us: on all that makes this country a great country and on our fundamental shared British values. Following on from the comments by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), what more can be done to ensure Facebook, Twitter and other social media play a large and active part? They are huge, capitalised international companies that spend lots of money on public relations, lobbying and corporate social responsibility. Their primary responsibility at this time is to tackle hate crime. They need to be part of the solution.

Karen Bradley: I agree with everything my hon. Friend has said.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I have over the years campaigned in different parts of the world against human rights abuses. We have been able to do that because Britain is seen across the globe as a tolerant liberal community that has always been prepared to protect all our peoples. Does the Minister share my horror that we should find ourselves in a position today where the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights feels it necessary to urge us to act on this matter? These people are eating away at the fabric of our community from the inside, but they also risk diminishing our standing on the world stage. That is why the Minister is right to act in the way she does, but Government alone cannot do this. She needs to work with local authorities, civic groups and voluntary organisations to ensure that we build the broadest possible coalition against hatred.

Karen Bradley: The right hon. Gentleman is right that this cannot be solved by Government alone or by legislation. This is something we all have to act on. The hate crime action plan we are working on is cross-Government, but it cuts across all sectors and all parts of society, including civil society, local government and other agencies.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): As a member of the Women and Equalities Committee, I welcome the comments by the Chair of that Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I also welcome

the Minister’s important statement. It is absolutely right that we do not allow this behaviour to be ignored. It is wrong, pure and simple. There are no excuses. Will the Minister confirm that anybody using the referendum as an excuse to commit hate crime will be made an example of, and that there will be no hiding spaces, whether online, in our schools, in our workplaces or around our religious places of worship?

Karen Bradley: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. There is no excuse at all for this behaviour. As I said earlier, I know the hard-working, loyal British people who voted in the referendum will want nothing to do with this behaviour and certainly do not want it to be used as an excuse for it.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): As you know, Mr Speaker, I tried twice to secure an urgent question on this matter, so I welcome the Minister’s statement today.

Does the Minister agree that the scenes of hatred and anger are the result of the racist, xenophobic and anti-immigration Brexit campaign, and of our print media, such as the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Sun*, which over the years have blamed migrant communities for all the problems that occur in our country? This level of hatred and nastiness towards immigrant communities has led to some of the things that are happening. What will the Minister do to address this type of press coverage? Some politicians also need to take responsibility, such as Mr Farage and the right hon. Members for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who in their campaign were absolutely disgraceful?

Mr Speaker: I greatly respect what the hon. Lady has said, so I hope she will not be affronted by this in any way. However, it is quite important for the future to bear in mind that we do not refer to unsuccessful urgent question applications on the Floor of the House. There are very good reasons for that. I absolutely understand the strength of feeling and considerable knowledge the hon. Lady brings to bear. As some colleagues perhaps might know—the Government are certainly aware of it—I did indicate to the Government that it would be helpful if there were to be a ministerial statement on this matter today. I hope the House feels that this is a very proper exchange in the circumstances.

Karen Bradley: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to deliver this statement. I think we all need to reflect on what happened during the referendum campaign. The result was decisive and we need to respect it, but we should all take a step back to look at what happened and how the campaign was conducted.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I commend in particular the final sentence of the Minister’s statement, when she stated that we must ensure that all those who seek to spread hatred and division are dealt with robustly by the police and the courts. I suggest to the Minister, using an example of hate crime recently prosecuted in my constituency, that mental health agencies also need to be involved for the period following prosecution if reoffending is not to occur. Does she agree that if those who made crass remarks during the referendum were

[*Huw Merriman*]

not aware that they could be flicking the switch of those who are dangerous and troubled, then they are more ignorant than I had initially taken them to be?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a very, very good point. He is right. I assure him that we work with mental health specialists and clinicians to ensure there is involvement at all stages. He is right that vulnerable people may misinterpret and misunderstand. We are only too aware of what the results of that can be.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): To deal with these horrific incidents, my colleagues in Birmingham and I are trying to co-ordinate efforts to get the leader of the council, the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable together to set up a gold command structure. Will the Minister consider issuing guidance to chief constables and PCCs, so we not only respond to these incidents but deal with these issues before they arise across our communities?

Karen Bradley: Decisions on operational policing are matters for chief constables working with police and crime commissioners, but the example the hon. Gentleman gives is a very good one. Others should look towards it.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I congratulate the Minister on not using the word “tolerance”. I have never thought on this issue that to just tolerate people goes far enough. We do not have a threshold with which we will put up. I thank her for not using that phrase and I encourage her not to have it in the hate crime action plan. On the scenes outside Parliament last night, there was only positive coverage by the BBC of what I believe to be hate-filled chants. That shows we have an awful long way to go. Many colleagues in the Labour party are receiving significant hate pressure, threats and intimidation because of internal party politics on their side, which shows that this is not just about the far right. There is a far left. This is not just about racism; there is anti-Semitism and myriad threats and dangers to the stability of what we believe to be culture and society in the United Kingdom.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman makes some very powerful points. I agree with much that has been said. He is right. I am no longer on Twitter because I decided that I just did not want to listen to this kind of nonsense. I will, however, use a spellcheck for the word “tolerate”.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I welcome the Minister’s statement. I come at this from the point of view of years of the disappointing correlation between those who report and those who receive conviction. I wonder whether the Minister can outline exactly what resources will be given to the Crown Prosecution Service. As it stands, there is no way that all the incidents we are talking about will ever even see the light of day under its current resources and structures. What support will be given to people so they can find their way through the legal systems? At the moment, we are at risk of opening an enormous door to an empty room.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady has experienced far more than her share of abuse, particularly online. She is a stalwart for standing up and being there, and for still being on Twitter—I am not quite sure why she is.

I spoke to my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General before I made this statement to ensure that he heard exactly that point: that the CPS needs to take this seriously and that we need to see prosecutions and convictions. It is very important that people are punished for those crimes.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I, too, welcome the Minister’s statement and her clear commitment to doing what she can to crack down on such appalling hate crime. She will be aware that a National Audit Office report showed that real-terms funding for individual police forces was reduced by an average of 18% from 2011 to 2015. That same report noted that the Department does not have good enough information to work out by how much it can reduce funding without degrading services. Does she know how many services to support victims of hate crime are at risk of being lost or have already been lost? What can she do to remedy that?

Karen Bradley: The prevalence of hate crime is not on an upward trend. According to the crime survey, prevalence is on a stable if not downward trend, depending on the type of hate crime, but we see more of certain types of hate crime and there is more reporting of it. The reporting of hate crime and prosecutions of hate crime is to be welcomed. We need to ensure that there is more reporting, because I am clear that there is still a very big gap between prevalence and reporting. The hate crime action plan has specific measures on victims, and I hope the hon. Lady comes back to that to discuss it when it is released.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): On Monday, an incendiary device was thrown into a halal butchers shop in Wednesbury Road, Pleck, in my constituency—there is a photograph in *The Guardian* today of the inside of the shop. Will the Minister confirm how much extra funding will be available for local police forces so that they can investigate and tackle such crimes?

Karen Bradley: That is another shocking example. I dread to think how many hon. Members know anecdotally, but not just anecdotally, of that type of incident. I hope it has been reported and I look forward to hearing from the hon. Lady about the outcome. Perhaps we can come back to funding and so on when the hate crime action plan has been published.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I was with North Wales police on nightshift last weekend. It was made evident to me that people from ethnic minorities—I emphasise that this is not anecdotal—are often afraid to report hate crime. I am sure we are united in praising the courage of victims and bystanders who call out racial hatred. I welcome the third-party reporting centres in the hate crime action plan. Where will they be and when will they be in place? Will they be accessible to all communities, because racism is a risk not to some of our society, but to society as a whole?

Karen Bradley: The various ways in which hate crime can be reported are available to all communities, but people can go to the True Vision site without fear—it is not walking into a police station and it is not making a phone call—and there will be additional funding for it.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): As someone who grew up experiencing considerable racism and Islamophobia, I am utterly shocked by what we have seen. My parents' generation are even more shocked and sickened, because they thought we had conquered that level of racism. Does the Minister agree that some of our national leaders have been utterly irresponsible in playing the race and anti-Muslim card? That has to stop, and we need cross-party agreements between our national political leaders that it will not happen in future. Politicians need to take responsibility where they have acted irresponsibly.

Even before the referendum in the run-up to the campaign, Britain First and other far right organisations targeted constituencies such as mine, mosques and other institutions in acts of provocation wilfully to cause disorder. There is a lack of resources for policing, and inept legal provision in tackling the hateful groups that are trying to stir up intolerance and violence in our communities. Will the Minister take action immediately? Will she insist that the Prime Minister leads the debate and ensures that we actually step up to the plate?

Karen Bradley: I agree with the hon. Lady—we all thought that hate crime was something we had left behind and it is shocking that that has proved not to be the case. I also agree with her that, as politicians, we have a responsibility to be measured and responsible in our language, in what we say and in the actions we take. We must never try to pit one race against another, one gender against another or one sexuality against another. That is totally and utterly irresponsible.

The hon. Lady asks about far right extremism in her constituency. Our counter-extremism strategy has specific measures to deal with extremism of all forms. People looked at the strategy and thought that it was perhaps just about Islamic extremism, but it is not—it is about all forms of extremism, including neo-Nazi and far right extremism. The new civil orders that we will consult on as part of our counter-extremism Bill will address part of that.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): My borough includes one of the greatest breadths of religious and ethnic diversity in the country, including one of the highest proportions of European residents. I am proud of the strength of our community and our institutions, but even in Westminster, we have had examples of abuse and harassment, and people are reporting their fears. We know from the Tell MAMA report that the Minister mentioned that 61% of victims of hate crime are women. Will the hate crime action plan include specific reference to how we can identify and support women who are targets of hate crime, and will it ensure that they are reporting all the incidents that are occurring to them?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady makes a good point. Yes, I can confirm that the hate crime action plan looks at all victims to ensure that there is specific support and measures in place for them.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I have spoken with the South Wales police and crime commissioner, Alun Michael, this morning about how we respond to the incidents that I regretfully spoke about in the Chamber the other day. Will the Minister

make it absolutely clear that there is no hierarchy of hate crime? Whether it is against Jews, Muslims, Hindus, gay, straight, men or women, and whether it comes from the far right or indeed from the far left, it is the same thing and can have the same consequences. We should not stand for it and we have to take action. Those who stir up, condone or encourage it, from wherever they come, need to take responsibility.

Karen Bradley: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): In Scotland, we have just come out of a fortnight celebrating the contribution of refugees to our society. It was a wonderful celebration that we can all be very proud of. Will the Minister join me in condemning those who fixed neo-Nazi, racist and homophobic stickers in Glasgow city centre, including to the statue of La Pasionaria, which commemorates the Scottish volunteers who died fighting fascism in the Spanish civil war?

Karen Bradley: I join the hon. Lady in condemning that behaviour.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Polish cultural centre in Hammersmith has received hundreds of supportive emails, cards and flowers following the obscene racist graffitiing of its premises last weekend. The children of nearby Brackenbury and John Betts primary schools turned up en masse at the centre to show their solidarity. That will not surprise the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is sitting next to the Minister, and who was their MP before I was. Will the Minister echo the message left by one of the children—"We love you! Yay Poles!"—and affirm that, for every bigot and racist, there is a legion of British people who welcome and embrace migrant communities?

Karen Bradley: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who makes a very good point. This feels like one of those occasions when we all agree, which is great, because we want to agree. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has mentioned to me that this may be the first time ever that he is full agreement with the hon. Gentleman.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Sadly, levels of hate crime have been growing for several years. It seems that for a very small minority of people on the fringes, aspects of the referendum campaign have legitimised some repugnant and atrocious views. Will the Minister say a bit more about what the Government are doing to offer confidence measures within communities feeling pretty bruised right now? It is important that we do build confidence among those people so that they understand that they play a vital role in British society.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: they all play a valuable role in British society. He also referred to a phenomenon we see online, where of course people can comment anonymously and where we have seen a socialising and normalising of behaviour that would never be acceptable in any other form. We need to fight back and make it clear that such behaviour is not normal and certainly should not be accepted.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I am pleased to hear the Minister recognise the importance of training and of a joint strategy between the CPS and the police. As a former special constable in the Metropolitan police, I have to say that my experience of training for hate crime was very poor. May I suggest she bring in an external organisation, such as HOPE not hate or Tell MAMA, to look at the training being delivered to the police and to investigate how seriously they are taking the matter internally?

Karen Bradley: I wonder whether the hon. Lady would be willing to meet me to discuss her personal experience, because I would like to hear about what is happening on the ground probably as much as she would like to tell me.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): Last weekend, my neighbour, a mum of two and a woman of Caribbean heritage, told me that she felt homeless following the referendum result last week. What specific resources will be available to the Metropolitan police to help them engage with communities experiencing a rise in hate crime? Does the Minister agree that we must all do absolutely everything we can to ensure that children in places such as Lewisham can grow up in a country that is respectful and inclusive?

Karen Bradley: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will write to her with the specifics about what is happening within the Metropolitan police. Clearly, there are many police forces and I do not want to provide information that is not strictly accurate and correct. I agree with her point, however. This is a great country—I am incredibly proud of being British—and it will continue to be, irrespective of the result of the referendum, and the country that I am part of is not a country that accepts this kind of behaviour.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for her statement and to colleagues for their remarks.

Point of Order

2.43 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Page 49 of “Erskine May” refers to the official Opposition as “the largest minority party which is prepared, in the event of the resignation of the Government, to assume office”.

The current official Opposition has lost two thirds of its shadow Cabinet. Their leader and what remains of the Front-Bench team no longer command the support of the overwhelming majority of their Back Benchers. They can now no longer provide shadow Ministers for large Departments of State. They are clearly in no shape to assume power or to meet the key responsibilities outlined in “Erskine May”. Given these obvious failings, what steps would now need to be taken to have the official Opposition replaced with one that can meet the responsibilities set out clearly in “Erskine May”?

Mr Speaker: I am familiar with “Erskine May”, as the hon. Gentleman would expect, and I am genuinely grateful to him for giving me notice of his point of order. I can confirm that the Labour party currently constitutes the official Opposition and that its leader is recognised by me, for statutory and parliamentary purposes, as the Leader of the Opposition. He will have noticed that I called the Leader of the Opposition earlier to ask a series of questions of the Prime Minister. He will also be aware that today we have Opposition business duly chosen by the Leader of the Opposition, as indicated on the Order Paper. I should perhaps add that in making these judgments and pronouncing in response to points of order, I do give, and have given, thought to the matter, and I have also benefited from expert advice. These matters are not broached lightly. I understand the vantage point from which he speaks, but he raised the question and I have given him the answer. We will leave it there for now.

BILLS PRESENTED

SEXUAL OFFENCES (PARDONS ETC) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

John Nicolson, supported by Amanda Solloway, Keir Starmer, Stewart Malcolm McDonald, Iain Stewart, Sarah Champion, Tommy Sheppard, Paula Sherriff, Nigel Huddleston, Stephen Twigg and Dr Philippa Whitford, presented a Bill to make provision for the pardoning, or otherwise setting aside, of cautions and convictions for specified sexual offences that have now been abolished; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 October, and to be printed (Bill 6).

HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Bob Blackman, supported by Mr Clive Betts, Helen Hayes, Mr Mark Prisk, Kevin Hollinrake, David Mackintosh, Alison Thewliss, Jim Shannon, Mary Robinson, Julian Knight, Mr David Burrowes and Liz Kendall, presented

a Bill to amend the Housing Act 1996 to make provision about measures for reducing homelessness; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 7).

NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE (WORKPLACE INTERNSHIPS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Alec Shelbrooke presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to apply the provisions of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 to workplace internships; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 November, and to be printed (Bill 8).

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Pat Glass presented a Bill to amend the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to make provision about the number and size of parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom; to specify how the size of a constituency is to be calculated; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 9).

AWARDS FOR VALOUR (PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Kelly Tolhurst, on behalf of Gareth Johnson, presented a Bill to prohibit the wearing or public display, by a person not entitled to do so, of medals or insignia awarded for valour, with the intent to deceive.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 10).

BENEFIT CLAIMANTS SANCTIONS (REQUIRED ASSESSMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mhairi Black, supported by Chris Law, Mr Dennis Skinner, Liz Saville Roberts, Caroline Lucas, Ian Blackford, Carolyn Harris, Angela Crawley and Andrew Percy, presented a Bill to require assessment of a benefit claimant's circumstances before the implementation of sanctions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 December, and to be printed (Bill 11).

PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (RATIFICATION OF CONVENTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dr Eilidh Whiteford, supported by Mrs Maria Miller, Jess Phillips, Gavin Newlands, Liz Saville Roberts, Fiona Mactaggart, Angela Crawley, Mr Alistair Carmichael, Ms Margaret Ritchie, Alison Thewliss and Lady Hermon, presented a Bill to require the United Kingdom to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention); and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 December, and to be printed (Bill 12).

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEBT (RESPITE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Kelly Tolhurst, supported by Mark Garnier, Amanda Milling, Craig Mackinlay, Victoria Borwick, Roger Mullin, Angela Crawley, Antoinette Sandbach, Yvonne Fovargue, Ian Paisley, Ben Howlett and Jo Churchill, presented a Bill to place a duty on lenders and creditors to provide periods of financial respite for families with children and young people in debt in certain circumstances; to place a duty on public authorities to provide access to related advice, guidance and support in those circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 13).

REGISTRATION OF MARRIAGE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Edward Argar, supported by Sir Simon Burns, Victoria Atkins, Simon Hoare, Seema Kennedy, Wes Streeting, Christina Rees, Jess Phillips, Stephen Doughty, Nigel Huddleston and Greg Mulholland, presented a Bill to make provision about the registration of marriages.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 October, and to be printed (Bill 14).

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

James Morris presented a Bill to make provision about the disposal of land included in a local authority's list of assets of community value; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 15).

DOUBLE TAXATION TREATIES (DEVELOPING COUNTRIES)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Roger Mullin, supported by Kirsty Blackman, Patrick Grady, Michelle Thomson, George Kerevan and Ian Blackford, presented a Bill to place a duty on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to align the outcomes of double taxation treaties with developing countries with the goal of the United Kingdom's overseas development aid programme for reducing poverty and to report to Parliament thereon; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 December, and to be printed (Bill 16).

FARRIERS (REGISTRATION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Byron Davies, supported by Chris Davies, Dr James Davies, Craig Williams and Mike Wood, presented a Bill to make provision about the constitution of the Farriers Registration Council and its committees.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 January, and to be printed (Bill 17).

PARKING PLACES (VARIATION OF CHARGES)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

David Tredinnick presented a Bill to make provision in relation to the procedure to be followed by local authorities when varying the charges to be paid in connection with the use of certain parking places.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 18).

DISABILITY EQUALITY TRAINING (TAXI AND PRIVATE
HIRE VEHICLE DRIVERS)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Andrew Gwynne, supported by Andrew Stephenson, Mrs Sharon Hodgson, Byron Davies, Norman Lamb, Lyn Brown, Mark Menzies, Barbara Keeley, Robert Ffello, Mims Davies, Helen Jones and Diana Johnson, presented a Bill to make the completion of disability equality training a requirement for the licensing of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers in England and Wales; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 19).

GANGMASTERS (LICENSING) AND LABOUR ABUSE
AUTHORITY

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Louise Haigh, supported by Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr Iain Wright, Chris White, James Cleverly, Paul Blomfield, Lisa Nandy, Will Quince, Greg Mulholland, Chris Stephens, Stella Creasy and Mr Dennis Skinner, presented Bill to amend the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 to apply its provisions to certain sectors including construction, care services, retail, cleaning, warehousing and the transportation of goods; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 November, and to be printed (Bill 20).

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT (NHS
PROTECTION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mrs Anne Main, on behalf of Mr Peter Lilley, presented a Bill to require the National Health Service to be exempted from the provisions of international trade and investment agreements; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 December, and to be printed (Bill 21).

KEW GARDENS (LEASES)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger presented a Bill to provide that the Secretary of State's powers in relation to the management of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, include the power to grant a lease in respect of land for a period of up to 150 years.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 18 November, and to be printed (Bill 22).

MERCHANT SHIPPING (HOMOSEXUAL CONDUCT)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

John Glen presented a Bill to repeal sections 146(4) and 147(3) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January, and to be printed (Bill 23).

COUNTER-TERRORISM AND SECURITY ACT 2015
(AMENDMENT)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Lucy Allan presented a Bill to repeal provisions in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 requiring teachers, carers and responsible adults to report signs of extremism or radicalisation amongst children in primary school, nursery school or other pre-school educational settings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 January, and to be printed (Bill 24).

CHILD POVERTY IN THE UK (TARGET FOR
REDUCTION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dan Jarvis presented a Bill to establish a target for the reduction of child poverty in the United Kingdom; to make provision about reporting against such a target; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February, and to be printed (Bill 25).

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY—1ST PART]

UK Economy

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): We now come to the Opposition day motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I call John McDonnell to move the motion.

2.51 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I—[*Interruption.*] Scottish National party Members should calm down.

I beg to move,

That this House recognises the risks posed to the UK economy following the decision to leave the European Union; notes with concern the loss of the UK's triple A credit rating, the potential output cut, potential job losses, risks to investment and the volatility in the equity and currency markets; and calls on the Government to bring forward measures to protect jobs and support businesses in the nations and regions in relation to the short, medium and long-term potential consequences of the referendum decision, and to address the current threats to community cohesion.

Let me welcome the Chancellor's presence in the Chamber. I have been critical of his non-attendance of recent debates. I have to say that this was one day on which I thought he might be too busy elsewhere, but I welcome him to the debate. I also commend his Financial Secretary who, in excruciating pain from a bad back, has dealt competently and courteously with the Finance Bill over the last few days. In our roles, sometimes we all have to watch our backs.

Although this is an Opposition day debate, this is, frankly, no time for partisanship and party political game playing when the country faces such serious challenges. I suggest that the tone of this debate should be one of honest critique, but constructive engagement. Yes, we have to be honest about our assessment of the economy, but we also have to be constructive in our questioning and our proposals for the future. The country will expect us all to work together—not uncritically but co-operatively in times of unprecedented political and economic turmoil.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks about doing things critically and uncritically. One criticism I have—it seems to me to be a fact—is that before the referendum, the Chancellor promised an emergency Budget, but he seems to have been bluffing on that, because there is not going to be an emergency Budget. He had already bluffed once, because I think he bluffed about the pound in Scotland. How would the hon. Gentleman respond to that?

John McDonnell: To be frank, we need to move on now. I expressed my concerns about some of the over-exaggerated claims at the beginning of the campaign that turned people off. We now know, however, that many of the claims made on both sides are unfortunately coming true.

The leave vote in last week's referendum has left us all with an immense series of tasks, and the economic situation is a major challenge for us all. Let me run through some of the headline items that we know about over these last few days: the UK's triple A credit rating has been lost; the pound fell to a 31-year low; sterling markets have been in turmoil, as have stock markets here and abroad; the FTSE 100 index registered the biggest single-day fall since the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008; employers, most notably in the financial services, are already looking to relocate jobs, with a quarter of all those employers saying that they have introduced a hiring freeze; and shares in UK banks have fallen dramatically. These are not comments, but realities, and this is just an outline of the situation that now obtains.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that the bond markets did the opposite of what the ratings agencies suggested? They said that the price of bonds should go down and the cost of state borrowing should go up, but I am very pleased to tell him that the opposite happened: bonds are at a new all-time high and, according to the market, we have record lows of borrowing costs. Does this not prove that the markets actually had a huge vote of confidence in respect of state debt and state creditworthiness?

John McDonnell: It proves the chaotic nature of the market at the moment.

Let me look ahead. Most major forecasters have revised their expectations of future growth sharply downwards. There is a major loss of capacity and the potential for permanent damage to the UK's growth prospects cannot be ruled out. We await an official assessment from the Office for Budget Responsibility, as the Chancellor announced in his statement on Monday morning. I think that an initial assessment should be given sooner rather than later, but ongoing close monitoring would be welcome, with regular reports to Parliament to ensure that that is happening. There is a prospect that the OBR will report at least a serious worsening in the public finances.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the Chancellor's statement a couple of days ago that taxes might have to go up and be followed by further cuts? Is not this a further infliction of austerity on the British people?

John McDonnell: I shall come on to that later in my speech. I want to deal with the implications of the Chancellor's statement on Monday for future Budgets, if I may. In a situation like this, it is essential to introduce some clarity. There is great uncertainty, both for those fearing for their jobs and those worried about the volatility of the financial markets over the last few days. It is up to us—I mean the whole House—to secure some clarity and a clear sense of direction in our debate.

Let me clarify why the referendum result has led to this situation. There were warnings that a vote to leave would produce this shock. Economic forecasting is, as we know, not an exact science, even at best, but every forecaster with any credibility pointed towards a significant negative shock from a leave vote. The main disagreements

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were about the size of that shock, and I have to say that the warnings should have been heeded. It was irresponsible of those campaigning for leave not just to gloss over them, but to make the claim that a leave vote would lead only to warm sunny uplands. The truth is that the shock is already significant and could rapidly worsen if action is not taken.

We welcome the Governor of the Bank of England's commitment to take steps to extend liquidity provision to banks if necessary, and to stand ready with further measures. We welcome the fact that the Chancellor has been in urgent consultation during the weekend with those in the financial services industry and our international partners. We will support measures to stabilise the markets and dampen volatility, but with the firm caveat that these measures—this was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham)—should not impose costs on households or small businesses. Despite his earlier statements, the Chancellor has ruled out his previous contractionary emergency Budget until the fiscal position is made clear, and this is to be strongly welcomed.

To move forward, we have to be honest in our assessment of the current situation if we are to ensure that the correct remedies are agreed for the future. We do not share the Chancellor's assessment, as he knows, of the broader economic picture. His claim that the roof was fixed while the sun was shining belies the reality. The leave vote is having a greater impact because the roof has not been fixed, as we saw in the Office for Budget Responsibility's assessment of the UK's fiscal position that was published alongside this year's Budget.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's approach to the debate. Employment rates in our country are now at a record high—in my constituency it is up 60% since 2010. Capital requirements for the banks are some 10 times what they were in the past six years and the budget deficit is down from 11% to 3% this year. I think that that was what the Chancellor was talking about when he referred to fixing the roof. What position does the hon. Gentleman think the UK economy would have been in now, after last week's vote, if we had not taken those measures?

John McDonnell: I remember the Chancellor promising that the deficit would have been eradicated last year. Although we welcome the jobs that the hon. Gentleman mentions, many of them are, unfortunately, insecure and poorly paid. However, we welcomed and supported the capital requirements relating to banks. I hope that the Conservatives can accept that balanced assessment.

At the centre of the OBR's pessimistic assessment was the stagnation of UK productivity. According to the latest available data, between 2007 and 2014—Members on both sides of the House have raised this point—productivity did not grow. That is the worst performance by any G7 economy, and it means that today, on average, every hour worked in the UK is a third less productive than in the United States, Germany or France. This productivity stagnation has happened on the present Chancellor's watch. It is clear that his long-term economic strategy has failed, as he has not secured the basis for

long-term growth. Can we at least agree that from now on that we need a comprehensive strategy to deal with the productivity crisis?

Over the past few years, growth has relied too much on two things. First, although the economy has produced a large number of jobs, they have been poorly paid and insecure. Secondly, growth is unfortunately becoming more and more dependent on a return to household borrowing. We have not yet hit the level of 2008, but the OBR forecasts an unprecedented five years of continual household deficits.

Alongside our deficit with the rest of the world, our current account deficit has widened to its highest level since the 18th century. At 7% of gross domestic product, it is the largest current account deficit in any major developed economy. To finance the gap, borrowing from the rest of the world and the sale of UK assets have reached record levels, alongside assets sales to the rest of the world involving a range of facilities, to some of which there have been significant objections in the House. Relative to GDP, the UK now has a larger overseas debt than any other major developed country. We have been able to finance the current account deficit, despite weak productivity growth, because of what Mark Carney described, in a recent lecture, as “the kindness of strangers”.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): Does the shadow Chancellor agree that the current account deficit is essentially being funded by foreign direct investment, which includes the purchase of assets in this country by Chinese organisations? How does that relate to Britain taking back control?

John McDonnell: Labour has consistently presented arguments in the House about the asset sales that have taken place. In the past, they have been described as selling the family silver, but in recent years we have been selling the floorboards and the fabric of the building itself.

Investors in the rest of the world have been willing to overlook some of the fundamentals of our economy in the belief that the country is politically stable, and has secure banks and a booming property market. Overseas investors have been willing to buy assets and lend money on a grand scale as a result. Owing to the leave vote, however, that “kindness of strangers” is now in short supply. Given the uncertainty over the UK's relationship with the rest of the world, the confidence of international investors in its position has been undermined.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome the hon. Gentleman's focus on this point. My biggest worry is that we are dependent on inward investment which, according to Fitch, may fall by 5% this year. Does he agree that whatever happens in the negotiation, the single most important message that must come out of it is that we are still an open economy, and will not resort to protectionism?

John McDonnell: I fully agree. I echo the Chancellor's statement on Monday that this country is open for business, and Members of all political parties must repeat it time and again to ensure that we retain the confidence of overseas investors as best we can.

We have to recognise that the confidence of international investors has been undermined by uncertainty over the UK's relationship with the rest of the world. It is regrettable that the current account deficit has not been addressed so far. To address it would have required a restructuring of our economy. We would have needed an industrial strategy to develop and support our key industries. The Government must now produce a comprehensive industrial strategy to support those industries and lay a path to future growth.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Given that uncertainty, does the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that the Speaker of the House of Representatives has today called for immediate talks between the United States and the UK about setting up a trade deal that will be in place for the US when we leave the EU? Does he also welcome the statements from the Indian Government, who want a trade deal between the UK and India to be arranged immediately so that we can ensure that there is no interruption to the UK economy?

John McDonnell: It must be recognised that the trading relationship with India, although growing, is still relatively small. I welcome the negotiations that are taking place, but we know from our experience of the timescale in which trade agreements have been secured over much of the past decade that the process is lengthy, and that when individual states negotiate on their own, they do not necessarily achieve the benefits that they would have secured within a trading bloc.

The simplest explanation for these decisive economic weaknesses is the poor state of investment in the UK. Admittedly, business investment was already in decline before the referendum, but it is undoubtedly falling still further, and, as the press has reported, the ongoing uncertainty alone is enough to deter investment. That fall in business investment is being worsened by the Government's plans to cut their own investment which, according to current projections, is set to fall by the end of the decade. Without sustained investment—private and Government investment—we shall not be able to address the economic decline that has blighted too much of our country.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): The hon. Gentleman talks about the need for an industrial strategy. The Government have set out important strategies for key industries such as life sciences, and, of course, for a northern powerhouse to help to rebalance the economy. Given the challenges that we face and the continuing need to rebalance the economy, will the Opposition now get behind the Government's plans and, in particular, support the northern powerhouse, about which they have been equivocal?

John McDonnell: We have welcomed initiatives to try to rebalance the economy; the problem has been the success rate. The investment pipeline that the Chancellor announced several years ago has been less than 20% successful. Five years on, we have seen only £1 billion of the £20 billion that was meant to come from pension funds. The Government announce well, but they do not implement very well. There is too much government by press release rather than by implementation.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: I will come back to the hon. Gentleman, but I must press on for a while.

It is important to recognise that economic decline and regional inequality, and the deep-rooted alienation and despair that they have produced, contributed to the fact that so many people voted to leave the EU. Some fear that a shock to business investment spending would help to push the entire economy into another recession. Again, I call for a fresh programme of Government investment to produce shovel-ready projects, especially in the areas that have been hardest hit by long-term economic decline.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): May I point out to the hon. Gentleman, in the spirit of the conversation that is taking place this afternoon, that there has been considerable investment in some northern cities, such as my city of Leeds? In the last month, Kirkstall Forge railway station opened in the constituency of his hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), and half a billion has been spent on other projects in the city. It is not all talk—I understand the politics of it—but I want the hon. Gentleman to understand that some of our great northern cities have benefited from real investment.

John McDonnell: We must not talk down some of the success that has been achieved so far, but, although it has dealt with regional economic problems, it has not been on a sufficient scale to rebalance the economy in the way that was promised. As a result, a disillusioned section of the electorate were willing to blame anyone, including migrants and including the EU, and accordingly voted to leave. People felt that communities had been left behind, and I believe that that is a consequence of the lack of investment in recent years.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a huge boost to the British economy if the £16 billion initiative for the expansion of Heathrow went ahead, and will he support my call for a free vote on the issue before the recess?

John McDonnell: I have to give my hon. Friend his due; he chances his arm. I am sure that there is a need for investment—selective investment—in aviation.

Kit Malthouse: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: We are short of time and a lot of Members wish to speak.

Whenever aviation expansion takes place, it will be judged on the criteria that the Labour party has set, which include the environmental impact and the impact on the wider economy. We await the proposals from the Government and we will then take our decision.

The referendum vote has forced a debate on the best course for our economy and for economic policy. It is unlikely that a simple return to business as usual will be possible or even desirable, but there are immediate steps that can be taken to calm market volatility and to limit the shock to demand. It is incumbent on the Government to take those necessary measures and Labour, in the

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national interest, will support measures intended to stabilise the economy when they protect households and businesses.

On monetary policy, of course authority rests with the Bank of England to intervene to preserve the stability of banks and the wider economy. Governor Mark Carney's Friday morning statement was important in helping to stabilise the immediate situation. However, some interventions by the Bank will require authorisation from the Government. To ensure the success of those interventions, it will be helpful if the House is kept as fully informed as practicable of those authorisations, with regular updates.

On fiscal policy, with the expected slump in demand, the Government's present fiscal charter is, to say the least, increasingly anachronistic. With the Chancellor having missed two of his three targets—on debt and on the welfare cap—he will now have to suspend the deficit target. The charter's restriction on investment spending in particular is impossible to defend. For the regions, a squeeze on Government investment could be especially damaging.

Last year—this was raised earlier at Question Time—over £10 billion was provided in regional development funding by the EU. That was concentrated on our most deprived regions and places that needed it the most. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that that essential funding will now be made good? What structures are being put in place to liaise with elected mayors, local government leaders and regional bodies to address the loss of EU funds?

The UK currently holds a 16% stake in the European Investment Bank, which last year disbursed a record £6 billion in investment for the UK. That includes £1 billion for social housing. What steps are the Government taking to maintain current programme funding? What plans do the Government have for the UK's stake in the European Investment Bank?

John Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John McDonnell: May I press on? I have taken a significant number of interventions and I am worried about time.

Significant uncertainties have been created for those trading with Europe, including manufacturers that are reliant on extended supply chains across the EU. What measures are the Government putting in place to support supply chains that are threatened by the severance of those ties and the falling value of the pound?

Exit from the EU threatens the UK's continued status as a global financial centre. A number of major banks have already put in place plans to move jobs from the UK. They are fearful of the loss of their European Union passport that allows them to win business across the EU. We need to know soon from the Government how they will ensure that those passport rights are retained. I hear that one French negotiating position is to offer EEA status with some controls on freedom of movement, but the loss of bank passporting rights. Clearly that is a move to encourage bank migration from London and it is unacceptable. The resignation of Lord Hill as Finance Commissioner means that the UK

currently has no voice at Commission level to argue the case for UK finance. What steps will the Government take to ensure that the voice of UK finance continues to be heard in Europe? May we propose to Government that, as a matter of urgency, they establish a working group to monitor the ongoing threat to the UK's financial stability, working with representatives from across the financial services industry?

It would be wrong not to mention the threats that have been made to community cohesion following the vote to leave. I was very concerned to hear about the attacks on the Polish community. Any such attacks must be condemned outright by the whole House. I have a Polish community in my constituency. The Polish War Memorial nearby at Northolt stands testimony to the sacrifices of Polish pilots during the second world war. I have attended many meetings at the Polish centre in Hammersmith, which was disgracefully attacked. I send my message of solidarity to that community and to anyone else suffering from the rise in racism. What mechanisms will the Government put in place with local government leaders and city mayors to protect these communities, to help to overcome these divisive actions and to resource the programmes that will be brought forward?

We will get through this period of uncertainty, as Britain has done many times in the past. There are real strengths in our economy, not least our talented and dedicated workforce. None the less, volatility continues and grave uncertainties remain about the UK's future relationship with our European partners and the wider world. The future direction of Government strategy is not yet determined, but Labour is prepared, in the national interest, to work with the Government and our parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House to ensure that the best interests of the British people are secured. I commend the motion to the House.

3.16 pm

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): I very much welcome this opportunity to update Parliament and the country on some of the economic challenges that we now face. I welcome the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) to her new position as shadow Chief Secretary. I will not welcome all the new members of the Labour Front Bench because it would be a bit like the presentation of the Bills that we just saw, but it is very good that the shadow Chancellor is still in place, and he has 80% of the support of the Conservative parliamentary party to remain there.

May I respond to this sober debate with a message of reassurance and realism? I say at the outset that because this is a challenging time and this is a good opportunity for the House to discuss these issues, we are not going to seek to divide the House on the motion today.

That message begins with the reality that I have never shied away from telling the country the truth, as I have seen it, about our economic challenges, and we do now face very significant economic challenges as a result of the referendum decision last week. I do not resile from any of the concerns that I pointed to before the referendum, but I want to provide reassurance that we are about as well placed as we could possibly be to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The shadow Chancellor was correct to

raise problems such as low productivity growth, which bedevil many western economies, but the British economy has been the strongest advanced economy in the world in recent years. We have the highest employment rate in our history. The capital requirements for our banks are 10 times higher than they were before the financial crisis. Inflation is low and stable, and real wages and household disposable incomes have been growing. These things did not happen by accident—they happened because over the last six years we took difficult, sometimes painful decisions in order to rebuild our economy, to strengthen our banks and to put our public finances in better order. We said we would fix the roof—and thank goodness we made the progress that we did.

While I personally gave everything to campaigning for a different outcome, we saw a clear result in the referendum. I accept that result and the Government accept that result. Now we need to implement that decision and deliver for the British people on the instructions they have given us.

John Redwood: As the 10-year cost of borrowing has fallen from 1.4% to under 1% and the rate for 30-year money is now under 2%—record lows—does that not mean that there will a windfall element from lower interest charges? Will the Government consider funding the debt longer at this advantageous time for borrowing?

Mr Osborne: My right hon. Friend is right to point to the fall in UK gilt yields, but there has been something of a flight to safety. In the last six years, we have made UK Government debt a safe haven in stormy waters, and on this side collectively we can take enormous pride in the fact that we have done that. It is very different of course from the situation six years ago when yields were increasing in the face of economic difficulties, whereas here they have come in.

In terms of the financing of the debt, I have already on a number of occasions over the last six years changed the skew of the Debt Management Office's debt plan and made sure we have more longer-dated debt than we would otherwise have had. One of the reasons why international investors and others have confidence in the UK gilt market is that we do not chop and change all the time every week, so while my right hon. Friend makes a very good point, I do not think we should immediately respond to the events of the last week by changing our financing remit. Indeed, the message we need to be sending very clearly is one of stability and reassurance. That brings me to the plan I believe we should now follow.

First, it involves ensuring financial stability, and that is precisely what we have been doing in the past few days. In the run-up to the referendum, the Treasury worked closely with the Bank of England and the Financial Conduct Authority to put in place robust contingency plans for the immediate impact of a leave vote. I met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss it on a number of occasions, and the Financial Policy Committee and the Monetary Policy Committee both had special meetings to discuss those contingency plans. The Prudential Regulation Authority—essentially, our bank regulator—worked systematically with each major financial institution to make sure they were financially sound and prepared for whatever the outcome of the referendum was going to be. The Bank of England

pre-announced additional liquidity auctions to support the banking sector. People will have seen this week from the result of those auctions that that liquidity has been provided. Over the last few days, we have been working closely alongside Finance Ministers and central bank governors across the G7 nations and the nations of the European Union to make sure that we are monitoring developments closely and are ready to respond. The president of the European Central Bank updated the European Council yesterday—the Prime Minister reported on that to the House earlier—but it has to be said that the update was not particularly rosy. Let us be clear: these contingency plans were designed to prevent disorder in markets; they were not designed to stop markets adjusting to the new economic reality.

I can reassure the House today that our major banks are resilient. Capital and liquidity remain strong, and this morning we have seen greater stability in the major banks' share prices, and the currency markets are continuing to function effectively. But there have been significant adjustments, and we have to be realistic about the impact of the referendum on the financial markets.

George Kerevan: The resilience and stability of our banks is to be welcomed, but it is clearly at the price of pumping so much central bank money into the system that bank share prices are falling, and the future commercial prospects for our banking system have been undermined. The system is not as stable as the Chancellor is telling us.

Mr Osborne: The stability of our financial institutions is there for people to see. It has been assured by our regulators. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the market is making new assessments about the future earnings of banks, yes, that is so, and it is quite striking that it is banks that face the UK economy that have seen the sharp falls in their share prices, not banks that face the European and international economy. We have to be realistic: markets—free markets—are going to make those kinds of adjustments. We have seen those—the shadow Chancellor noted them—but it is striking that there has been the largest one-day fall against the dollar on record for our pound sterling. Equity markets, particularly the FTSE 250—which largely comprises companies that, again, face the UK domestic market—fell by 14%, and they are now 9% below their level. The particular sectors that have been affected are British retail banking, house building and short-haul airlines, some of which have seen their share price fall by more than 40%.

Kit Malthouse: Notwithstanding what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said, will he acknowledge the benefits of a weaker exchange rate? For a country that is running a large trade deficit, having a significantly weaker exchange rate will make a large difference, particularly to exporters, and it means that we are more likely now to avoid deflation in the economy, which not a few months ago people were forecasting was likely to hit us.

Mr Osborne: I agree with my hon. Friend that a free-floating currency is a shock-absorber that we have the benefit of. We do not have a fixed exchange rate, and

[Mr Osborne]

of course we are not part of a single currency, so the currency can take some of the strain, and that is reflected in the currency market.

The only thing I would caution my hon. Friend on is this: in 2008 we saw a sharp fall in sterling, and that was sustained, but it did not lead to the boost in exports that people expected at that point. That was partly because other markets, including European markets, were depressed, but, as we came to discover, it was also the case that integrated supply chains these days are more international. For example, car exporters might benefit from the fall in the currency in terms of the price they sell their cars for, but they will have imported parts and will have seen import prices go up. Unfortunately retailers are also warning us that prices in supermarkets, for example, may well now rise because of the fall in the currency, but we will wait and see.

Of course the other challenge we face is from the credit rating agencies—not that everything they say is gospel. Unfortunately, we lost our triple-A rating with Standard & Poor's and were downgraded two notches a few days ago.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Are we still using quantitative easing, and if not, when did that end?

Mr Osborne: The shadow Chancellor raised questions about monetary policy. Obviously the Bank of England is independent. The MPC set out the challenging trade-off it might face between a fall in output and a rise in inflation. We will have to wait and see how MPC responds to the judgment it has to make.

The central bank has not been undertaking quantitative easing, but the arrangements put in place by my predecessor Alistair Darling—essentially, the authorisation arrangements—remain in place. In other words, the MPC will be able to use any of the monetary policy instruments in its toolkit, but that is entirely a judgment for it. We will wait to see how it responds to the challenges it faces.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): This June, sadly, the sun is not shining, and like many MPs I have been contacted by constituents who may wish to delve into a second referendum. Democracy gives us a say, not necessarily our way. Does the Chancellor believe that even looking at a second referendum would do massive damage to our improved finances and delay and disrupt further infrastructure projects which are so vital to our communities?

Mr Osborne: I fought passionately to remain in the European Union, not because I was a massive fan of the EU with all its problems but because I thought it was better for Britain to be in the EU than outside it, but I absolutely accept the result of the referendum. I do not think it is credible, in the days after the result, to say, "The people got it wrong. We need to elect a new people." In our democracy, we need to respect the result that the British people have given us and, as representatives of the population in this Parliament, our obligation is now to get on and deliver what they have asked us to deliver, to the best of our ability.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The Chancellor is being very candid in his remarks this

afternoon. He has referred to the situation with the banks, and I have noticed that Goldman Sachs has downgraded its profit forecast for the UK banking sector by €10 billion over the next two years. Will he reflect on what that means for the UK economy and for tax receipts? Will he also reflect on the importance that is placed on getting out of our banking holdings over time? Does he not think that this is a self-induced problem that has been created by the Conservative Government's manifesto commitments? Does he not regret the fact that it is the Conservative party, through its internal dispute, that has got us into this terrible mess in the first place?

Mr Osborne: The short answer to that is: no I do not. I do not think that it is wrong, in a democracy, to ask the people about very big constitutional issues. In all the years that I have been a Member of Parliament—and, indeed, before that—the question of our relationship with the EU has hung over our political system and our body politic. I am surprised to hear a Scottish nationalist raise doubts about the effectiveness of referendums, but there we are.

We have well thought-through contingency plans and they remain in place in case financial conditions should deteriorate. The market should not doubt our resolve. We are absolutely determined that, unlike eight years ago, Britain's financial system will help our country to deal with any shocks and dampen them, rather than contributing to those shocks or making them worse. As the shadow Chancellor requested earlier, I shall of course keep the House informed. However, we have to accept that some investment and hiring decisions will continue to be paused as firms adjust to the uncertainty caused by the referendum. There is already survey evidence and anecdotal evidence of this. So the second part of our plan—the first part involves financial stability—has to be to resolve that uncertainty as quickly as is practical in a democratic system.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): European Union funds have helped economic development in my constituency. What measures is the Chancellor going to take to ensure that areas such as south Wales continue to receive support for infrastructure and to help to boost jobs in our valleys?

Mr Osborne: We are going to face some big questions about providing support to the institutions, regions and sectors that have been receiving European Union assistance, most notably the regional support that has been provided to areas such as south Wales, the ongoing support that the EU provides for research in our universities and the support for our farming community. We in the House of Commons are going to have to address all those issues in the coming months and possibly beyond. However, at the moment we remain a member of the European Union—I shall talk about the procedure for our departure in a moment—and the European funding and grants will continue to be made. We are looking specifically at areas where questions have been asked about long-term uncertainty in relation to particular projects, and I will keep the House updated. This is a challenging question, which we have to answer, and we are looking at it very intensively now. But at the moment nothing has changed and we remain a member of the European Union.

That brings me back to the question of trying to resolve as quickly as is practical the uncertainty about the new relationship we are seeking with the European Union and our European neighbours. We need a bit of realism and we need to offer reassurance. It is apparent that the uncertainty will be fully resolved only when we as a country have negotiated an agreement with our European partners on the relationship we now want to have with them. We know what the broad options are. The Government spelled them out and set out the different relationship models over the past few months in the Treasury and Cabinet Office papers that were produced in advance of the referendum. We could join the European economic area, like Norway; we could forge a new negotiated bilateral agreement with the EU, like Canada; we could adopt the Swiss model; or we could rely on World Trade Organisation rules.

As the Prime Minister set out at this Dispatch Box, the Government have established a new unit at the heart of Government made up of some of the best civil servants, reporting to the Cabinet, that will help us as we make that decision. I stress, however, that Members of Parliament and other organisations can feed in to the work that is taking place, so that we have the fullest possible information on the decision that we will have to take collectively as a Parliament on our new relationship with Europe.

My view is clear that we should move towards an arrangement that provides us with the closest possible economic ties with our European neighbours. Close to half of our exports go to the EU and millions of jobs are supported by our trade with the EU. Leading industries, such as car manufacturing, farming and our services industry, are reliant on that relationship, and we should be moving towards an arrangement under which—if we reach it and can negotiate it—the trade of both goods and services, including financial services, is as free as possible. In the meantime, returning to a point I made earlier, UK firms continue to have exactly the same status as any other EU firm. Business continues in the City and elsewhere, including for euro-denominated trading in our financial markets.

However, I am a realist—we have to be realistic about this—and we must acknowledge that we cannot have all the benefits of the EU without accepting any of the costs and obligations. It will be for this Parliament to decide what the accommodations and compromises should be.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): So much of the leave argument was predicated on shifting our focus to the world beyond Europe. If the Chancellor agrees with that assumption, we need to ensure that we can get there. Given that Heathrow expansion would deliver a £16 billion privately financed shot in the arm, up to £211 billion of economic growth—predominantly outside the south-east—180,000 jobs and 10,000 apprenticeships, I urge the Chancellor to commit to giving Government Members a free vote safe in the knowledge that there will be sufficient votes on the Opposition Benches, irrespective of whipping arrangements, to deliver that result.

Mr Osborne: We await the work that is being done on air quality around the airport. When we discussed the matter some months ago, people were a bit dismissive,

but to be fair to the new Mayor of London, he raised air quality issues during the London mayoral contest that resonated with voters' concerns—the hon. Gentleman would know that as a London MP. Before Parliament makes a decision, it is important that we have addressed the issues, concerns and questions about air quality. It will be nothing new if I tell the House that the decision will be controversial when we come to take it, so it is important that no one cries foul over the process. We can then make a decision on the merits of the case. People know my view, which is that we need additional runway capacity in the south-east of England, but where that capacity should come from must be a matter first for the Government and then for Parliament.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr Osborne: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman and then make some progress.

Mr Dodds: As with so many issues, Northern Ireland has a direct interest in runway capacity in the south-east, and we want a decision on the issue raised by the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) as quickly as possible as well. Can the Chancellor assure me that the Treasury is talking to the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive so that Northern Ireland's interests and concerns are very much in the thinking of Her Majesty's Government?

Mr Osborne: That dialogue is taking place and I assure the right hon. Gentleman that it will continue to take place. We were on different sides of the argument when it came to the referendum, but he shares my view that Britain needs to be open to the world and trading with the world. That means having sufficient airport capacity to fly to the world and to allow the world to fly to us. I am sure that that view is universally accepted across the House, but we will find out.

The key challenge, to which I think we can rise, is working out through collective discussion and decision making the new relationship that we should seek with the European Union. Until we have agreed on an approach, we should not trigger article 50 and begin the process of exiting the European Union. As the Prime Minister said, “triggering article 50” is rightly a decision for the new Prime Minister and the new Government, and it is a decision that we will take at the right time, when we are ready and not before.

The economic uncertainty will have an impact on our public finances that is likely to be both cyclical and structural. The Office for Budget Responsibility will make its assessment of the economy this autumn—let me tell the shadow Chancellor that, to get the best possible forecast from the OBR, we have to wait a little for the dust to settle—and it will be for the new Government under a new Prime Minister to take the decisions about the adjustments that will be required to meet the new fiscal realities, but we should never forget that fiscal stability is the absolute bedrock of economic security. We must be realistic, but I want to reassure the House that our economy remains competitive and open for

[Mr Osborne]

business—we have the lowest corporate taxes in the G20, more people in work than ever before thanks to our welfare reforms, and our science and our universities are world class.

Let me pick up on a point that has been made throughout the debate in the country and in Parliament. We need to go on forging our links with key partners beyond Europe, such as with China and India. I never thought that we had to choose between Europe and forging new links with the rest of the world. Germany exports three times as much as we do to China, so it is clearly possible to do that within the European Union, but outside the European Union those links are more important than ever before.

I will travel to China next month as part of the G20 Finance Ministers meeting there. To pick up on a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) made in an intervention, I have spoken to the US Treasury Secretary and the Speaker of Congress in the past couple of days about strengthening our ties with our great ally, America.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that it is about not just new trade deals but the supply chains that he mentioned earlier and building those customer relationships over many decades, as we have with the European Union? We simply cannot take our trade from Europe one day and move it to the US or China the next.

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is completely right, but we should not have to choose between the two. It is perfectly possible to do a lot more business with India, America and China while also doing a lot of business with Europe. That would be a key part of Britain's economic strength in the future. As I have said, in respecting the decision of the British people to leave the EU, we should now be seeking the closest possible terms of trade with the EU not just in goods but in services, including financial services.

The third and final part of the plan that we need to pursue was touched on by the shadow Chancellor—we think of it as a social issue, but it has economic ramifications as well—and that is that we must unite across the political spectrum and offer a very loud and clear message to this country that we have no tolerance of intolerance, hatred and bigotry. We need to send a message of reassurance to all the communities in our very successful, multi-faith, multi-race democracy that we will not tolerate those who want to divide us.

The reports of the graffiti on the Polish community centre in Hammersmith, of the people who have lived in this country for decades being told, “We voted you out”; and of the figures that have shown a big increase in the report of hate crimes all point to incidences that are appalling and unacceptable. It is not the British way. We should unite in condemning it. The Prime Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), set out some of the additional steps that we are taking to combat this intolerance, but in this economic debate I say to business leaders that they should also play their part and make it clear that intimidating bullying of any kind in the workplace

based on nationality or race should be identified and punished. Britain is an open, tolerant and diverse society where people of all faiths and none and of all nationalities and ways of life are welcome, as they have helped to build this successful country.

Therefore, there are three key things that we need to do now: go on ensuring financial stability; ensure that we resolve the economic uncertainty by working together to determine the model for our new relationship with the EU; and send out a strong message that we will not tolerate intolerance. If we deliver on those three parts of the plan, we will be doing the best we can to make this decision work for Britain and to fulfil the instructions of the British people. I must be straight with people in this country: the weeks and months ahead will not be easy, but, as has always been the case in our history, it is during the moments of greatest challenge that our country must demonstrate its greatest resolve, and it often does.

3.44 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the shadow Chancellor and the Chancellor for their tone so far. We will support any necessary and constructive measures to bring back confidence and stability, particularly to the markets. The shadow Chancellor was right to say that we cannot hide and that we must have a robust critique of what the referendum outcome may mean. Unusually, the vast majority of the criticism that I do make today will be directed not at the Chancellor, but at those who led the Brexit campaign, who once again since that referendum are absent from this Chamber.

We will support the motion before us, although that is rather superfluous, given that there will now be no vote. We agree with much of it, particularly in respect of the decision to rip Scotland and the UK out of the EU and the huge and real risks that that poses to the economy, to jobs and to prosperity. Those risks were brought about in part by the decision to hold the referendum, but much more importantly by the failure of those advocating Brexit to have any plan if they won. It is worth noting that when we had our first independence referendum, it was based on a 650-page White Paper, a detailed plan and a clear prospectus for what would happen. What the Brexit campaign leaders—the Lord Chancellor and the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—had prepared was a few scribbled notes on the back of Nigel Farage's fag packet. It really was not good enough.

James Cartlidge: The hon. Gentleman refers to the first referendum. He will recall that the big issue there was the currency that would be used by an independent Scotland. In the Bill being drafted, is it the assumption that Scotland would no longer use the pound and would have an alternative currency?

Stewart Hosie: We had better fix the problems caused by the Brexit decision and then, if we find ourselves unable to secure our place in the EU by any other means, the hon. Gentleman will be more than welcome to scrutinise whatever plans are brought forward.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes an eloquent point, but he is totally wrong. I have to set fire to his straw man. A general

election, where a policy programme is presented and a party is ready to take over with a fixed platform of policy, is different, as he knows, from a referendum. The referendum result is an instruction to the Government to deliver, and they should have been ready to take that instruction.

Stewart Hosie: We are now seeing the consequence of the lack of plan. The expectation that those who campaigned to stay in should be preparing the work for those who wanted to leave is preposterous in the extreme.

We back the motion also because the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. We have shown ourselves to be a modern, outward-looking and inclusive country, and I share the view of others. We look on in horror as community cohesion is under threat as the racists and the bigots think the result of the referendum is a green light to abuse anyone from any other background. It is not, and we unreservedly condemn that racism and that bigotry.

Let us understand what happened in Scotland on the day of the referendum. The people there made it clear that they see their future as part of the EU: 62% of the Scottish people—a nation—voted to stay in the EU, compared with 48.1% across the UK, and 51.9% across the UK voted to leave; only 38% in Scotland chose to do that. Over 1.5 million people voted remain. Each and every one of the 32 council areas voted to remain—the only nation in the UK with a clean sweep of local authorities voting to stay in. At a little more than 67%, the turnout was the second highest of any referendum held in Scotland, even higher than the 1997 referendum on devolution. So while I understand what the Chancellor said about respecting the will of the UK people, I hope that the same will apply to respecting the will of the Scottish nation, who have clearly said that they intend to stay in.

Alec Shelbrooke *rose*—

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) *rose*—

Stewart Hosie: I will give way one more time.

Alec Shelbrooke: Given the clear decision that Scotland made, if it came to a vote on the Floor of the House on whether to implement article 50, would the SNP say no?

Stewart Hosie: The Government have made it clear that it will be for the next Government to bring forward such a vote. I think we have got until September or October at the earliest before we need to decide whether to do that.

We are disappointed that the UK voted to leave. That is not what we wanted. The priority must be, as others have said, to stabilise markets and to protect the economy. That is why our First Minister is in Brussels today, and it is why she has said that our Government are exploring each and every potential avenue to maintain Scotland's EU status, because that is where the instability is coming from.

Let me say one more thing about the previous referendum, and then I will move on to the economic consequences. It is democratically unacceptable for Scotland to be removed from the EU against its will. The irony is that we were told time after time before our independence

referendum that the threat to our position in the EU came from independence. Alistair Darling told us that in November 2012. Ruth Davidson told us that on 2 September 2014:

“It is disingenuous...to say that no means out and yes means in, when actually the opposite is true. No means we stay in,”

she said. Even the Better Together campaign tweeted the same day:

“What is process for removing our EU citizenship? Voting yes.”

How wrong, and how misleading that all was. Our place in the EU was never under threat from independence; it was, and it is now, very much in jeopardy only because of the UK decision to leave.

I will move on from that. Now is the time for calm, measured reflection, with our First Minister and Government doing everything they can, including talking directly to Brussels today, to secure our European status and to provide as much reassurance and certainty as we can over the next days and weeks. It is the time for being reassuring, as we all should and must, to individuals from the EU and further afield, because we believe—as most in this House believe—that they remain welcome and appreciated here.

We must also do all we can to help to restore financial stability, to reassure the business community and to emphasise that, of now, we remain members of the EU and we are firmly in the EU; that trade and business should continue; and that we should all do everything we can to say to those planning inward investment, “This remains a place where one should invest one's capital with confidence.”

Why is this important? Because the FTSE 100 dropped by 8.4% on the morning of 24 June. On 27 June the downward trend continued; by late afternoon, the FTSE was down another 150 points, or 2.5%. Friday morning's sudden drop meant that £137 billion was wiped off UK blue chip stocks within minutes of the markets opening. As the Chancellor said earlier, banks, house builders and others were the biggest fallers. Taylor Wimpey was down 42%, Persimmon 40% and RBS 34%. During Monday morning, trading in the shares of Barclays and RBS was briefly halted as the sharp losses exceeded 10% of their stock value. After trading was restarted, the share price of both companies continued to fall and move wildly because of the uncertainty. The FTSE 250 index, which has more businesses in it that are exposed to the domestic market, fell even further—by 7.2%, or 1,200 points. Those were extraordinary falls and changes in both markets. PageGroup led the fall; there was a 58% slump in the value of its stock.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): While I recognise the figures the hon. Gentleman quotes, does he accept that the FTSE 100 is currently trading at around 6,300, which is higher than it has been for most of the last six months?

Stewart Hosie: Indeed, and I will come to the recovery in certain areas in just a moment. The hon. Gentleman is right when it comes to the FTSE 100, but let me come to all the other indices, and we will see the real damage and how it is being played out.

It was not simply stock prices that were affected. Sterling was trading at \$1.45 before the referendum. The value of the pound against the dollar fell by almost

[*Stewart Hosie*]

8% on Friday the 24th—almost twice the fall in 1992, when the UK was forced out of the exchange rate mechanism on Black Wednesday.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Of course the FTSE 100 is going to rebound a bit, because the vast majority of the business of FTSE 100 stocks is outside the United Kingdom. If we look at indices such as the FTSE 250, which is much more domestically exposed, we see that the fall has been catastrophic.

Stewart Hosie: That is absolutely correct. The FTSE 250 is far more exposed to the domestic market. Whether the index moves up or down slightly at any given time, the key point is that the exposure to the UK market and the lack of confidence at the moment are precisely what is driving that uncertainty.

Kit Malthouse: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Hosie: No, I will not give way at the moment.

I was pointing out that the fall in the pound was twice that in 1992. By Monday the 27th, it fell another 2%, to \$1.32—a three-decade low. [*Interruption.*] There are mutterings from people who want everything to be fine. We have had a near three decade low in the pound because of the actions taken by the Brexit campaign, which failed to have a plan to deal with this eventuality—that is the crux of the matter. The value of the pound against the euro fell almost 6% on Friday the 24th, and it fell again on Monday the 27th.

Most alarming, given the stock placed on it, was that the UK lost its triple A credit rating from Standard & Poor's following the Brexit vote. Standard & Poor's said the referendum result could lead to a

“deterioration of the UK's economic performance, including its large financial services sector”.

It was the first time that Standard & Poor's had downgraded a triple A-rated sovereign by two notches in one go. On Friday the 24th, Moody's cut the credit outlook from stable to negative, saying the result could lead to a prolonged period of uncertainty. By changing its outlook to negative, it has warned that the UK's Aa1 rating is also at risk of being lowered, and with that, obviously, comes the risk of higher borrowing costs.

And that is before we get to the real world and job security. The Institute of Directors surveyed 1,000 of its members. It found that a quarter plan to freeze recruitment. Two thirds said the vote was negative for their business. The BBC has reported that HSBC plans to move up to 1,000 staff who process payments in euros from London to Paris. Others are deeply concerned about the loss of passporting arrangements, which mean that firms do not have to have different authorisations for individuals in individual countries. These are very real concerns, but they are being whitewashed and brushed over by those who are desperate to leave, because of the absence of a plan to deal with issues that should have been considered in advance.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The leaders of the Brexit campaign are conspicuous by their absence from this Chamber, which is perhaps not a surprise, given the embarrassment they face. One of those leading

voices—the Minister of State for Energy—said the volatility we are seeing is not unusual. Does it not just underline the complete economic illiteracy of their case that they think these unprecedented changes are not unusual?

Stewart Hosie: If the pound falls by twice as much as its record fall ever, I suppose that no one sensible should describe that as minor, normal or run of the mill. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

With regard to the indices, it is true, as I said, that the FTSE 100 has pretty much bounced back to its pre-referendum level, as of earlier today. The FTSE 250 is not yet back to the position it was in on Monday 27 June. The pound versus dollar is unchanged since its collapse and is bouncing along the bottom. The pound versus the euro is unchanged since the fall and is bouncing along the bottom. The real concern—

Kit Malthouse *rose*—

Stewart Hosie: No, no.

The real concern is that this uncertainty will last for a very long time, not least because of the preposterous decision by those advocating Brexit not even to try to invoke the article 50 negotiations immediately—not so much a man without a plan as a campaign without a clue.

Kit Malthouse *rose*—

Stewart Hosie: No, I am not going to give way.

We do know, though, that many of the underlying problems are deep rooted and long term. One of the arguments posited by the out campaign was that money currently going to the EU could be spent here at home. We do not need to leave the EU to reverse the decision to convert innovation funding from grants to loans in order to support new product development. We do not need to leave the EU to reverse the cuts to export support in order to help businesses sell more overseas. We do not need to leave the EU to abandon an economic plan to cut £40 billion more than is necessary to run a balanced current account. We do not need to end our membership of the EU to do these things; we do need an end to austerity.

The other argument that the Brexit campaigners posited was that we need to “take back control”, in their words, in order to achieve improvements in all the economic metrics. The problem with that is that countries within the EU are doing better on every single measure. Malta and the Czech Republic have lower unemployment. Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands have higher employment. Ireland has higher GDP growth. Estonia and Bulgaria have lower debt-to-GDP ratios. In terms of the key issue of productivity—

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Hosie: No, I am coming to an end.

Productivity, as against the UK, is higher in the entire euro area. It is higher in Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Ireland. All the things that we want to see done can be done within the EU: that is self-evidently the case.

This is a Brexit campaign without a plan, leading to the chaos we are seeing now and potential difficulties in the economy for many, many years to come. Of course we need to get on, one way or another, to resolve this, fix it, and work with the hand we have been dealt. However, if we are expected to respect the decision taken across the whole of the UK, we would expect the same respect for the decision taken by the people of Scotland to stay in the EU.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. If we stick to about 10 minutes each, I will not have to impose a speech limit. If we can go with that, then I think we can get everybody in.

4.3 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a great privilege to speak in this debate, which I very much welcome, because it is what we should be doing. There is a lot of excitement out in the rest of the estate at the moment, but following this enormous decision, with all its consequences, we should be sitting here as a packed Parliament discussing the huge impact. I very much welcome the shadow Chancellor's point about the need for a cross-party approach, because this is potentially bigger than any party or any leader, no matter how charismatic or experienced they may be.

George Kerevan: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could explain why this is an Opposition day debate and the Government did not call a debate on the economy after Brexit.

James Cartlidge: I am not an expert on “Erskine May”, but I understand that this slot was allocated for an Opposition day debate—[*Interruption*—]—and there was a statement on the European summit.

I campaigned passionately for a remain vote, and I argued positively. I always set out what I thought was the positive case, but I have to say that in my view the negative case was made too often. We created a “cry wolf” situation: if we warn about some things too often, people eventually ignore us even when we are right. We must be honest and say that some of those predictions are coming true.

I believe that the country can come through this, come together and be stronger eventually, but if we are to do so, we initially have to recognise what we have lost and the strength that we have given up. The best way to look at this is to think of a very good Gwyneth Paltrow film—I do not know whether you have seen it, Madam Deputy Speaker—called “Sliding Doors”. We know what has happened: we have had the resignation of a great one nation Conservative Prime Minister; we once again, having reopened Pandora's box, have the issue of Scotland; we undoubtedly, whatever the indices are showing, have turbulence in the financial markets; and we have profound uncertainty. The very best we can say is that we have a crisis of uncertainty. We hope that that will not be manifested as real pain in the economy, but it is quite obvious that there is a genuine risk of that and we must deal with it. As I said when I intervened on the shadow Chancellor, Fitch has issued a very serious warning of a 5% reduction in investment this year. The

biggest threat is what might happen to inward investment. We must remember the current account deficit issue and the fact that the country is completely dependent on inward investment. If the big foreign firms look at this country less positively, we will pay a high price.

I mention “Sliding Doors” because if we had boarded the other tube train going to “Remainia” in the referendum—oh, how I wish that had been the case—

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): It's the way he tells them.

James Cartlidge: The hon. Gentleman has a fantastic sense of humour himself, as does his party.

If we had boarded that tube train and gone down that route, our Prime Minister would have been in post for years to come, and our stock market, our economic confidence and our currency would have strengthened. We would not have put permanently to bed but would have very strongly put to one side the two big constitutional issues of Europe and Scotland that have bedevilled our politics for so long. Instead, we have instability again.

We have to recognise that if we had remained, we would have had a very strong position, rather than all this uncertainty and weakness. For me, whatever arrangements are negotiated for the future, they must compensate for that and restore the strengths and assets that we had, not least the fact that British has historically been seen as a beacon of trust. It has been seen as a country into which people would put their life savings, and there is a profound sense around the world that we have respect for the rule of law, and that we are stable, sound and all the rest of it. At the moment, one could forgive the world for thinking that that was not the case, as certainly seems to be true in other European countries.

How do we restore those strengths? First and foremost, when we enter into negotiations, we have to decide on the principles—just as with a Bill, we have a Second Reading debate about its principles—and we need to decide on the principles of the negotiations we will have with our European partners and on the fundamentals about how we go forwards. I want to focus on three key points.

The first point is openness, to which I referred earlier. To me, one of the most extraordinary comments during the referendum was when, after concerns were raised about steel, a key figure in the leave campaign said that if we left the EU, we could unilaterally impose tariffs on Chinese steel. There may be a strong case for doing so, but that betrayed the fact that when the argument becomes nationalistic, particularly economically nationalistic, there is inevitably a threat of protectionism. We have heard many times about how Britain would negotiate good trade arrangements, and about how, since we have deficits with the EU, its members will want to trade with us—after all, look at how many cars we buy from them. Implicitly, the point was therefore that if they did not want to trade with us, we would consider protectionism.

Kit Malthouse: I realise that my hon. Friend and I were on different sides of the argument, but does he recognise that the EU is a protectionist bloc? The EU is a common tariff area whose members collectively impose significant tariffs on other parts of the world, some of which are impoverished third world nations.

James Cartlidge: I accept my hon. Friend's point, but the EU as a whole is a tariff-free market of half a billion people, and it is a massive asset for our economy to be part of that. In my opinion we need to remain in the single market at all costs. The principle of openness is important, but this is also about the message we send. We have all agreed that there is a threat to inward investment—this is an existential threat to our economy—and it is important to send to the world the message not just that we are open for business, but that we will be open with the principles of our economy and not resort to protectionism.

Secondly, any negotiation on our new arrangements must take place in a tone and manner of goodwill. We must seek an arrangement that is not just in our interest but in those of a strong European Union, and that is fundamental. Whoever undertakes those negotiations with our European partners must be someone who is trusted to want something that works for both parties—I worry about people going to negotiate with a body that they have spent many months heavily criticising.

My third point is about fiscal policy. Whatever we do, if we want to maintain a sense that we are sound, and win back the sense that we are a stable country in the world, we must continue with a fiscally prudent regime. We must continue to take tough decisions, and commit to balancing the books and reaching a surplus. The message that that would send will inspire confidence in our investors and help to restore the stability we all seek.

Dr Julian Lewis: Does my hon. Friend agree that an important start has been made on building up that mutual trust by the candour and openness with which the Prime Minister and Chancellor accepted the verdict of the people, even though it went against their own strongly held beliefs? We must carry that forward by ensuring that we observe the spirit, as well as the letter, of the people's decision.

James Cartlidge: I agree with my right hon. Friend, and I was coming on to speak about why this decision came about. While we must accept the decision of the people, we must also understand and be honest about the prospectus on which we believe they voted. A few days ago my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the former Mayor of London, of whom I am—of course—a huge fan, wrote:

“It is said that those who voted Leave were mainly driven by anxieties about immigration. I do not believe that is so.”

However, the huge turnout that we saw in working-class areas of this country, council estates and so on, was not due to people saying, “We didn't get a say on the Lisbon treaty”; it was because of immigration, which was pushed in an inflammatory way throughout the debate. If anyone wants proof of that, I can bring the tweets and emails that I have received, some of which were shocking and horrific—indeed, some were too shocking to read out in the House in the way that some of my hon. Friends have done.

We must accept that the campaign was driven by concerns about immigration. That makes things difficult for us, because when we negotiate we must find a way of preserving all the economic strengths to which I referred while controlling immigration from the European Union. If we boil down the explicit underlying nature of the prospectus from vote leave, it was the end of unskilled

immigration from the EU. We heard that there will be skilled migration, but at the moment tier 3 is closed and unskilled workers cannot come to this country from outside the EU. Finding that balance will be incredibly difficult, but it is possible if we have good faith and show goodwill towards those with whom we negotiate.

4.14 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I welcome today's debate and the tone that we have heard this afternoon. After what has been all too often a foul-mouthed debate over the past couple of months, the tone of constructive engagement and working together is very important. It is down to the leaders in this House to put the decency back into our democracy and, like many others, I was shocked to hear the statements, tweets, messages and incidents that hon. Members read out during our proceedings on the statement earlier today. We just cannot have that in this country; we are not going to have that in this country. It is a responsibility on all our shoulders to ensure that in the communities we serve we stamp it out, and we stamp it out fast.

Part of a decent democracy is that people honour their promises. Let us be honest that we have already seen promises that were made in the campaign being broken into shreds, tatters and little pieces. It is a job for all of us to hold to account the leaders of the leave campaign who made promises that now appear not to be honoured. We need to hang those promises around their necks in the months ahead because, frankly, our democracy cannot withstand too many more broken promises. The guilty men and women who made those promises must be held to account in this House.

I wanted to speak in the debate because I want to say that we need to honour the people's decision. They have given us a stark lesson. We know how to globalise, but we do not know how to make globalisation work for the majority of voters. What I think most voters told us in the referendum is that we have become a world of very rich elites and very remote elites. People have had enough of it; they want a different settlement.

We need to move with speed in this House to set out the principles for a new special relationship with our closest neighbours. The sooner we agree those principles across the House, the better. I am glad the Chancellor set out a couple of principles, but I hope that he agrees, and that when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury winds up the debate he will agree, that we ought to have been better prepared. We were told yesterday by the Prime Minister that there is a new EU unit, yet somehow the Government have forgotten to include the Home Office in it, as if somehow immigration was not an important feature of this debate. Quite frankly, that beggars belief.

We are blessed in this House with the European Scrutiny Committee, which does a good job. It is charged with scrutinising individual instruments of EU legislation that come before us. It is, of course, chaired by that neutral and commanding figure the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). However, it is not equipped to look at the big picture nor to look at the principles that we need to agree. I therefore hope the Prime Minister will take seriously the call from Opposition Members for a new Joint Committee of both Houses to try to get to the bottom of the 6,500 instruments we might need to incorporate into UK domestic law, give or take those aspects we do not like.

Parliamentary sovereignty has just been voted on, but Parliament cannot be sovereign if Parliament is blind. We need to ensure that we are equipped in this House with a method of coming to agreement and making sure that the right plan for a new relationship is on the table.

Stephen Gethins: On the question of democracy and sovereignty, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government, in terms of setting out their timetable for Brexit, should also set out a timetable for scrapping the House of Lords so that we do not have any more unelected bureaucrats deciding day-to-day business?

Liam Byrne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am on his side when it comes to the House of Lords. This Government's idea of democracy is to bring forward proposals to cut the number of people in this House while increasing the number in the other place, I think by more than 200 at the last count. It makes one wonder what they are scared of when it comes to democratic decisions.

I want to touch very briefly on some of the principles that have to define the new special relationship with Europe, and we have to start with national security. Since we put in place co-operation on justice and home affairs, we have made important progress. We have good ideas, such as the European arrest warrant, and we have concerted action on sharing information relating to crime, terrorism and watch lists. Terrorists do not respect international borders and nor must the fight against terrorism. It is therefore essential that we agree to collaborate and co-operate to the maximum possible extent with our neighbours when it comes to the fight against crime and the fight against terror.

Secondly, it is clear from this vote—the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) made this point well—that we will have to update the principle of free movement and replace it with a new principle of fair movement. I was the Minister for Borders and Immigration who introduced the points system for non-EU immigration into this country. During the French presidency, it became clear to me that there was an appetite across Europe for reforming the free movement directive. I said at the time that it would be a long struggle to get such reform, but the sooner we started, the sooner we would finish. Surely we now have to take that lesson and begin putting on the table serious proposals for the reform of free movement.

There are a million and one choices to make. We have to start by honouring the rights of those who are already here. We cannot retrospectively tamper with the rights of people who have already made the life-changing decision to move home. There are then questions about restrictions on low skill or high skill, how long visas should last, whether visa rights should lead to rights of settlement and citizenship, and what access to benefits should be enjoyed for taxes paid in. Of course, there is the huge question of how, as part of a new agreement on fair movement, this country steps up to its international obligations to help refugees struggling due to war in the middle east. We should be doing far more to help Europe with the burden of giving safe haven to refugees fleeing war zones and make that part and parcel of our proposals for fair movement.

Within all that, we have to be careful that we do not damage the free movement of ideas, which is why I always argue that students and scientists should be exempt. Alongside that, we must ensure that co-operation on ideas, intellectual capital and intellectual property protection are part of the new arrangements.

Thirdly, we must ensure that there is no race to the bottom on workers' rights and human rights. It was this country, and one of our greatest Prime Ministers, that helped to found the Council of Europe. Over the decades that followed, we were among the most important authors of the European convention on human rights, and we are the proud co-authors of the European Court of Human Rights. We must ensure that there is no race to the bottom on workers' rights, and that we do not enjoy second-class human rights in this country.

Fourthly, we obviously have to try to maximise free trade, free movement of goods and free movement of capital throughout the single market. We will need to be honest that we will pay a price for introducing restrictions on migration. We need to think carefully about what price we are prepared to pay. That is why I believe we need to introduce the minimal possible restrictions on free movement and the fewest fetters possible.

When it comes to the free movement of trade and of capital, we must ensure that our rights to tax revenue are protected. We have made progress over the past few years in ensuring that multinationals pay their fair share of tax, but heaven knows we have an awful long way to go. We know that hundreds of billions are sheltered by European companies in tax havens. We have to deepen collaboration and co-operation with Europe to ensure that people pay their fair share.

Finally, we need a big debate about sharing the burdens of our neighbourhood. Good neighbours do not shirk their duties, whether on climate change or common border protection. There will be countless other burdens regarding which Britain has to step up and say, "Yes. We are going to take on the obligations that come with sharing this part of the world." The Prime Minister was right to say that we will not turn our back on Europe. We have to send a very clear signal that we will be not just good neighbours, but the best of neighbours.

In the debates that come, there will be an iron relationship between reform of free movement, access to the single market and the integrity of the United Kingdom. If we are to maximise the integrity of the UK and to keep our trade balance good, we have to keep changes to free movement to an absolute minimum. It would be an error to slam the door to this country closed and lose our place in the world as a great trading nation, which would inevitably lead to the unravelling of the United Kingdom.

We need great British moderation now more than ever. We must have no more pie in the sky from politicians with no intention of honouring their promises, which is why I hope this place continues to lead such debates.

4.24 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who made some fine points. I particularly liked the phrase he coined about moving from free movement to fair movement.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

There is a time and a place to take a risk. I started my business in 1992. Many in the House will remember that year and, in particular, 16 September 1992. Unemployment was at 3 million; repossessions were running at 72,000—three times the normal average; and, on that single day, interest rates went from 10% to 12% to 15%. As the House will remember, the day after, we pulled out of something called the exchange rate mechanism, and that was the right thing to do. Many economists said it was the wrong thing to do—they said it was a big risk—but things could hardly have got worse, so it was absolutely the right thing to do.

Look at where we are today: we have one of the fastest-growing economies in the developed world and virtually full employment, meaning that all our young people and our older people can get a job. We had a saying in our business: hope is not a strategy. There was so little strategy from the Vote Leave campaign going beyond our exit from the EU, which was why most business organisations—the Institute of Directors, the CBI, the manufacturers' federations, TheCityUK—said it was the wrong thing to do. Every leading economist—and even some not-very-leading economists—said it was the wrong thing to do. But of course this was seen as some kind of conspiracy.

It was not just business talking like that but the music industry, the science industry, our research organisations, our technology industry and so on. A report by the House of Lords called leaving the EU a huge risk because of the complexity of withdrawal. It will take at least two years from our giving notice under article 50, but it will take many more years to unwind all the connected legislation. A report in *The Times* last week said it would take 10 Queen's Speeches to unwind the legislation. That breeds the uncertainty that businesses do not like.

This is also about trade deals, and not just about trading today with Europe but about opening new trade markets around the world. As the Chancellor said, that is a great opportunity, but businesses cannot simply move their supply and customer bases from one location to another overnight—yet that is what they are being asked to do.

James Cartlidge: Is not much of our trade with the rest of the world done through large international companies that locate in the UK because we are in the single market?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A good example are the Swiss banks. Despite Switzerland's being part of the European economic area, it cannot trade directly with the EU, so it has to base subsidiaries within the EU. Happily, firms such as Credit Suisse and UBS put them in London, as do US banks such as Goldman Sachs, J.P. Morgan and the like. That is why the head of TheCityUK said that the move could cost up to 100,000 jobs in the City of London. Yet this was never dealt with or answered by the Vote Leave campaign. [Interruption.] My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) shakes his head. The risks are huge, yet the issue has not been properly dealt with.

The impact on car manufacturers has not been properly dealt with either. This is not simply about our opening new trade markets around the world; it is about a

supply chain that is deeply embedded throughout Europe. A typical drive shaft for a family saloon car is manufactured in six different countries across Europe. What are car manufacturers to do if tariffs are applied between us and the EU? Just last evening, I was talking to a multinational retailer who had 3,000 members of staff but was moving to new premises with 5,000 members of staff. These people move from London to Frankfort to Paris just as we would move from north Yorkshire to London, but they face the prospect of not being able to do that. How have we made this decision without talking about these issues and answering these questions?

There is an even bigger issue. Looking at the European Union in such a sensitive stage, I view it as a house of cards, and if the UK pulls our card from the bottom, there is a significant risk that the whole house will implode. A domestic economic risk then moves towards becoming an international and global economic risk, along with a political risk and a security risk. This country's economy and our prospects for national security could be hugely affected.

We should recall that only a few years ago many European member states were totalitarian states behind the iron curtain, yet they are today free and fair democracies with the rule of law and freedom of the press. The European Union has presided over those member states, making sure that they are focused on prosperity and trade, rather than looking backwards or, even worse, eastwards towards Russia.

All these issues are in play, and there are many positive reasons for remaining part of the European Union. It is about the opportunity to live, work and study right across the continent; it is about peace and prosperity; and it is about tackling some of our huge challenges and economic risks—issues such as climate change, air pollution, drug resistance and tax evasion.

Of course, free movement of people and immigration are the biggest issues that need to be dealt with. I quite understand the public concern about those issues, and I believe that this was not a referendum on the European Union, but on immigration. I understand that we need to deal with it and now we have an opportunity to do so. As the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) said, we need to deal with it in a proportionate way, and to look at the many different solutions to the problem, working together with our European neighbours.

Above all, we must have free and unfettered access to the single market, because the economic consequences of not having it are impossible—too severe—to contemplate. All the way through the referendum campaign, I wanted to remain and reform, but that option is no longer available. What we must now do is to work together with our European counterparts to make sure that we get reform. We must work collaboratively with our European partners to make sure that we have a fair economic settlement that works for both the European Union and for the United Kingdom.

4.32 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I was going to say that it is a pleasure to speak in this afternoon's debate, but that is not really how it feels. I am not the baby of the House, but I am among its younger Members, and for the 33 years in which I have been alive I have grown

up in a country that is part of the European Union. Part of its character is a confident, open, outward-looking nation that looks to the world with optimism, confidence and strength.

Although I respect the result and the verdict of the voters last week, I cannot disguise my bitter disappointment with the result. It has put this country on a fundamentally different course for this century from the one we were previously on. We have already seen the economic impact of that decision, and we have seen some of the political repercussions of it, too. Probably more worrying than anything else about last week's result is the sense that our political leaders have yet to find adequate answers to the questions that have been thrown up by the leave vote.

I represent an outer London constituency on the Essex border, and many of the people I represent travel in on the Central line to work in the City of London, and many of them will be worried about the future of their jobs. We have already seen the announcement of thousands of jobs potentially moving abroad into the eurozone, and we hear rumblings about other jobs set to go elsewhere. Communities, including those that voted overwhelmingly to leave, are seeing the consequences of their decisions, with a loss of the inward investment that delivers jobs—whether it be investment in car manufacturing in the north-east or investment to bail out the steel industry in Neath Port Talbot.

Without feeling too bitter about the result or finger-wagging at people who have reached different conclusions, I cannot but say—and am deeply sorry to say—to those who attacked Stronger In and its advocates for prosecuting “Project Fear”, especially those in the House and in the officially designated Leave campaign, that it looks increasingly likely that it was “Project Fact”, whether we are talking about instability in the currency or the markets, or about decisions that have already been made in the space of a few days that will relocate jobs, change people's lives, and affect communities for the worse.

As far as I am concerned, the Conservative leadership contest cannot come soon enough. I relish the prospect of seeing the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) at the Dispatch Box, because I want him—along with his right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) and other Conservative Members who prosecuted those arguments—to live up to the promises that were made. I want them to live up to the promise of £350 million for the national health service, the promises about immigration, and every other promise that they made to the British people, which, in good faith, those people believed when they voted leave. This place must deliver accountability if we are to place any trust or any faith in politics.

When those Members assume the reins of power—and some of them are already in that position—they should expect Labour and, I suspect, Conservative Members to hold them to account for the promises that they made. If I had been a leave voter and I found that my job was at risk, or that immigration had not changed substantially in the way I had been promised, or that there was not £350 million for the NHS or anything remotely like it, I would feel very betrayed and let down—and so many of those who are members of my generation or younger do feel let down, because they will bear the consequences of this decision for longer than anyone else.

I cannot recall any other issue on which there has been such an overwhelming economic consensus, among this country's leading economists and economists around the world, that in the longer term this country will not be as well off as it might have been: not poorer than it is today, perhaps, but certainly not as well off as it might have been. Why should we be concerned about that? If our country is not as well off as it might have been, in communities like the one in which I grew up—in communities like my council estate in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, and other working-class communities throughout the country—it will not be the wealthiest who feel the impact in their pockets, but the poorest.

When businesses do not have as much custom, as much trade or as much inward investment from around the world, it will not be the mighty global players that are affected; they will simply take their business elsewhere. It will be the small and medium-sized enterprises. It will be the hard-working people who take the risk, who take the plunge and set up a business, who work their fingers to the bone, day in day out, to turn a profit and provide a home and an income for their families. Those are the people who will pay the price of this decision. So forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I feel somewhat angry about that.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his powerful and effective contribution to the debate. I also congratulate him on what he said about airport expansion during the Chancellor's speech. Whatever our future constitutional position, we shall need to make whatever decisions we can to get the country moving, to show that we have momentum, and to encourage inward investors back into the UK.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful for that intervention. In the short time during which I have been in the House, I have been appalled by the extent to which party-political self-interest has slammed the brakes on vital infrastructure decisions to secure the future economic wellbeing of our nation, or even our national security. The Government should allow votes on airport expansion, on our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent, and on other major, vital infrastructure projects to keep our country safe and prosperous. We cannot continue to allow such crucial decisions to be sacrificed on the altar of party-political management, not least when the attempts that are made appear to be futile.

We are not just seeing a fundamental change in the role of Britain in the EU; I think that we may be looking at the break-up of the United Kingdom. I am thinking not just about Scotland, but about the huge achievement that was made in Northern Ireland, from the Downing Street declaration under John Major to the Good Friday agreement under Tony Blair. The Northern Irish peace process itself could be put at risk because of the way in which this debate has been handled. It is troubling that, days after the referendum, there are still no answers to some of the critical questions that have been asked about how we are to move forward as a country.

James Cartlidge: The hon. Gentleman is making a fantastic speech and I agree with the sentiments that he has expressed. Is it not the case that, in the best case scenario, it is inevitable that a huge amount of Government

[James Cartridge]

energy and time will be diverted to legal wrangling and other issues? We should be focusing on the huge issues that the country faces.

Wes Streeting: I wholeheartedly agree. I came to this House not to spend hours and hours scrutinising changes to the law to protect the rights we already have as members and citizens of the EU, but to advance new ones and to fight for my schools, my hospitals and my public services and to improve the life chances of people in my constituency. I did not come to this House to take part in a grand constitutional convention tinkering at the edges to maintain the status quo, rather than advancing the interests of our nation.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I am almost reluctant to interrupt my hon. Friend's flow, which is magnificent, but he mentioned the Northern Irish peace process. May I ask him to comment on the fact that the EU was one of the key components of the Good Friday agreement, just as we worked with Washington and with Dublin? The EU and peace 1, peace 2 and peace 3 are essential components of the architecture of the peace process. The possibility of customs posts from Derry to Dundalk is not some fanciful nonsense; it is a reality. Is he aware of the negative impact that this is having on the people of Northern Ireland?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend has a great deal of expertise in this area and we take seriously his warnings. I would feel less aggrieved by what he says if it were not for the fact that in the run-up to the referendum these very questions were put to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We were told, "Don't worry"—which seemed to be the blank cheque; it was said with every promise of the leave campaign—and now we find that we should very much worry.

We should also worry about the reason people voted to leave the EU. Much of it was not about the Lisbon treaty or where decisions are taken. Many people, even with this British Parliament as sovereign as it is today—and as sovereign as it was last week by the way—still do not feel that they have control over their lives and their destiny. I would hazard a guess that when the analysis is done we will be able to map community by community those places that voted leave and those places that have had the hardest time because of the unequal nature of our economy. That should worry us more than anything else. Many people voted leave out of desperation, in the vague hope, in the belief that their circumstances could not be worse than they are today and that our immigration system and the flow of people into this country make them and our economy less well off, rather than better off. That concerns me deeply.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I represent one of the areas that overwhelmingly voted out. Thirty-six per cent. of my constituents earn the living wage and believe that this decision will increase their salaries, yet 7,000 of my constituents are employed in an industry that is already looking to see what happens next, is unstable and is stopping investment. Does my hon. Friend agree that we have to get strong answers from the Government to protect future investment?

Wes Streeting: We do need those strong answers. We also need to accept that it is not just about our economy as it is today; it is about our economy as it will be defined in the future. This country now faces choices about the structure of our economy and about how to compete in a globalised world. With respect to Members on the Government Benches, it is my belief that there is a risk, under not just the current Government but the next Prime Minister, that the future will be about a race to the bottom, further casualisation of labour—a race to the bottom in terms of wages and terms and conditions—because outside the protection of the single market that is the only way for this country to profit in the way those at the top of society want. That makes me even more worried for our country's future. That is why we desperately need a change in Government.

More than 100 years ago, working people, socialist societies, friendly societies and trade unions came together to form the Labour party because they knew that the way to improve the lives of working people and their conditions was not by marching through the streets demanding change but by marching through the corridors of power and delivering that. The Labour party has a great history, whether it is the creation of the national health service, homes fit for heroes, the white heat of technology, the creation of the Open University, the introduction of the national minimum wage, or the improvements in education standards that let this council estate boy from Tower Hamlets make it to university and to this place. Successive Labour Governments are the only vehicle for delivering progressive change in this country.

I urge Members of my party to think very carefully about whether we prefer the futility of opposition to the ability to change people's lives through power. The pursuit of power is not about our careers; it is about the life chances and opportunities of the people the Labour party came into being to represent—and if they do not have confidence in the Labour party and its leadership to be that change, we consign this country to decades of Conservative Government, just as we did before when I was growing up in the 1980s. That should hang heavily on the consciences of the skeleton Front Bench of this party, because until we start providing effective opposition now, that lot will get away with it. That is why we should remember above all else that the Labour party is a cause, not a personality cult, and it is time some people put the interests of the people the Labour party was founded to represent at the forefront of their judgments about their futures and do the right thing so we can get on with taking that lot apart and delivering a Labour Government.

4.45 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful and eloquent speech of the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting); I feel somewhat like a dull bank manager following on from his act.

Perhaps unusually, may I welcome not just the subject of the motion, but also the wording of it? I congratulate those on the Opposition Front Bench on bringing this motion forward today.

I must confess that the decision made by the voters of the UK to leave the European Union came as both a surprise and a shock to me. I spent my time holding

debates across my Bexhill and Battle constituency so that constituents could hear both sides of the argument and then come to their own conclusion. I never sought to influence their votes one way or the other. This position of balance also permitted me to speak to 25 schools—both secondary and primary—over the last week of the referendum campaign. It troubled me greatly that young children whose parents were originally from the EU were asking if their parents would have to leave the UK or whether Britain would go to war if we left. At least it gave me the opportunity, with balance, to do my best to reassure them.

I would contend that the campaign themes and sometimes extreme scenarios that were being asserted were causing these concerns to be raised and it is little wonder to me that some votes appear to have been irrationally cast. Had the remain side recognised, perhaps in more balanced tones, that there were positive reasons for the UK to leave the EU but even more positive reasons to remain, I wonder whether the UK population would have so readily lined up to give the establishment opinion-makers the thumbs-down.

All this is for historians to deal with in due course. We are where we are and it is my belief that we in this place have to lead from the front and get the best deal for the UK in order to preserve the rights that our population has enjoyed from the EU while delivering the semblance of democratic control which the public have demanded of us through this result.

While I have concerns about the economic implications in the short term, I believe that, with the right civil service negotiation team in place, we can get a good deal from our European partners. I do, however, believe that this will take determination, good grace, hard work, focus and an ability to work with our European counterparts. Thumbing our noses, as Nigel Farage did so disgracefully in the European Parliament this week, not only demonstrates that he should not be let anywhere near this process, but also demonstrates that vitriol and triumphalism rarely bring out the best in negotiation counterparts.

My rationale for this is borne of my experience working at Lehman Brothers over a 15-year period, for seven years with the small team that was unwinding what became the world's largest bankruptcy. I was running a legal department the day Lehman Brothers went bankrupt. During the speech of the hon. Member for Ilford North, there was a time when I wanted to come over and give him a cuddle, because there was great fear in 2008 just like the fear for his generation that he was describing. There is great fear right now, but I remember that fear back in 2008, from a personal perspective because I had my mortgage on that institution, and my friends and colleagues for many years worked for it. Despite what people say about investment banks, they include not only bankers, but cleaners, secretaries, and people who do not earn a great wage, and they lost not only their job, but their sense of pride and security in that institution.

Wes Streeting: The hon. Gentleman is right to mention the support staff and cleaners who make those businesses function, but it is also worth mentioning the fact that, although the people who work in financial services have been guilty of all sorts over the years, including bringing our economy almost to its knees, the financial services

sector still generates enormous investment in this country and creates jobs. It would be foolish to allow that great industry to go by the wayside, given all the benefits that it brings and the tax receipts that we invest in public services. We should not let those people off the hook, but we should never pretend that financial services are not an asset to this country.

Huw Merriman: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. There were some who really needed more punishment than they got, while others took a huge amount of punishment, but those services are still a great exporter for UK plc.

The events on that day in 2008 were an enormous shock, and I remember them well. I worked with a guy from another bank—the largest international and commercial bank—who was in control of its legal department. He said he had spent that weekend dealing with Lehman Brothers as it fell over. He then spent the following week dealing with one of the other largest banks as it fell over. The week after that, his own bank fell over as well. Back then, those of us who were there remember feeling that money was just not safe in any financial institution at all. People might be fearful right now, but I ask Members to cast their minds back to 2008 when things felt even more uncertain.

I also ask the House to recognise that, in the past six years, the economy in this country has got better. We have recovered. Who would have thought we would reach a position in which 2 million new jobs could be created? Perhaps the decision on the European Union has been such a great shock because we have once again got used to a form of stability.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Is my hon. Friend going to mention the fact that the markets are bouncing back as we speak?

Huw Merriman: I am not—not least because the point has just been made for me—but I am well aware of that fact, and it is one of the reasons that I am feeling positive. My point is that, at the time, people feel terrible but history judges that things might not have been quite as bad as they feared. I certainly take my hon. Friend's point.

The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers certainly brought out the worst emotions in people, as well as some of the better ones. I can recall three stages of behaviour. There were those who lost their heads, those who wielded the knife and those who put their heads down and tried to work through the chaos.

Jeremy Quin *rose*—

Huw Merriman: I will give way to my hon. Friend, because I know that he had similar experiences at that time.

Jeremy Quin: I did indeed. I worked in Her Majesty's Treasury for the then Government, who are now the Opposition.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): That was your fault.

Jeremy Quin: I can assure the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) that I arrived here to help after the events in question. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) mentioned the fact that the markets have bounced back, and it is good that they have done so, but we should all be aware that they will be volatile and they will fluctuate. They will go up and down, but what matters is the long-term momentum in our economy and particularly our ability to attract ongoing inward investment. Our minds must soon turn to how we can ensure that that tap has not been turned off, either through infrastructure investment or through fiscal measures to encourage investment into our country.

Huw Merriman: My hon. Friend has great experience in these matters and I agree with everything he has just said. I shall now press on because I am conscious of the time.

I was talking about the three emotional states that I came across during the events of 2008, and the best of those was demonstrated by those who put their heads down and tried to work through the chaos. Being a believer in such action, I stayed on with the Lehman Brothers estate for seven years to manage the team of lawyers that was dealing with the claims, worth tens of billions, that were made against the estate as well as those that the estate made against other trading entities. For 18 months, I led a team dealing with a multibillion-pound case against a large international bank that had locked up our custodial assets to use against its own claim. Rather than litigate across the globe, we negotiated with the bank and ended up settling to both parties' satisfaction, drawing up a new trading agreement to continue future business. I hope that that is a metaphor for what can be achieved with our European partners. As a result of that success, Lehman Brothers claimants, who originally feared getting only 10p in the £1, will end up with nearer £1.50. It became such a sound and safe investment that we struggled to get claimants to take their money out because they wanted interest to continue to accrue.

I use that example because, at the time, the situation looked hopeless to staff and financial stakeholders alike, and I recognise that that is how much of our population sees the UK's plight following the referendum. I hope that, over time and with the right team in place, a better outcome can be delivered for the UK. Only time will tell whether our economy will be stronger outside the European Union than inside, but what is in our hands is putting in place an experienced civil service team with the qualities to deliver for the UK and then giving them the time and space to come up with a strategy and allowing them to implement it. While we have discussed many of the trading principles that we would like to see in place, I urge the House to think more soberly about the type of people that we have to fight for them. From experience, I would say that that is as important as the cause itself.

That approach, with sufficient transparency in the process, is what will give the population the reassurance that they so badly need at this uncertain time. I look forward to calls from across the House saying that the House should work together and add all its experience and support to the process, so that we can support all the people in this country.

4.56 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I wish that we did not need to have this debate, because I wish that the majority had voted to stay within the European Union, but we are where we are. In the spirit of openness and transparency, it may be useful to set out that I well understand that the way in which I and my hon. Friends understand the problem and how we frame it is different from the way that people in other parts of the Chamber see it. In my view, the sovereign people whom I respect and on whose behalf I must act are the people of Scotland. I believe in a great continental principle of popular sovereignty. I do not believe in the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. That is why I am particularly concerned that my colleagues and I reflect on what is in the interests of Scotland at this time.

The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) who is leaving—*[Interruption.]* He was leaving until I mentioned him. He made some of the best points in this debate thus far about the lack of a plan. Even Baldrick had a plan.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): A cunning plan!

Roger Mullin: A cunning plan at that. However, it would seem that the leave side had no plan and that the Government were unfortunately unprepared for this eventuality. The Prime Minister indicated at Prime Minister's questions that we are having to spend the next few months modelling the alternatives without specifying what different scenarios were being planned for. Whatever the scenario, we must get some clarity about what we are going to say about Scotland's place within the European Union. The Government cannot assume that we will meekly follow and be dragged out of the European Union against the will of the Scottish people. It is not our job to be dragged along; it is our job to represent the interests of Scotland and the Scottish people, and that we will do to the best of our ability.

At Prime Minister's questions before the vote, I raised the case of Thomas and Elke Westen, originally from Germany, who lived in my constituency. Thomas runs a small business in the service sector. Elke is a distinguished artist in glass. They came to Scotland some years ago, bought an old home and refurbished it beautifully, created jobs in the community, and contributed to the community in lots of voluntary ways. Days before the vote, they decided that they could not stand the way in which they were being portrayed as immigrants and that they would leave the country for the period of the vote. They said that if the vote was to leave, they would want to leave Scotland permanently. They are in France at the moment. I am still in contact with them, and I am trying to persuade them to come back. I am aware that they are not the only people who feel that they have been hurt tremendously by the nature of the debate and let down by the Government. It is all very well for the Government now to say that they are welcome here when they denied them the vote in this referendum. Part of the problem we have in reassuring people is the way they have been treated up to now both by the Government and by those advocating a leave vote.

Elke and Thomas were small business people. There has been lots of discussion today about large businesses.

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the impact on EU nationals. May I remind him that it was not just vote leave campaigners who denied the vote to EU nationals and 16 and 17 year olds, but the Government who were backing remain?

Roger Mullin: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of that.

James Cartlidge: I was there in Committee when we debated votes at 16 and foreign nationals. I made the point on foreign nationals, and it is a fact that if they had been allowed the vote, which is not the case in general elections, they could have swung the result. Even though I regret the result, we cannot underestimate how inflammatory that would have been, especially as we were not using the franchise from a general election.

Roger Mullin: That is a rather sad argument to make. We allowed EU nationals a vote in the Scottish referendum. Thomas and Elke Westen are as much Scots as I am and they have as much right to express their feelings about the country in which they have chosen to live. It is similar to the case of my older brother and sister who had to emigrate because they could not get the opportunities to work in their own land, which has been a big problem for Scotland. The countries in which they have gone to live have welcomed them and allowed them the vote. Excluding these people helped to introduce an element of xenophobia into the way in which the referendum has been conducted. I have great regard for the hon. Gentleman, but on that particular point, I am afraid that I completely disagree with him.

There are problems for our small and medium-sized enterprises. In my own constituency—I would be interested to hear whether this is shared elsewhere—two types of SMEs have been talking to me. The first group includes those SMEs that export, and their concerns are primarily about access to markets. Earlier, the argument was made that it was good that a falling pound would allow exports to be a little more competitive. In all honesty, I have not heard a single business person making that claim. What I have heard is that the problem will be in assuring exporters that they have access to markets. Without access to markets, the exchange rate is rather immaterial.

The second type of SMEs has included not exporters but importers. They are particularly concerned about what is happening with the currency level, and what the cost will be of bringing in the types of continental products that we have been so used to benefiting from over the past 20 or 30 years. There are different perspectives on the problem in SMEs that reflect real concerns that we will have to manage in this new situation. The Government will not be able to wait two years until an exit takes place to deal with this matter. They will have to think urgently about the kind of initiative that can be brought in to assist those SMEs that are living in a period of great uncertainty. When they have a period of great uncertainty, what effect will it have on their decision-making? They will not be going to the banks and borrowing for investment at a time when they are uncertain about how they are going to construct their future. My fear is that over time that uncertainty will lead to less and less investment, not merely by the large corporations, but by many of the small businesses at the heart of our communities.

Another issue of concern is research funding and academia in society. Many people have said, “Don’t worry. The contracts that have already been struck will not be ended,” so our great universities are safe in that regard. However, the universities’ fundamental concern is for the future of European collaboration in research. How will that happen if we have exited the EU? Will British academics have the same access to other academics and to future research projects? That is highly unlikely unless we regain our place in the European Union. What of those students in Scotland and elsewhere who have benefited from travel to continental Europe and those who benefit from the great universities of France, Germany, Italy and elsewhere? What are their prospects? Future generations will be denied the opportunities that others have had over the past 30 years. That can only be a tragedy for our society.

5.6 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin). It is always a fantastic honour to listen to the eloquence of one of my oldest friends in politics.

We have a responsibility to act in a way that does not talk down the economy, and collectively to support measures to create financial stability leading to sustainable economic growth. I commend the Bank of England for seeking to reassure the financial markets that it will, among other things, take the necessary measures to sustain liquidity. However, when the Prime Minister says in this House, as he did on Monday, that there has been an “adjustment” in the financial markets, his comments fly in the face of reality.

Over the past week, the pound has fallen by more than 10% against the US dollar. The FTSE 250, which is more representative of the UK economy than the FTSE 100, is down by 12% in a week. When we look behind these indices, we see the severity of the declines in a number of economically sensitive sectors. Look at the banks: RBS is down by 28%; Barclays is down by 27%; and Lloyds is down by 22% over the past week. The house builder Barratt Developments is down by 32% over the past week.

Those astonishing falls clearly represent a crisis of investor confidence in our economy and indicate that investors anticipate a significant shift on growth in the UK economy. Indeed, I note this afternoon that consensus expectations for GDP growth in the UK next year have fallen from 2.1% to 0.4%. This is no “adjustment”, as the Prime Minister called it; it is a significant shift in investor perception of UK plc, and it is driven by a failure of leadership by the Prime Minister and his Government.

Let us make no mistake: this is a crisis made in Westminster by Westminster, and it needs our full attention if we are to respond appropriately to the challenges we face. The challenge is brought home to us when we see that Moody’s has today changed its outlook on 12 UK banks and building societies, and downgraded its outlook on 52 UK sub-sovereigns from stable to negative.

The Chancellor talked of an emergency budget and additional austerity measures as a result of Brexit. It is the Government’s responsibility to deliver financial stability, not to kick the legs from under that stability and

[*Ian Blackford*]

threaten the jobs and livelihoods of our citizens, but that is precisely what this Government have done. These are no abstract matters—[*Interruption.*] It might be better if the Front-Bench team paid some attention rather than talking to each other, because we are discussing the livelihoods of people in this country and it would be respectful to the House if Front Benchers listened to the debate.

The fall in the financial markets affects the pension funds of everyone investing in this country. The stock market adjusts to future expectations of profits and dividend growth, and that is what should concern us. Goldman Sachs has downgraded UK banks and cut its profit forecast for the sector by a whopping €10 billion. Just think about that—a Tory row over Europe leads to banking profits in the UK being decimated. Have the Prime Minister and his Government no shame about what they have caused? It is, as someone might say, another fine mess they have got us into.

When the Government come to this House and call for support to change the future payout to pensioners of the British Steel pension scheme, it is, in part, through a consideration of future prospects for asset growth in that pension scheme. Thousands of British Steel workers and pensioners face a very real threat to the value of their pensions, and the events of the last few days can only exacerbate it. The threat to the British Steel pension scheme is newsworthy and current.

As the consultation response from the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries suggests, there is a much wider threat to pension schemes, but this self-induced run on the markets has made that threat greater. We need to put it in the context of the economic circumstances that we face. The fallout from the financial crisis of 2007-08 is still with us. We are burdened with eye-watering levels of debt. Wages have barely risen in real terms since the financial crisis. Productivity has flatlined and prospects for economic growth had already been cut before we ran into the backwash of the referendum. What was required was a focus on driving investment into our economy through innovation and by driving up productivity growth, as a result delivering higher living standards.

The UK Government have engineered, at the very least, an economic setback of their own making. Why? A fallout over Europe within the Tory party has caused domestic and foreign investors to take fright, and not just at prospects for growth and stability in the UK because this will have a knock-on effect on our neighbours in Europe and elsewhere. The Chancellor has talked about further austerity, so yet again the poorest and weakest in our society will be asked to pay the price for a lack of leadership from the UK Tory Government.

When we look back over the last few years, we see rising inequality, which has been driven by the Government's fiscal and monetary policy decisions. There has been a lack of appropriate measures to deliver sustainable economic growth, with too narrow a focus on quantitative easing, rather than considering measures that could have led to better outcomes. Where is the Government analysis of the quantitative easing programme? As of today, £375 billion has been invested in an asset purchase scheme. Where are the additional measures to stimulate growth and investment?

We know that the Government and those on the Brexit side had no plan for a leave vote. The Chancellor went into hiding. Well, let us hear it now. The financial markets have given their judgment on the referendum decision. Where is the Government's response, beyond the Prime Minister calling the market declines an "adjustment"? We need to build confidence and stability, so where is the Government plan to do that? Let the country hear it. I will happily give way to any of the Government Front-Bench team if they want to intervene. So far, we have heard absolutely nothing that would deliver confidence to the financial markets.

We know that there is no plan. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor are like a pair of rabbits caught in the headlights, transfixed and clueless. The Prime Minister was sent packing from the meeting of the Council of Ministers—he is yesterday's man in Europe and yesterday's man at home. The Prime Minister has got us into this mess, but he has no plan to get us out. Someone else is going to have to pick up the pieces and deal with the economic uncertainty. Thank goodness that we in Scotland have Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish Government, who are showing effective leadership. We are optimistic for our country. At the 2015 general election campaign, and in every Budget since, the SNP has set out a credible alternative to austerity that would see us invest in public services and kick-start growth throughout the UK.

People in this country and elsewhere have reflected on the leadership that Nicola Sturgeon has shown over the last few days. We need the European Union to recognise the voice of Scotland and the fact that Scotland voted to remain in the European Union. Scotland is an internationalist country that is open for business. The vote in the Scottish Parliament yesterday showed a unity of purpose, giving the Scottish Government a mandate to negotiate with the European Union to protect the interests of the Scottish people and to make sure we retain access to the single market, which is so important to the security of jobs, investment and growth.

Let me say to the people of Scotland and to those in this Chamber that Scotland in Europe will be a beacon of hope, bringing jobs and investment to this country. People in London who are concerned about operating in financial services can come to Scotland—to a country that sees itself as part of a European destiny, that will be very much focused on jobs and growth, and that will deliver for the people of Scotland.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): Given all the hon. Gentleman's passion for staying in Europe, and for all of us in the Union working with each other and with Ireland, does he agree that we need to find a way of establishing how Scotland fits into the Union and how all the parts of the United Kingdom can work together so that we can move forward?

Ian Blackford: Of course, those of us on the Opposition Benches will work to ensure that we can rescue something out of the carnage of the vote that took place throughout the UK.

The people of Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. Of course we want to do our best for all the people of the UK, but our primary responsibility is to protect the people of Scotland. That is why we need to extend the hand of friendship to

the people of the European Union and to say to them, “Please stand by us. We have stood by you.” Let us make sure that Scotland remains in the European Union so that we can deliver hope, prosperity and jobs for our people.

5.17 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): May I, too, thank the Labour party for giving us the opportunity to debate this matter? The European referendum result has been debated by the European Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, so it was high time we had the opportunity to do so, notwithstanding the time the Prime Minister has given us in his statement. As always, it is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), as well as my hon. Friend—and neighbour—the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin).

The decision that has been made will have a huge impact on Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath mentioned research. In my constituency, I have the University of St Andrews, which has argued that for every £1 of Scottish Funding Council grant it receives, it returns £12 pounds to our economy. To turn that on its head, for every £1 that St Andrews loses, Scotland will lose £12. That has a significant impact on the economy locally.

I speak from personal experience, as somebody who benefited from the right to live and work in the European Union, and as somebody who benefited from Erasmus. I know the opportunities that that gave me and the opportunities that young people are now missing out on, and I wonder whether the Government will reflect on the training and educational opportunities that will be lost to not only individuals but the broader economy.

It is worth remembering, on a question of democracy, that Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain part of the European Union. If we take the electoral regions throughout the United Kingdom, we find that the highest proportion for any side—remain or leave—was the 62% gained in Scotland, with every single local authority area voting remain, including the two that voted not to join back in 1975. That was a phenomenal mark of support for European Union membership, and one that it would be ill-advised to ignore.

On the point about democracy—I made this point to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) earlier, but it is important—this place will gain powers and responsibilities, and it will have more say over the day-to-day lives of our citizens. So why—I would be delighted if anybody can tell me this—do we maintain the unelected affront to democracy that is the House of Lords when Vote Leave argues on a point of democracy? It is a disgrace.

Given the issue of stability, which is so important for the economy, and the huge uncertainty around Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom, I am delighted that over the past few days the Scottish Government have shown a huge amount of leadership. I pay tribute to the Scottish Government, who, it would appear, represent the only functioning party of Government left in the United Kingdom. The vacuum that has been left by the Conservative party and the Labour party, which is reflected in this Chamber right now, is doing no credit to this place whatsoever. What is more, just as the people of Scotland are being well served by the Scottish Government, the people of England are being

ill served by their two biggest parties. The people of England—who have made their decision, and we respect that—deserve much more than they are receiving at the moment.

Let me say more broadly—my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath has worked very hard on this—that we have a rich heritage of European citizens who have made their lives and their homes in the United Kingdom. European citizens have made, and continue to make, a huge contribution in my constituency. They enrich our economy, and they enrich our society more broadly as well. I wish that more leading politicians had said what the First Minister of Scotland said:

“I want to take the opportunity this morning”—

the morning after the referendum—

“to speak directly to citizens of other European countries living in Scotland—you remain welcome here, Scotland is your home and your contribution is valued.”

We all need to repeat that over the coming weeks and months.

Callum McCaig: As other hon. Members have said, there is no impediment against this Government—indeed, this House—making a positive statement about the rights of those EU citizens, whom we value and who make an unbelievable contribution to our communities. That can and should be done. We need to press all those seeking the Tory leadership on this. If they all unite on it before going through the rigmarole of electing a new leader, we can end this uncertainty, which must be unbearable for these people.

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend, as usual, makes an excellent point. We should have some commonality of purpose, and a few more people should repeat that, because of the richness that these people bring to our society—the Scots Germans, the Scots Irish, who would include my family many, many years ago—[*Interruption.*] And the Scots Australians as well. We are a richer country for it. If the leadership contenders, in no matter which part of the House, could make that commitment, it would be valuable to these people, and to us.

Things have changed, and changed utterly. Over the past few days in Scotland, a number of people who voted no in the independence referendum are coming round to the idea of independence—or certainly coming round to the idea of working together to maintain Scotland’s place in the European Union. I give credit to members of the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Green party who are working with the SNP in the Scottish Parliament to maintain Scotland’s place in the European Union. It is interesting that the Scottish Liberal Democrats have now been reported as urging their party to support independence and drop their opposition to it. Henry McLeish, the former Labour First Minister, has said that he is “very, very attracted” to independence and it is a “game changer”.

Outwith domestic politics, internationally and from a European perspective, we are seeing welcome support from people such as Guy Verhofstadt, the former Belgian Prime Minister, who has said:

“it’s wrong that Scotland might be taken out of the EU”

against its will. Manfred Weber, the leader of the European People’s party, has said:

“Europe is open to new member states...Those who want to stay”—

[Stephen Gethins]

and we are staying—
“are welcome”.

I pay credit to Micheál Martin, who thinks that, as an issue of fairness,
“Ireland ought to be”

our

“friend and demand fair play”.

I welcome all those comments from our European friends and allies.

Historically, and as a matter of fact, Scotland may be on the geographical periphery of Europe, but we sit at Europe’s heart politically, and that is where we want to stay and will stay.

5.24 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be debating with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the first of what I hope will be many such debates. I thank the Chancellor, who is no longer in the Chamber, for his kind words.

There have been some fantastic speeches in this debate, and I want to run through some of the main issues that have been raised. The hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) highlighted concerns about the leave campaign’s lack of a plan. The hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) stated that, sadly, some of the remain campaign’s predictions were coming true. I welcome the fact that he echoed the sentiments about a cross-party approach. He said that this is bigger than any leader, and it certainly is.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), whose comments I welcome, stated that he wanted to put decency back into democracy. The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) feared for the international house of cards that Britain’s exit could cause to collapse. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who made a fantastic speech, echoed the risks that jobs would be moved, that communities in deprived areas would struggle to obtain investment, and that “Project Fear” would prove to be “Project Fact”. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) said:

“We are where we are and...we...have to lead from the front”.

I could not agree more.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) told us the terrible and harrowing story of his constituents who have left to go to France following the result of the European referendum—we hope that we can coax them back again—and he highlighted the problems faced by SMEs in trade. The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) made a very passionate speech. He stated that we should not kick the legs from under stability and highlighted the fact that falling markets affect the pensions of everyone. Finally, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) echoed the comments about how people from the EU have enriched his local economy. He wanted to state that their contribution was valued, a sentiment that is certainly shared by Members on both sides of the House.

As my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor outlined in opening the debate, the decision to leave the EU poses considerable risks to the UK economy. The financial

markets are in turmoil, sterling remains volatile, the UK’s triple A credit rating has been lost, and employers in some sectors have already started to discuss moving jobs out of Britain. This is very worrying, but we can turn it around. To do so, we need political and economic stability. We now need all parties to put their political interests aside and work together in the interest of their nation’s economy. I have enjoyed the tone of today’s debate, which has been broadly in agreement with that sentiment.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. Will she join me in welcoming the fact that the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Green party in Scotland have given the Scottish Government a mandate to negotiate with the European Union about Scotland’s continued membership of the EU, given the overwhelming vote?

Rebecca Long Bailey: I think that is really an issue for the Scottish Government. I am sure it will be the subject of many debates in the coming weeks, and I hope we will debate it further in this House.

On where we are now, I do not share the Chancellor’s assurances that our economy is now shockproof. He did not fix the roof while the sun was shining—quite the opposite: he sold it off. The growth we have heard about is largely built on a swelling bubble of household borrowing and an increase in poorly paid, insecure jobs. I was pleased to hear that his emergency Budget has been shelved for the time being. However, there remains a high probability that austerity measures will be introduced later in the year, imposed by a new Conservative Prime Minister who could be even more ideologically to the right than his or her predecessor. Such an approach, based on cuts and under-investment, has taken hold despite the fact that economists the world over agree that it is economic nonsense to cut Government spending when the economy may be heading towards recession. The most vulnerable will suffer, and our communities will snap under the strain of further public sector cuts. Quite frankly, people cannot take any more.

It is not hard to understand some of the reasons why vast swathes of people in this country voted so passionately in last week’s referendum—it is no wonder that people were angry with the political elite when their financial situations have worsened rather than improved. On doorsteps in my constituency, which has suffered from decades of industrial decline, I could feel the anger from those who have been left behind. They were right to be angry—angry that our hospitals and schools are in a state of crisis and starved of funding; angry that many people cannot get a home; and angry that our public services are being cut so that the safety net on which they rely is eroded. People rightly wanted something or someone to blame for that, but sadly that was confused in the rhetoric of some of the referendum campaigns. A hornets nest was stirred up with scaremongering about migration, rather than a debate on the core issue of why our economy was not working and how the EU affected that.

We must ensure that migrants living in Britain know that they are welcome, especially in the light of the racist attacks and abuse that have been reported since the referendum. I wholeheartedly echo the Chancellor’s comments that such behaviour is not British—that is not what makes Britain the great nation it is. Such disillusionment with the political establishment took

root long before the EU referendum, and 1979—the year I was born—heralded the biggest change in economic thought that the country has ever seen. British manufacturing, and the secure well-paid jobs that came with it, was the envy of the world, but it had its heart and soul ripped out. In many cases manufacturing was moved overseas to cheaper labour markets, and the jobs lost were never really replaced. Communities around the country were destroyed, leaving future generations to pick up the pieces.

Following such decline there has been a failure to restructure our economy, to develop an industrial strategy to support key industries, and to make our country great. However, we are where we are, and whether people voted leave or remain, it falls on us in this House to build a country of which the British people can be proud and in which they feel safe. We need a plan to rebalance our economy and support our key industries—a proper industrial strategy to provide the secure jobs that we so desperately need, and Government investment in our economy so we can become the innovators of the world, with priority investment in those communities that have been economically neglected for years.

All Members of the House must fight for and support our economy and the people in it. The economic outlook for the UK is uncertain, and we are facing turbulent political times. As my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor emphasised earlier, there are strengths in our economy, but we must nurture and support them at this vital time. If we do not, the future looks bleak. Labour is willing to work across the House to ensure that the people of this country are protected from whatever is to come, and we are committed to delivering an economic agenda that promotes Britain and British industry. Let us be the envy of the world once again.

5.33 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): I thank the Opposition for tabling this motion and giving the House the opportunity to reflect on the momentous events of the past week. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) on her meteoric promotion to the shadow Cabinet. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already congratulated her, but I thought it worth repeating in case there have been any further changes in the past three hours. In all seriousness, I welcome her to her role, and I wish her good fortune in what could be a difficult time in the Labour party.

It is two weeks to the day since we last gathered in the Chamber to debate whether it was in our best interest to stay in the EU, or whether to plot our own course ahead—indeed, I had the last word for the Government in that debate, but we have seen what can happen in two weeks. I said that although I believed the EU needed reform we were better off in. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House spoke in support of that view, just as others—again, on both sides of the House—put the case to leave. That is the mark of a good democracy. With such a big decision about our future, it was right that the ultimate choice was for the people who make this country what it is. In the past few months and years, this has not been a question confined to the halls of Westminster. It is one that has been debated in homes and streets, on the way to school and on the way to work.

Last Thursday, we braved a typical British summer in large numbers to each have our own say on the question. That is the mark of a healthy democracy. Now we have made the collective choice to leave the European Union, countries around the world will see at least that Britain has a Government who listen to the direction its people set and plot their course accordingly. I am sure my hon. Friends will agree that that is the mark of a true democracy.

Stephen Gethins: On the mark of a true democracy—I made this point earlier—does the Minister agree that we should have a timetable to scrap the House of Lords, given the vote about democracy?

Greg Hands: This may come as news to the hon. Gentleman—he was not here in the previous Parliament, although some of his SNP colleagues were—but we had a very extensive set of debates, including a number of votes, on the future of the House of Lords. I do not think that, at this time of great interest in the nation's constitutional affairs, another debate about the future of the House of Lords would be sensible.

We heard some very good speeches, including from my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge). I agree with him that it is no use going back to what might have happened. We need to move forward in reasserting our strengths as a nation and as an economy. I could not agree with him more that we need to continue with a fiscally prudent regime and build a surplus before the end of this Parliament.

George Kerevan: Is the Minister therefore saying that the Treasury is still committed to running a budget surplus in 2019, come what may?

Greg Hands: The fiscal rules provide for action in the event of particular eventualities. I do not see a need to revise the rules at the moment. We move forward from here. The most important thing is for all of us to unite in moving forward and to make the best possible case for our renegotiation in the European Union.

We heard from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who is a predecessor of mine in this role. I totally agree with him about being loud and clear on the rights of existing EU nationals in this country. I can tell him that my own wife, Frau Hands, would very much agree with him as well.

Stewart Hosie: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I am going to talk a little more about the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) made a very powerful speech, referring to his very strong business background. Like me, he strongly supported the remain campaign. He made strong points about business and the importance of making sure we secure business and trade in our new arrangements.

The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said he is one of the youngest Members of this House and that he had not been alive when the country had been outside the European Union, which is food for thought. All the years he has been alive, the country has been in the European Union. He was right to say that if

[Greg Hands]

an economy goes wrong, it is very likely to be the poor who suffer most. That would also apply in London, which we both represent. He issued a warning to the skeleton Front Bench of his own party. It is not appropriate for me to reflect too much on that, but I am sure his points landed with those he wished to make them to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) made a strong contribution. He made an interesting observation at the beginning of it, when he said he hosted debates with high-quality speakers in his constituency and came away thinking that they did not seem to sway voters either way. He also said that the economy will bounce back if we act with resolve, which was an important point.

We then heard three speeches from Scottish National party Members—the hon. Members for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins)—and I have taken a couple of interventions from them. They made impassioned speeches and some pretty familiar points.

Ian Blackford: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: No, I will carry on.

The result may not have been what some of us wanted, hoped for or even expected, but that does not mean that the Government were unprepared for it. In the past six years, we have been working hard to bring our economy back from the brink and get our public finances back under control. We said we needed to fix the roof for any economic storms ahead, and that is what we have done. We have brought down the deficit, and we have steady growth, record employment and a resilient financial system, which we spent the past six years strengthening.

We have done the analysis on what leaving the EU might mean, and considered the potential impacts on our economy in both the short and the long term. There was general consensus in the House a fortnight ago on the risks we might face, so hon. Members recognise that it will not be plain sailing and that there are challenges ahead, but thanks to the measures we have taken over the past six years our economy is as well prepared as it could be to face whatever comes our way.

We anticipated that there would be an immediate impact on the value of our currency and the stability of the financial markets. The Treasury, the Bank of England and the Financial Conduct Authority have extensive contingency plans in place and we are watching the markets closely. Although we have seen volatility, the markets nevertheless continue to function effectively.

The Prudential Regulation Authority has worked closely with major financial institutions to prepare extensively for the consequences of a vote to leave. The Bank of England stress tests show that UK banks have enough capital and liquidity reserves to withstand a scenario more severe than the country currently faces. Thanks to our work to strengthen our financial stability, banks in the UK have raised more than £130 billion of additional capital in the past six years, and have more than £600 billion in liquid assets to ensure that they can keep lending to UK businesses and households during

challenging times. The Bank of England can provide more than £250 billion of additional funds to support the banks and the smooth functioning of the markets. It can also provide liquidity in foreign currency if required. The authorities have all the necessary tools in place to protect financial stability. They are monitoring developments closely and will not hesitate to take further measures as required.

As we embark upon the renegotiation of our relationship with the EU, I reiterate the reassurances of the Prime Minister that the result does not mean that everything changes overnight. For British subjects living in the EU and EU citizens living in this country, there will be no immediate changes. People can still travel across the EU, businesses can trade as they did and our services can be sold as before.

The Prime Minister has been clear that there will be no immediate triggering of article 50, the procedure by which a member state can leave the EU. That gives us time to plan the new arrangements we are seeking with our European friends and neighbours. It also gives the Prime Minister's successor the opportunity to make any adjustments to economic policy and our public spending, informed by an assessment of our economic situation from the independent Office for Budget Responsibility this autumn. In the meantime, we will continue to work hard to maintain the fiscal stability we have always worked so hard to deliver. A new unit will be set up in Whitehall bringing together experts from across the civil service, and in answer to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill I can say that it will extend right across Whitehall, including all Departments likely to be affected, and that it will be given the resources it needs.

Liam Byrne: The Home Office?

Greg Hands: Yes, it will include the Home Office, and it will advise on the many options we face as we determine our future relationship with the EU. As Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I expect to play my own part in that task over the coming months.

Danny Kinahan: Does the Minister agree that the unit needs to consider how we hold the Union together and build the relationships between Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, given the direction in which Scotland seems to want to move and the need to maintain our relationship and trade with Ireland?

Greg Hands: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Of course, we have to keep on board all the devolved Administrations and make sure we get the right deal for all the nations of this country and, indeed, for Gibraltar. I know that different parts of the UK voted different ways—my constituency voted 70% to remain—but we must come together and ask for, and get, the best possible deal for the UK as a whole in the negotiations. That is absolutely the key point. This is not a time for division between our nations and communities.

Now is also the time to heal divisions in the country and in our communities. I was one of the first to condemn the disgraceful attack this weekend on the Polski Osrodek Spoleczno-Kulturalny—POSK—which is in what used to be my constituency in Hammersmith. I was delighted

that—people have commented on this—perhaps for the first time in 20 years the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and I have found something to agree on. We were retweeting each other in condemnation of the attack. It was an absolutely disgraceful attack on the Polish community in particular and on EU nationals and foreigners in general.

There was some irony there. I am not sure that the people responsible had any sense of what POSK did. POSK was set up in the 1960s. It had nothing to do with EU freedom of movement and labour or our joining the EU in 1973—even if it did, of course, the attack would still not have been correct. POSK was founded back in the 1960s, as a focal centre for the local Polish community, many of whom fought shoulder to shoulder with British servicemen in the second world war, fighting for our values and protecting our way of life. Never has the word “solidarity” felt more appropriate in how we reach out to the Polish community and other EU communities in this country. Sadly, that attack was not the only incident of xenophobia across the country, but every right-thinking person, on both sides of the House and the referendum debate will see them for what they are: ignorant and unwelcome displays of hatred, which have no part to play in the future of this country.

Both professionally, as the representative of a constituency where about 17% of local people are EU nationals and which benefits from their contribution, and personally, as the husband of a German wife and father of half-German children—they were in tears on Friday morning after hearing the referendum result—I want to send the message loud and clear from this Chamber that our fellow Europeans are still welcome in the UK, as are those from beyond the continent.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I had an Italian constituent in tears on Saturday—she had been here for 30 years and had raised her family here—asking

whether we were going to deport her and her children. We need to get a grip and the Government need to get a plan.

Greg Hands: The Government have been loud and clear in condemning these events, and a statement was made earlier on what the Government are doing in response. A vote to leave the EU is not a vote for hatred and intolerance; it is not a vote to turn our backs on our European friends; and it is not a vote to pull up the drawbridge and turn away from the world. At the same time as we find the best way forward for this country, we must uphold the very best values.

This debate has moved on from a fortnight ago. It is no longer a question of whether we should leave the EU, but how. We have got our decision; now is the time for all of us to roll up our sleeves, get on with the job and keep building the best future for this country. I have every confidence that this is precisely what our hard-working people will do; it is precisely what our businesses will do; and it is precisely what this Government will do. Investors across the world will see that our economy is fundamentally strong and that we are still very much open for business. In government, we will continue to build on those foundations to seek the best opportunities for people across the UK. That has always been our aim, and it will remain our aim as we plan the way ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises the risks posed to the UK economy following the decision to leave the European Union; notes with concern the loss of the UK's triple A credit rating, the potential output cut, potential job losses, risks to investment and the volatility in the equity and currency markets; and calls on the Government to bring forward measures to protect jobs and support businesses in the nations and regions in relation to the short, medium and long-term potential consequences of the referendum decision, and to address the current threats to community cohesion.

Backbench Business

Centenary of the Battle of the Somme

5.50 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the centenary of the Battle of the Somme.

The motion was tabled in my name and that of the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis).

On 12 August 1916, a young German officer called Friedrich Steinbrecher wrote home, saying:

“Somme. The whole history of the world cannot contain a more ghastly word.”

Somme is seared into the national consciousness like no other battle before or since.

On Friday, in Manchester, at Thiepval, in London and across the country, we will unite to mark the first day of the centenary of the Somme. Soldiers are often glorious, but war never is—and anyone saying otherwise is a complete fool. War is sheer, bloody reeking hell on earth, and we politicians must do everything in our power to avoid it. More than 1 million men lost their lives during the 141 days of the Somme offensive, many of them reduced to unrecognisable scraps of flesh and bits of gristle. Most, of course, survived but so many were left with physical and mental scars that they would take with them to the grave.

For the record, I should declare an interest: since November 2011, I have been the Prime Minister’s special representative for the commemoration of the centenary of the Great War and thus involved with the national arrangements that I suspect my right hon. Friend the Minister will shortly discuss. All I will say, sparing his departmental blushes, is that his officials and the associated arm’s-length bodies have done a truly fantastic job, and continue to attract admiration from our international partners. I would also like to pay particular tribute to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Royal British Legion and the Imperial War Museum, which have all worked tirelessly, and to the BBC whose coverage has been in the very best traditions of public service broadcasting.

I think we have had a pretty divisive few weeks. Now is the time for unity, as we come together to remember one of the bloodiest battles in our history—a battle that touched everyone from Lerwick to Londonderry to Land’s End. In all our communities, it still casts a long shadow. If a battle divides, its centenary has the power to unite. That was vividly shown last month when we marked the centenary of the Battle of Jutland, shoulder to shoulder with Germany in the grand panorama of Scapa Flow and on the Jutland Bank.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Somme was obviously the major battle of the first world war, but we should not forget all the other battles of that war, in which so many men lost their lives or were badly maimed. My grandfather, for example, was badly wounded at the battle of Loos.

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I suspect he will have closely followed the programme over the past two years and will continue to monitor it closely over the next two years, leading up to armistice in 2018.

As I was gazing over Scapa Flow a few weeks ago, I wondered how many seamen in Jellicoe’s grand fleet, or in Scheer’s high seas fleet, would have guessed that their countrymen would be spending most of the ensuing 100 years as the closest of allies, united in the most powerful alliance that the world has ever seen. On Friday, we will be standing shoulder to shoulder with another friend and ally at a very special Anglo-French place, the Thiepval monument on the Somme, in the lee of which there are 300 French and 300 British graves. It is a special place; a haunting place. It was Lutyens’s great triumph—a monument to the missing, but more than that: an enduring monument to the unity, I think, of Europeans, and particularly our unity with our closest continental neighbours.

At this time of historic opportunity and risk, let us make the centenary’s legacy one of amity and concord in our European neighbourhood. Here at home, too, we are desperately in need of a coming-together moment. The Somme vigil on Thursday night, and the silence at 7.30 on Friday morning, will, I hope, facilitate such moments of quiet reflection.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, which is worthy of this occasion. Does he agree that one of the most encouraging developments of the last few years is the greater respect that is shown to our armed forces, and, in particular, the armed forces covenant? Is our country not coming together to a greater extent than ever to mark the dedication and service of our armed forces?

Dr Murrison: I agree with my hon. Friend. One of the things that has struck me while I have been doing this work is how much added value there is in the presence of a serviceman from today’s Army on the battlefield tours that we have been running, and in seeing the faces of the young people for whom the tours were principally designed. One understands that they get it—in that moment, they get it—and there is a bridge between today’s servicemen and those who served 100 years ago. That is very powerful.

I am very pleased to see that so many colleagues from Northern Ireland are present. As I was preparing my speech, I asked myself, “Who can I reasonably expect to see in the House during this debate?” I am not surprised, and I am not disappointed. May I pre-empt some of the remarks of Northern Ireland Members by saying that there is nowhere in these islands where the force of the Great War is more keenly felt, or, indeed, where I have felt that more value has been extracted as a result of this centenary commemoration? The way in which communities have been pulled together by sharing history that is so often complex and nuanced has been a joy to behold.

When prominent republicans feel comfortable telling us about their relatives’ wartime service in the British Army, when members of the nationalist community—as guests of the Somme Association at the Somme Museum in County Down—proudly show us their grandfathers’ Great War medals, when the Irish Ambassador lays a wreath at the Cenotaph for the first time, and when

the Commonwealth War Graves Commission unveils a Cross of Sacrifice in Glasnevin cemetery in the shadow of Daniel O'Connell's tomb, we know that something good is afoot. If this is a centenary looking for a legacy, it need look no further. We should remember that a Somme that saw the Ulstermen's heroic storming of the Schwaben Redoubt also saw the 16th (Irish) Division's Guillemont and Ginchy. The Somme narrative, once heavily partisan, is now becoming a shared history. On Friday, President Higgins will occupy a place of honour before the Thiepval monument, which carries the names of so many from what were, by the time it was built, two separate polities on the island of Ireland.

Remembrance is hard-wired into the four-year centenary, but what does remembrance of the Somme actually mean now, today, given that its participants would have been long since deceased in any event? I look forward to hearing the views of young people the length and breadth of the country who will be taking part in the series of Great War school debates that were successfully opened last night in Manchester.

The perspective of youth on the causes, conduct and consequences of conflict is so important to our future, but for me remembrance means reflecting on loss and missed opportunity. Our society now is the poorer for the fallen not having enriched the last century through arts, science, medicine, business, even politics. We lost the famous men honoured in their generation, the glory of their time, cited in "Ecclesiasticus", which many of us will have read out on Remembrance Sunday. Society is the poorer also for the loss of men who would otherwise have lived out their lives in relative obscurity. "Ecclesiasticus" mentions them too. It is the poorer because of the children who were never born to all those great uncles, children whose names were never etched in stone and whose number was never counted among the casualties. In all that hopeful, bright, missed opportunity, how bitterly ironic that one participant in the battle survived—the very distillation of evil, a corporal in the Bavarian army who would march the world to an even greater war of misery two decades later, a war that history will judge to be inseparable from the first.

Steinbrecher was right. The Somme has become a byword for tragedy, pointlessness and waste, but we should never lose sight of the achievements of our predecessors. Be proud of them. Be proud of Britain's first citizen army. The butcher's bill may have turned out to be impossibly high, but they were doing the right thing in a just cause. That they were acting against Europe's then general disturber of the peace was nobly and magnanimously acknowledged at the start of the centenary by the President of Germany, a modern, forward-looking country still tortured by its past.

What was going on in the heads of Kitchener's young men? In 1916, many of them would not have had the vote. Their families would not have enjoyed the equity in a rich country or public goods that today we assume as our birthright. What then motivated them? If the rallying cry in 1916 was "King and Country" or "Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland", the glue was loyalty to your mates. If love for country was the headline, the text was written in pride—pride for town, for village, for neighbourhood and for family. But above all it was the ultimate team spirit, the instinct to do the right thing by fellow creatures united in adversity and a common cause. That is why men went over the top in July 1916. That is why they endured unspeakable horrors. That is

why they fought and died on the Somme on a truly industrial scale. But ask those who have served in the wars of the 21st century, the sort of conflict that we will be debating, again and at last, next week. They will say the same. A gentler age would have called it love for your oppo. In today's terms, it is loyalty to your mates.

Nowhere is that better shown than in the Pals battalions of Kitchener's volunteer army, a phenomenon that is a byword for the pathos of the Somme. That magisterial work, "The First World War" by my late constituent and near neighbour Sir John Keegan, ends with this:

"Men whom the trenches cast into intimacy entered into bonds of mutual dependency and sacrifice of self stronger than any of the friendships made in peace and better times. That is the ultimate mystery of the First World War. If we could understand its loves, as well as its hates, we would be nearer understanding the mystery of human life."

Steinbrecher survived the Somme, but was killed in action the following year. By then, with the Americans entering the war, the tide had turned. Another German officer, Captain von Hentig, described the Somme as "the muddy grave of the German field army"

and so it was. But peace came, and Europe's politicians failed, a betrayal of the fallen and a reminder of our heavy responsibility.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. To try to give everyone equal time, because I know how important this debate is, can we try and restrain ourselves to between five and 10 minutes, so we will all manage to have the same amount of time?

6.5 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I know that Members from all parts of the House are grateful for the opportunity to mark this important moment of remembrance, and I would particularly like to thank the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison)—my hon. Friend—who in his role as the Prime Minister's special representative for the centenary commemoration of the first world war has done very important work in ensuring that the first world war is commemorated in an appropriate and inclusive way. He and I agree that one of the most important reasons for our country to remember is that our country's young people—the next generation—cannot. To them, thankfully, a war in western Europe seems a distant prospect and my hon. Friend deserves generous praise for working to ensure that our next generation has been fully engaged in this process of commemoration.

Many of us will be attending commemorative events for the Battle of the Somme in the coming days, but it is absolutely right that in this place we have the opportunity to pay our respects. Organisations and community groups across the country will also be commemorating this centenary. I want to pay particular tribute, as my hon. Friend did, to the work that is specifically being done by the Royal British Legion, the BBC, the Woodland Trust, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Imperial War Museum. They have all made a very significant contribution to this process. Tonight, I want to reflect on the battle itself, the contribution made to the war effort by the country, and the wider implications of the battle and the first world war itself.

[Dan Jarvis]

On the morning of 1 July 1916, the piercing sound of whistles filled the air as men climbed out of their trenches to advance, and so began 141 days of the bloodiest battle of world war one. Those soldiers were surrounded by their comrades and driven forward by determination, duty and fear. The prospects of reaching the enemy trenches were grim as whole waves of men fell to the storm of oncoming fire that spread across the battlefield.

By nightfall some 21,000 would lay dead and 35,000 lay wounded. It is hard to comprehend the horror. The sound of British artillery guns could be heard across the channel on the south coast of England, mines detonated beneath the German trenches shook the ground, and within moments cries of the wounded were echoing across the bloodied battlefield.

For every yard of the 16-mile front there were two British casualties, and by the end of the battle more than 1 million soldiers had been killed. The terrible price paid by those soldiers reverberated across Europe and, indeed, the world.

In the weeks and months that followed, families would mourn their loved ones who would never come home. This pain was felt in every community across our country. Of the 16,000 towns and villages across Britain which dispatched soldiers to war in 1914, only 40 “thankful parishes” would see the return by 1918 of all who had left for the conflict.

I visited northern France last year to pay my respects to those who had fallen: men who were prepared to face danger to secure freedom for people they would never meet and never know. I stood in the trenches they had defended. I imagined the terror they must have experienced and walked the ground on which they had fought. I knelt in front of their graves. It felt like they were a long way from home.

On occasions such as these, it is customary to talk about one’s own local unit, and I will do so in a moment. I remember being in northern France a year ago, standing in the trench from which the men of the Devonshire Regiment had begun their attack. Those who had fallen now lie buried in the very same trenches from which they had fought. There is a plaque marking the spot, and it reads:

“The men of the Devonshire Regiment held this trench. They hold it still.”

Many of those who lost their lives on the Somme were volunteers—men who put themselves forward after seeing Lord Kitchener’s famous recruiting poster. Among them were the Barnsley Pals. They were miners, steelworkers, glassworkers, clerks, stonemasons and clerics, and many of them were friends and neighbours. They joined up together, they trained together and they went to war together. Ultimately, many of them died together. That story is true not just of the Barnsley Pals but of the many volunteer battalions up and down the country. Some signed up through a sense of duty, others through a sense of adventure, but regardless of their reasons for joining or of where they came from in our country, we stand united today to recognise and remember their sacrifice. We live in peace and enjoy freedom today because of what they and others did for us. That is a legacy that must endure for all time.

We should also take a moment to acknowledge how the Somme and the first world war in general helped to reshape our society. We remember the sacrifice of the men who died at the Somme, but Britain’s war effort would not have been possible had women not become the backbone of the war effort. This ultimately led to the Representation of the People Act 1918, which at long last extended the voting franchise to women. It can also be argued that the conflict planted the seeds for the growth of the trade union movement, the transformation of the state and the fundamental realignment of British politics that has had a profound impact on our country over the last century.

This debate also provides us with an important opportunity to pause, to remember and to pay tribute to those from the Commonwealth nations who fought alongside British troops. There were volunteers from India, the West Indies, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and other countries across the globe. They were thousands of miles away from home but they were fighting with great courage for what they believed to be right. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

In our debate in this place just a couple of years ago, we marked the start of our commemoration of world war one by saying how important it was for it to be a commemoration and not a celebration. In that spirit, I also want to commemorate the men in the opposite trenches at the Somme who lost their lives during the battle’s 141 horrific days. I have read the accounts of both German and allied troops who fought at the Somme. The accounts are eerily similar and similarly tragic. Those in the opposing trenches were not monsters. They were young men, just like their British and allied counterparts, fighting for their country.

We know that, sadly, the first world war did not turn out to be the war to end all wars, as David Lloyd George had suggested. Within two decades, war would again engulf our continent, but it is a fitting tribute to those who died in both world wars that we now pursue partnerships of peace and are enjoying our longest period without conflict in western Europe for nearly 2,000 years. It is comforting to know that what were once fields of war are now fields of peace.

The historian A. J. P. Taylor once said that idealism died on the Somme. I do not believe that that is true, and I do not believe that we can allow it to be true. We must keep working for a better world—a world that stands as a fitting legacy for those who fell at the Somme in those dark days 100 years ago. It is a mark of our common decency that we commemorate a war of history, but it is a measure of our common humanity that we continue our work today to ensure that such an event never occurs again. That is the greatest tribute that we can pay.

6.14 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), who gave a moving speech, talking in very human terms about one of the bloodiest battles in our country’s history. I join him in paying tribute to the Commonwealth citizens who gave so much in the war. Like him, I took my family to northern France to see the battlefields—they are a moving sight.

It is also a great privilege to follow the powerful speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison). He has provided exemplary leadership on this particular piece of work. The whole House owes him a great debt of gratitude for all the work that he has done. He is right that war is hell on earth, but his thoughtful opening to the debate set the events in an understandable context. It is difficult for us to comprehend the scale of the sacrifice of those who went into battle 100 years ago.

There are no surviving soldiers to tell us their stories. Instead, we have extraordinary monuments of scale and poignancy that defy belief. Lutyens' Thiepval monument, commemorating more than 70,000 British and South African soldiers, is haunting, but it is a place that we should all visit. The Welsh red dragon of Mametz wood remembers more than 400 soldiers who were killed and injured in that particular part of this appalling battle. These are extraordinary monuments to people who showed courage in the face of such horror. I pay tribute to the Government for putting in place the Battlefield Tours Programme, which continues to help many children to gain a deeper understanding of this important part of our nation's history. My hon. Friend is right that remembrance is hard-wired into these commemorations. This is about loss and opportunities forgone.

I did not learn about the war from great-grandfather, who was a soldier in the first world war. It was actually from reading the memories of poets such as Wilfred Owen that I gained my first understanding of the horrors of the war. My hon. Friend paid tribute to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the BBC, and I want to extend that tribute to, and specifically talk about, the work of 14-18 NOW. With no one left to tell the stories of what happened, we are again using the work of artists to help us to connect with the horrors and the courage of the Somme 100 years on.

While I was a Minister, I was fortunate enough to be able to help to establish 14-18 NOW and to give another generation of artists the opportunity to help us to make sense of the events. Jenny Waldman and Vikki Heywood have led the way in commissioning some extraordinary work that will live on in everybody's memory, such as the iconic poppies at the Tower of London, the dazzle ships, and the "Lights Out" event that marked the start of our nation's first world war commemorations. Those visual, memorable events brought into our consciousness the devastating events of so many years ago. The advisory panel, which I had the honour of chairing on the behalf of the Prime Minister, ensured that the programme of works was inspiring and fitting. I again pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire. Not only was he a member of that extraordinary panel of people, but he ensured that the events came to fruition.

14-18 NOW has helped to create a body of work to mark the 100th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, including the newly commissioned opera "In Parenthesis", which is based on the epic poem by David Jones, "Memorial Ground", a new choral work by David Lang, and the Somme 100 Manchester event at Heaton Park with the Hallé orchestra. All those pieces of work can perhaps help us to understand the raw emotion of those times. Yet again it has been the artists who have helped us, another generation, to connect with and comprehend the scale of horror and courage.

We are at a point in our history when our relationship with the rest of continental Europe is very much at the forefront of our minds. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire was right that the legacy here is of coming together. In remembering the battles fought 100 years ago alongside our allies, we should not forget the sacrifices that were made by so many men and women on both sides. We may vote to leave a political institution, for whatever reason, but the pasts and destinies of Britain and our European neighbours will be forever intertwined. We should remember those who lost their lives.

6.20 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I had the pleasure of serving under her chairmanship on the first world war centenary advisory board and of working alongside the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), the Prime Minister's special representative for the centenary commemoration of the first world war. He has been in Northern Ireland and the Republic on a number of occasions and joined us in some of our centenary commemoration events. We thank him for all his support.

The Battle of the Somme has a particular resonance, as the hon. Gentleman reminded us, for the island of Ireland, and especially in the historic province of Ulster in what is now Northern Ireland. The 36th (Ulster) Division, which was deployed for the first time in combat on 1 July 1916, acquitted itself with great gallantry, heroism and fortitude, but it suffered a huge loss on that fateful day.

Before I go into a little detail on that, may I pay a tribute to my colleagues on the Northern Ireland world war one centenary committee, which I have had the privilege of chairing since its formation? The committee is responsible for organising the main events throughout the centenary period. We have a special programme of events coming up this weekend in Northern Ireland, including an overnight vigil at Clondeboye, near Helen's Tower, the scene where the 36th Division trained before it went off to France to fight on the western front. We will have events at Belfast City Hall and in Parliament Buildings, Stormont. In the evening, we have a festival of remembrance at Carrickfergus castle. Saturday is devoted to local community events, commemorating the losses at a local level in villages, towns and cities across Northern Ireland. On Sunday, we have a special service in St Anne's cathedral in Belfast to commemorate the sacrifice not only of the 36th Division, but of the 16th (Irish) Division, which fought with equal valour at the Battle of the Somme.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): May I commend my right hon. Friend on the way in which he has chaired the Northern Ireland world war one centenary committee? He mentioned the sacrifice of the 36th (Ulster) Division and the 16th (Irish) Division. The way in which the commemorations are playing out in Northern Ireland is exemplary because they are bringing people together. For the first time in a long time, people are recognising the sacrifice of soldiers from Northern Ireland and southern Ireland. The work that his committee has done has been absolutely tremendous.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his very kind words. It is not just me but my colleagues from many parts of civil society in Northern Ireland who have come together to undertake excellent work to ensure that the centenary commemorations are inclusive—they have been, as the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire has reminded us—and that they embrace people from right across the community. I have had the pleasure of attending events in Northern Ireland in which people from all sections of the community have taken part. I have attended services, for example, at Lisburn cathedral in my constituency, when we marked the centenary of Gallipoli. We had the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a member of Sinn Féin, lay a wreath in the cathedral in remembrance of the men from the island who died in that battle.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I totally accept the right hon. Gentleman's purpose and what he is saying. Does he accept that in 1916 there was huge turmoil in Ireland, which was under the United Kingdom at the time—we had one country in Ireland? Does he accept that the Irish Government have now taken on their responsibilities and role, and that they recognise the soldiers who died at the Somme and in other battles, which they did not do for many years? They deserve some credit for that.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: Indeed. I echo the hon. Gentleman's comments. It has been a pleasure to work with the Irish Government. We have organised and hosted a number of joint events commemorating soldiers from right across the island of Ireland. I will be back in Glasnevin cemetery in July, where some more of the Victoria Cross stones will be unveiled for soldiers who died. They lie in the shadow of the cross of sacrifice in Glasnevin cemetery. I commend the Irish Government for the way in which they have embraced the centenary of the first world war. The events that they have organised have been most appropriate and inclusive.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I had the privilege of visiting the Somme and in particular the Ulster tower on the Somme. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has visited that wonderful memorial. Will he join me in paying tribute to those who organised that? It tells the world and the European Community of the sacrifice of the 36th (Ulster) Division on 1 July.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He is right. The Ulster tower is a replica of Helen's Tower at Clondeboye, and on 1 July there will be, as there is every year, a special event to mark the sacrifice of the 36th Division. I commend to the hon. Gentleman the Irish peace tower at Mesen, which is symbolic of the three Irish Divisions—the 10th, the 16th and the 36th. I hope that next year, as part of the centenary commemorations, we will hold a joint commemorative event with the Irish Government to mark the sacrifice of the three Divisions in the first world war.

The 36th (Ulster) Division was commanded by Major General Oliver Nugent. On 1 July, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, it was one of the few Divisions to make significant gains on that fateful day. Its objective was to take the German position known as the Schwaben redoubt. The Ulstermen took the German front lines and secured that position, but did so at a huge loss. It is

worth recording that on the first two days of fighting at the Somme, the Ulster Division lost 5,500 officers and enlisted men, killed, wounded or missing in action. Given that Northern Ireland is a very small place, the impact of such losses in two days of battle was huge. Visitors to many of the cities, towns and villages in Northern Ireland today will see place names linked to the Somme. In my constituency Thiepval barracks, named after Thiepval wood where the Ulstermen made their attack, is the headquarters of 38 (Irish) Brigade and the Army's headquarters in Northern Ireland.

Of the nine Victoria Crosses that were awarded to the British Army for the Battle of the Somme, four were awarded to men of the 36th (Ulster) Division. I want to mention briefly the names of those four courageous soldiers. Captain Eric Norman Frankland Bell from Enniskillen, who served with the 9th Battalion, the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, was 20 years old when he died on 1 July 1916. Rifleman Robert Quigg served with the 12th Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles. We were delighted that yesterday in the village of Bushmills in County Antrim, Her Majesty the Queen unveiled a statue to commemorate Robert Quigg and his heroism during the Battle of the Somme. Rifleman William Frederick McFadzean, 14th Battalion, the Royal Irish Rifles, died aged 20 on 1 July 1916. Lieutenant Geoffrey Cather, 9th Battalion, the Royal Irish Fusiliers, 25 years old, died on 2 July 1916. Those four men were awarded the Victoria Cross for their heroism.

I also want to mention the 16th (Irish) Division at the Battle of the Somme. It is important to understand, as we do in Northern Ireland, that it was not only Ulstermen who went over the top at the blow of the whistle on 1 July. There were some from the 10th (Irish) Division. The 1st Battalion, the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, were in action that day alongside the 36th (Ulster) Division, and later in September the entire Division was deployed at the Somme, again with massive losses during the Battle of the Somme. The 16th (Irish) Division suffered 4,314 casualties during the Battle of the Somme. We from Northern Ireland commemorate not only the soldiers from the Province of Ulster—from what is now Northern Ireland—but those from the 16th (Irish) Division who fought and died alongside the 36th Division at the Battle of the Somme.

In concluding, to underline the significance of the Battle of the Somme for those of us from Northern Ireland, I quote the now famous words of Captain Wilfred Spender of the 36th (Ulster) Division, who wrote—I never tire of quoting these words—on 2 July, the following day:

"I am not an Ulsterman but yesterday, the 1st. July, as I followed their amazing attack, I felt that I would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world. My pen cannot describe adequately the hundreds of heroic acts that I witnessed...The Ulster Volunteer Force, from which the division was made, has won a name which equals any in history. Their devotion deserves the gratitude of the British Empire."

And so it was. The blood sacrifice of the 36th (Ulster) Division, in my opinion, is the basis on which in 1921 Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. The Ulstermen did not die in vain. Not only did they die for a cause that was noble in defending European freedom, but they died for a cause that ensured that the Six Counties that are now Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom. Their sacrifice has a special place in the hearts of Ulstermen and women, and it is why this weekend, when we remember them

and we remember their sacrifice, they will have that special place in our acts of remembrance. But in the spirit of taking forward reconciliation on the island of Ireland, there is also a special place in our hearts for the men from Connacht, from Leinster and from Munster who put on the uniform of the Crown and sacrificed themselves in an equally noble cause, and who died for our freedom.

6.32 pm

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on his moving speech and the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on his speech and comments. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who I know has worked so hard in preparing all the commemorations to do with the first world war.

I am so old that I interviewed dozens of first world war veterans in the 1970s, many of them officers, about their experiences. The first lecture I ever gave at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, in the Churchill hall, was on the Battle of the Somme. Above the snores of the officer cadets, there was the occasional person who was paying attention.

In my brief remarks, I do not intend to replicate the comments that have been made so far about specifics to do with the Battle of the Somme. If anything, I want to try to step back, because it seems to me that one thing that often does not come across in the commemorative ceremonies is: why the Somme, and what happened?

All too often, there is no context in the coverage. People know about the first day of the Battle of the Somme—that it was the bloodiest battle that the British Army ever fought, and that it was just one day—and it has entered our psyche. It has to be more than that, however. It has to have more than a commemorative purpose in bringing together not only the peoples of the United Kingdom, but the peoples of Europe. I think that that is very important. I would say to some of the people who have been involved in the debates on whether we leave or remain in the European Union that the failure to understand why the French and the Germans cling to the European Union comes from a failure to see that this is not just about money; it is about the fact that they fought three brutal wars against each other—the Franco-Prussian war, the first world war and the second world war—and they are determined that that should never, ever happen again. We should bear that in mind.

The next point I want to make is that to understand what happened, we have to go back to the end of 1915. We, the British, were the junior partners in an allied alliance—we represented about 5% to 10% of the French army in 1914. Our old, pre-war regular Army, with the Territorials, had just about died off by the end of 1914. Our strength was the Royal Navy. We had to build up an Army, and as hon. Members have said, those who served in the campaign on the Somme were almost exclusively volunteers—loosely called Kitchener's Army—with large numbers of Territorials. The men who volunteered in late 1914 and early 1915 were deployed mainly as formed units in the spring and summer of 1916, and their learning curve had to be absolutely enormous.

The allied strategy was a recognition of the fact that the Germans and Austro-Hungarians were in a powerful position. If you are the Belgians and the French in 1915,

that is not an academic thesis. Some 90% of Belgium was occupied by the Germans, and all of northern France was. How do you get them out? The allies recognised that you do that by co-ordinating your attacks. In late 1915, therefore, they decided to co-ordinate an offensive on the Somme in the spring and summer of 1916 with the Russians, the Italians and, of course, the British.

However, old Napoleon Bonaparte once said that the first law of war was that no plan succeeded after initial contact with the enemy. Between February and December 1916, the Germans and the French fought an attritional campaign at Verdun—we are talking about the most monstrous campaign. If any hon. Members have ever been to Verdun, they will know that it puts Thiepval into context. We think that the French lost about 300,000 to 400,000, and the Germans lost about 300,000 to 400,000. This was an attritional war on a vast scale.

The British therefore had to shift the balance. The French were going to take the main offensive on the Somme, but it became the British. The offensive was going to be conducted by an Army led by a few professional regulars. The commander-in-chief, Douglas Haig, had commanded, at the most, 20,000 men in 1914; he was now commanding an army of 1.5 million. The battalions that our Northern Irish friends talk about were lucky if 1,000 men had two regular officers and a couple of regular non-commissioned officers.

The offensive was based on the fact that a vast artillery barrage would destroy the German frontline. We never had enough guns. Our war industries meant that about one third of the shells we produced were duds. The Germans were also a formidable opponent.

The context has to be that the commander-in-chief and his army commander could not agree on the operational plan. Douglas Haig thought that the plan would work, that we would break into the German lines, that the cavalry would be sent through and that we would roll the Germans up. His commander of the fourth army, Rawlinson, believed that all he could do was take the first line of trenches. They never agreed on what the main plan was.

That is crucial in terms of what happened on 1 July. On 1 July, the German defences were not overwhelmed, and the statistics we have seen resulted from the fact that the German machine gunners and artillery were able to destroy our advancing infantry on a vast scale. However, 1 July is only the start of an offensive on the Somme that lasted until November 1916. While we commemorate, and rightly so, the 60,000 casualties on the first day of the Somme, we should recognise that over the next three to four months the British Army endured over 300,000 casualties—the Germans about the same, and the French about the same, in addition to what they had lost at Verdun. We should recognise that this was a major campaign, and we should not ignore the bravery of the men who fought in those ensuing months.

My final point is crucial in understanding the men and women of that period. Yes, there were men and women who opposed the war, and yes, there were men and women—men, in particular—whose morale was broken by what they endured during those operations, but my conclusion from talking to veterans, and from all the reading I have done of letters and diaries, is that they did not give up; if anything, their determination to continue what we regard as a slaughter was increased.

[Mr Keith Simpson]

If I were to advise Members to read anything about the first day of the Somme, it would be a novel published in 1961 by John Harris entitled “Covenant with Death”, based on the Sheffield Pals battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment. It is a marvellous, moving novel. He worked in a Sheffield newspaper office in the 1950s with many of those veterans. Of all the things I have ever read about the first day of the Somme, it is the most moving, and a tribute to the men who died on that day.

6.41 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Somme: the first time this world had seen mechanised warfare and the industrial destruction of human life. “Lions led by donkeys” it was said of the British forces in the Crimean war, but that was never more true than at the Somme. We cannot see the war that those who were living a century ago saw, nor can we hope to understand the horror, the pride, the loss and the patriotism that they felt. It may be a disservice to them for us to try. Current serving personnel and veterans of our modern wars will have some understanding, but we do not. Soldiers, sailors and air crew are now trained before being thrown into the hell that is the killing theatre. Precious few of those who fought in the last century had anything resembling military training. Theirs was not an easy task, nor an easy billet, nor an easy death.

My own constituency remembers most keenly the Edinburgh Pals battalions, encouraged to join up with people they already knew to fight alongside them and to die alongside them. Whole communities were devastated as their sons died on France’s fields. People on the other side of Edinburgh from my constituency tell of an entire professional football team, Heart of Midlothian, which joined a Pals battalion, along with players from other Scottish professional sides. They fared no better—youths who were sent to die in the mud. War is always loss and grief and pain, but the first world war stands out starkly as a reminder of how cheaply the lives of ordinary soldiers were held, and how little regard their leaders had for them, even after the guns fell silent.

I am Australian, so I will take a few moments, if I may, to talk about the forces who came from Australia and New Zealand. The Australian and New Zealand soldiers—the Anzacs—fought first at Gallipoli in April 1915. In July 1916, they were in France, at Fromelles, as a diversion for the Franco-British offensive on the Somme. In September, they were sent to rest, but were back at the Somme in October, where they suffered a very severe winter. About one in seven of the New Zealand division died in the battle, and 40% were wounded. Two thousand graves and 1,200 names engraved on the memorial to the missing mark New Zealand’s sorrow. New Zealand’s population at the time was about 1 million. At the Battle of Fromelles, there were just over 7,000 casualties in the British Expeditionary Force, and 5,500 of them were Australian.

“Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”

may be a fine epitaph, but it does not wipe away the hurt, or ease the grief, or help to rebuild the community.

After the war, Atatürk spoke to the mothers of the Anzac soldiers who died at Gallipoli, and the sentiments he expressed apply across the world and across the decades:

“You, the mothers who sent their sons from faraway countries, wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.”

Wherever they came from, whatever side they fought on and whoever we are now, we should embrace all those who have lost their lives fighting in wars they never started. We should remember them as human beings. In the chaos and cacophony of battle, these boys died painful and frightening deaths, lonely even as their friends died alongside them.

Some say that wars are crimes committed under the cover of patriotism, necessity and self-defence. It is sometimes found necessary to commit such crimes, but they are crimes none the less. It is said that we sleep peacefully because others stand ready to do violence on our behalf, but that does not make it right. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who served and those who continue to serve, but we owe them more: we owe them our best efforts to avoid waging war in the first place.

Graham Evans: As this debate is about the Somme, I thought the hon. Lady would like to join me in paying tribute to the Australian armed forces that fought so superbly at Pozières. Not only is there a fantastic memorial there, but soil from Pozières was used for the burial of the Australian unknown soldier in Canberra.

Deidre Brock: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point and I appreciate his raising it at this time, but I hope that I have already paid tribute to the Anzac soldiers in my comments.

Those who fought in previous wars should be remembered, and those who defend us now should be honoured and paid well. Those who come back from the battlefield injured should be looked after, and their rehabilitation and long-term care should be shouldered completely by the Government, not simply by charity. A century after the carnage of the Somme, we still send young people into harm’s way. The very least we can do is to treat them well.

6.47 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): All the belligerents—the Germans, the French and we the British, too—thought the year 1916 would be one for decisive results. The Germans felt that they could severely knock out the French. I think that is right, but I would ask my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) whether it is. He taught me at Sandhurst, although I was asleep most of the time. The Germans believed the French were slightly weaker than the British and that knocking out the French would bring the British to heel and sort out the problem.

As my hon. Friend has already hinted, and I will continue on the same theme, that caused the Battle of Verdun, which started on 21 February 1916. The Germans and the French went at it in that fortified town, and it went very badly for our allies the French. My wife’s French family have a biscuit tin filled with various medals—the Légion d’Honneur, the Croix de Guerre and the Medal Militaire—which were gained by her family at Verdun. All 11 of them were killed. Now the family does not even know to whom the medals were awarded. As my hon. Friend stressed, Verdun was hell

on earth. Unsurprisingly, the French General Joffre, as allied commander-in-chief, pressed his British allies to take the pressure off Verdun by a massive attack in our sector. Our commander-in-chief, General Haig, wanted to delay until August, but Joffre was insistent, and thus the Battle of the Somme started on 1 July.

In his book, "Britain and Her Army", the military historian Correlli Barnett wrote that

"the British army in France by 1916 was the largest, most complicated, and most comprehensive single organisation ever evolved by the British nation."

and that no peacetime operation in either Government or private enterprise could begin to compare with it. But all that organisation was to count for nought and would be largely annihilated by what was to happen.

On the Somme, German positions were mainly on the high ground, and they had incredible shelters, some of which were as deep as 30 to 40 feet underground. British preliminary bombardments had started a week earlier but with not as many shells as we had hoped, and they had little effect because the Germans were relatively safe deep underground. As the bombardment ended, the whistles blew and our men started moving across that dreadful area. The Germans came out of their deep shelters and mowed down our men as they crossed no-man's land, which could be up to a mile wide and was in full view of the enemy.

The attack started at 7.30 in the morning with whistles blowing up and down the line—I think we will replicate that at 7.30 am in many of the commemorations on 1 July. Four battalions of my regiment, the Cheshires, went over the top in that first assault. Day one was a total failure—well almost; a little bit of the German line was captured. Estimates vary, but about 20,000 men were killed and 60,000 wounded. The carnage was enormous. A company of the 5th Cheshires lost every officer and all its men—they stood no chance.

Today I do not suppose that we can even get near to understanding how difficult it must have been to keep going through the oozing mud, wire and shell holes when one's closest friends were dropping all around, often in agony. The effect on our soldiers must have been utterly horrific. Let me read what I say at all military funerals that I have attended, and quote the words of Padre Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, who was known as "Woodbine Willie" by all the men:

"There are many kinds of sorrow in this world of love and hate but there is no keener sorrow than a soldier's for his mate".

I will end with a little story that links today with 100 years ago. In 1982, when I was a terribly good-looking young major—[*Interruption.*] Thank you—I wanted to lighten the tone. In 1982 as a company commander in Northern Ireland, I lost my company when six of my men were killed and 35 wounded. Those were not quite the casualties that the Ulster Division had, but it was not far off and—as in the first world war—it took place in one incident: the Ballykelly bomb. I had not only to be the incident commander through the night, but it took me six hours to identify my men. I then had to bring them home, and they were all buried within the boundaries of Cheshire.

As I came out of St George's, Stockport, after the second funeral I had been to in that church that week—this must have been just before Christmas 1982—I saw an old lady who was crying. I crossed the road and put my arms around her. I am afraid, ladies, I am a bit of a dinosaur and I said to her, "Don't worry, darling, he's

out of his pain." She said, "You don't understand, young man." In my mind I was thinking, "I bloody well do understand. I held him as he died." I did not say that, but she read my mind. She said, "No, you clearly don't understand. When I was a little girl, I stood on this spot and watched 800 men of the 6th Cheshires go into that church. When they came back from the Battle of the Somme, they filled three pews."

6.56 pm

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Over the past decades the Battle of the Somme, and the first world war more generally, has passed from living memory to shared national history. Those who experienced at first-hand the horror of fighting in the trenches are no longer with us. Their children, who were brought up in the shadow of the war fully aware of the huge impact it had, are falling in number. For the majority of us now, the Battle of the Somme is something impersonal. We read about it in school textbooks, and those who perished on the battlefields of France are remembered perhaps too often as numbers, rather than as the people they were.

Everybody knows that nearly 20,000 British soldiers died on the first day of the battle, 1 July 1916, and that by the end of the battle, in November 1916, over 1 million men had either lost their lives or been injured. Few of us, however, can comprehend the huge sense of loss and devastation that engulfed the country at the time of the tragic battle. In every city, town and village, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters received news of their sons, husbands, fathers and brothers who had suffered or had died. No community was left unscathed by the battle.

At the time of going to war in 1914, the regular professional British Army was already Scots-heavy and it was supplemented by volunteers as the war got under way. There were 4.6 million Scots, comprising less than 10% of Britain's pre-war population, yet they made up 13% of the volunteers in 1914 and 1915. A total of 147,609 Scots lost their lives in the four-year conflict between 1914 and 1918. Scotland's soldiers accounted for a fifth of Britain's war dead, although Scots were only a tenth of Britain's population.

At the Battle of the Somme, the casualties, as a percentage of the British Army total, did not include as many Scots as at the Battle of Loos the year before, where one third of the casualty list served in Scottish regiments. However, the number of Scottish troops who took part was considerable. Three Scottish divisions took part in the battle and many other battalions were involved. Many of these battalions were volunteers known, as we have heard, as the Pals battalions. They were particularly affected by the battle. One of these was the 16th Royal Scots, which became known as McCrae's battalion, after the charismatic Lieutenant-Colonel Sir George McCrae, who rallied the men of Edinburgh to enlist beside him. It is also known as the sporting battalion, after the whole of Heart of Midlothian football team joined up. Prior to enlisting, the Hearts team were taunted for continuing to play football rather than supporting the war effort, with a letter in the *Edinburgh Evening News* stating that they should adopt the *nom de plume*, the White Feathers of Midlothian. However, when the team committed themselves to the war, the same paper declared:

"There is only one football champion in Scotland, and its colours are maroon and khaki."

[John Nicolson]

They were followed by professionals from other football and sporting clubs and their supporters. McCrae's battalion was one of many to go over the top on the first day of the Somme. Some of the battalion managed to fight through, capturing the strong point that became known as the Scots redoubt. Others made it to the village of Contalmaison—the deepest penetration of the German front lines that morning—but few of them lived to tell the tale. By the end of the day, the battalion had lost 12 officers and 573 soldiers. Three-quarters of the 16th Royal Scots were killed and wounded on 1 July. A distinguished conduct medal, three military crosses and seven military medals were awarded to the bravest of McCrae's men.

That was not the only Scottish battalion to show remarkable bravery at the Somme. On the morning of the battle, David Laidlaw, who was commanding the 16th Highland Light Infantry, commented that his men were

“singing and whistling as if they were going to a football match instead of one of the most serious encounters in the world's history.”

Despite losing 20 officers and 534 men on the first day, three platoons held out for eight days against ferocious German attacks after being isolated following an attack on a trench called the Frankfurt. There was no military worth in holding out for so long, but it said everything about their bravery and heroism that they did so.

One soldier to show heroism at the Somme was John Meikle, born in Kirkintilloch in my constituency of East Dunbartonshire. Like many others, he was so anxious to join up at the beginning of the war that he lied about his age and fought at the Somme aged just 17. Despite his extreme youth, he quickly rose up the ranks and survived the battle. Sadly, he was killed two years later at the second Battle of the Marne. To mark his death, a commemorative plaque in his honour will be laid in Kirkintilloch in two years' time. John is thought to be one of the youngest-ever recipients of the Victoria Cross and is one of only 25 men under the age of 20 to receive the award. After his death, his family did not attend the official presentation of his Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace. Why? They were unable to afford the associated expense of new clothes and accommodation in London. Instead, they chose to receive the decoration during a local parade in Glasgow.

Unfortunately, that was an all too familiar story for those who lost close family members or for those returning from the battlefield. While they were promised a land fit for heroes by the then Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the reality was very different. In many towns and villages, the male populations had been wiped out. The profound effects of mental and physical injury left many soldiers incapable of adapting back into society. Unemployment was rife, and half a million decent homes to be built by 1933 did not materialise.

My grandfather, John George Stant, was one of those who volunteered and served. His letters home to his mum in Scotstoun in Glasgow, written in immaculate copperplate, with a signed oath on each envelope, spell out his hopes and fears—absurd optimism giving way to grim despair. The job that was promised to him was not there in reality, so he decided not to return home. There was little choice but to join the army of occupation

marching into Germany, where he was billeted with a kind family in Cologne. They left him a present under their Christmas tree that year, as he told his mum in a letter.

My grandpa survived only to be killed by a German bomb in the Glasgow shipyards 20 years later, but many did not get those extra 20 years. The chaplain at the Somme wrote a letter to the parents of Peter Logan of Milngavie, who was killed on 20 July 1916. He said:

“It is some help to bear your heavy loss to know that he was doing his heroic bit in this battle and that he had made his great sacrifice for a cause that stands for everything we hold dear.”

Tragically, despite such great heroism and sacrifice at the Somme and throughout the first world war, the devastation left behind, the failure to build a new Britain and the inability to build a lasting peace in Europe meant that the sacrifices were often in vain, and many who survived found themselves battling on the home front just 20 years later.

We must never forget the horrors of war or the personal stories that go with it. As many at the Somme and those left behind found out, the devastation of war far exceeded the glory. The Battle of the Somme will be forever etched into the national memory of villages, towns and cities throughout these islands and Europe, especially as we mark the battle's centenary this week, but if we do just one thing we must remember this: it is easy to stand up in the House, make grand speeches and pay homage to those who died, but the best memorial to them would be if everyone here were to think very carefully before casting a vote for war and be absolutely certain that they have the best interests of our troops at heart and are protecting them and their lives.

7.6 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): It is an honour to follow the moving speech from the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) about the Scottish regiments' contribution to the Somme and about what we should always bear in mind in the House when we commemorate the dreadful events of 100 years ago.

It is right that we commemorate the Somme on 1 July. We will be doing so in my Sussex constituency of Horsham, in the town itself, in Crawley Down and in other villages and towns around the constituency. My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) referred to the battle beginning on 1 July, but of course the preceding artillery barrage started on 24 June—[*Interruption*—] as he is now reminding us. The barrage grew in intensity until, by 1 July, it could be heard on the Sussex coast.

The Somme campaign involved a series of related engagements, however, and it is on one of them that I want to touch briefly. Even before 1 July, some of our forces were going over the top. A diversionary attack was launched on 30 June, the day before the battle, at 3.5 am. It took place away from the Somme, in the Richebourg sector, at an emplacement known as the Boar's Head, and was designed to persuade the Germans that the real thrust was coming from elsewhere. It was conducted by three battalions of the Royal Sussex Regiment—the Southdown Battalions: the 11th Battalion, in a support role, suffered 116 casualties; the 12th Battalion suffered 429 casualties; and the 13th Battalion, which was destroyed, suffered 800 killed, wounded or captured.

In that engagement, which lasted five hours, no fewer than 12 sets of brothers were killed. The battle mimicked what would happen the next day on the Somme. In horrific fighting, the troops advanced on prepared positions and captured the frontline. In fact, they captured a notice, written helpfully in English, that read, "Welcome Sussex boys. We've been waiting days for you". The battle followed a three-day artillery barrage. They held the frontline and penetrated right through to the support trenches, which they held for four hours, before a complete shortage of ammunition forced them to withdraw. There was terrific heroism. The company sergeant major, Nelson Carter, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

The people of Sussex know that, for understandable reasons, their battle will always take second place to the carnage the following day on the Somme—the battle of Boar's Head does not even feature in the official history of the war, despite the losses and the valour—but in proposing today's motion, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) mentioned that one of the many emotions that went through our soldiers' minds as they went over the top was pride in their neighbourhoods. I wanted to put it on the record that the neighbourhoods and the county of Sussex still take huge pride in those men. Sussex will always remember 30 June 1916 as the day that Sussex died.

7.9 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to contribute on this issue. As the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) clearly outlined in his introduction, in the Province of Ulster or Northern Ireland as it is now, we remember with great pride the courage of our forefathers at the Battle of the Somme. I would also like to thank the hon. Gentleman for the overseeing work that he has done for the whole of the United Kingdom in the commemorations for the first world war.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) is not in his place, but it is only fair to put on record on behalf of the MPs and the people of Northern Ireland our recognition of the energy, drive and leadership of my right hon. Friend as the chairman of the Northern Ireland First World War Centenary Committee. Many events taking place today are happening because of his leadership. He would always say that it was due to those around him, but the fact of the matter is that he is the Michael O'Neill of this first world war commemorative committee.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I want to put it on the record that he spoke most gallantly. We in Northern Ireland want to thank him very much for his courage, his leadership and heroics. He will not take it lightly, but we mean it. I thank him for all he did in uniform for Northern Ireland and for helping to make it a better place today. I thank him so much for that, which is something I have always wanted to say publicly in this Chamber; it is only right that we should do so.

As the diktat of home rule loomed, Ulstermen and women organised their resistance. From 1910, the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Council had been persuading the Dubliner, Edward Carson, to become their leader. In 1911, he wrote to James Craig that in return for his leadership he wanted to satisfy himself that the people really meant to resist:

"I am not for a game of bluff and, unless men are prepared to make great sacrifices which they clearly understand, the talk of resistance is useless."

Under the leadership of famous Lord Carson among many others, Ulster stood up and backed up her defiance with a willingness to fight. Up to half a million signed the Ulster covenant, signalling their intent to resist home rule by all means necessary, and over 100,000 signed up to join the Ulster Volunteers, should such means of resistance become necessary.

From where I am from in Strangford, I can see the Helen's Tower where the 36th (Ulster) Division trained. It is always good to remember that. Just three weeks ago, the Orange institution of which I am proud to be a member in the fourth district of Newtownards paraded on the same route that the men marched down after their training at Helen's Tower before they went off to Newtownards to catch the train to go to fight in the first world war and the Battle of the Somme. Wearing a different hat as a mayor back in 1991 and '92, I had the opportunity to visit the Somme, and I will always remember the youth of those who died so clearly for a cause, as they did.

At a rally in the Ulster Hall, Fred Crawford, who had been keen on obtaining arms to challenge home rule from the mid-1890s, stated:

"I predict that Home Rule will never be killed until we show any British Government which brings it forward that we will resist to the death, even with arms if necessary".

But soon, a foe beyond our shores would raise its head. This is pertinent to last week when the Ulster boys were making all the noise at the Euros; 100 years ago, our boys were sent off to France. Without fear, reservation or doubt and with no uncertainty in their conviction, our boys went off to fight for King, country and empire. Their presence alone turned heads before a shot was even fired.

In July 1915, the division moved to Seaford on the Sussex coast of England. This was the first time that many of the men had been outside their native land. Lord Kitchener inspected the division there on 27 July 1915, and later remarked to Carson:

"Your Division of Ulstermen is the finest I have yet seen."

Off to France our 36th Ulster Division went—and in the finest spirit and as finely trained as they could be.

In March 1916, the sector of the front held by the Ulster Division was extended to cover an area south of the river called Thiepval wood. This wood, the name of which would become indelibly linked to the Province of Ulster, served as a base until the commencement of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. Thiepval comprised an area of some 100 acres of deciduous forest and was criss-crossed with deep communication trenches leading to the front line. Dugouts were excavated from the chalky earth and provided some shelter from the German artillery.

Food stores and ammunition dumps were also constructed in the wood, and it was near one of those dumps, on the morning of 1 July, that Rifleman William McFadzean, of the 14th Royal Irish Rifles (Young Citizen Volunteers), won immortal fame when he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for an act of courageous self-sacrifice. Last Saturday, in my constituency, we unveiled a new commemoration garden and a new monument to the 36th (Ulster) Division, 100 years after the event, and we mentioned the four VCs that were won by members of that division.

[Jim Shannon]

Thiepval wood housed the four battalions of 109th Brigade. The River Ancre divided the 108th Brigade, with two battalions in the wood and two in the village of Hamel. Divisional headquarters were at Aveluy Wood, which also housed the 107th Brigade.

On 1 July 1916, as the morning mists cleared away, the assault waves of 130,000 British infantry called their rolls and checked their arms and ammunition. Each man was in “fighting order”, and given the extra burden of shovels, grenades, a Stokes mortar bomb, wire cutters, a gas mask, a prepared charge of explosives for cutting gaps in wire and other obstacles, many of them were carrying up to 90 lb. At 7.30 am, zero hour, the artillery barrage lifted off the first German line and moved on to the second. That was the first employment of the so-called rolling barrage. Steel-helmeted and with bayonets fixed, the infantry left their trenches and advanced. A senior officer wrote to *The Times* of the Ulster Division:

“It was done as if it was a parade movement on the barrack square”.

They were closely packed in rigid lines, the military doctrine of the day being that they should swarm on to the enemy trenches as soon as their own artillery had lifted, but that stiff formation prevented the use of cover and inhibited initiative. Thousands of Ulstermen reportedly dumped supplies so that they could be as fast and as agile as possible.

From 1915 until 1918, the 36th Division was commanded by Major-General Oliver Nugent, a general of distinction. The 36th was one of the few divisions to make significant gains on the first day on the Somme. It attacked between the Ancre and Thiepval against a position known as the Schwaben redoubt. We are told that the leading battalions of the division

“had been ordered out from the wood just before 7.30am and laid down near the German trenches...At zero hour...blew the ‘Advance’.”

It is said that many of those Ulstermen wore their orange sashes when they went over the top. The pipes were skirling—the Ulstermen loved the pipes, as we still do—and they advanced out of their trenches full of energy, courage and conviction. They

“rushed the German front line...By a combination of sensible tactics and Ulster dash, the prize that eluded so many, the capture of a long section of the German front line, had been accomplished.”

At first, south of the Ancre, everything went well, and the 108th and 109th Brigades moved over the German trenches with few casualties. Scarcely were they across, however, when the German batteries opened a barrage on “no man’s land”.

Bob Stewart: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to intervene on my good friend. I seem to recall that an officer rallied the troops with the very appropriate battle cry for the moment, “No surrender”.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman has said it for me. I thank him for the benefit of his knowledge, as always.

Simultaneously, the resolute German machine-gunners, who had remained safe from our bombardment, sprang up from their shelters, pulling up their guns and heavy ammunition boxes, and raked our men from the flanks and the rear, thinning the waves of soldiers. Many officers fell, and the men went on alone.

The Ulster Division’s position was now a vulnerable salient in the German line, a few hundred yards wide and raked by German fire. At dusk, a powerful counter-attack by fresh German troops drove our men, almost weaponless, back to the second German line, which they held all the next day until they were relieved at night by the troops of the 49th Division. They withdrew, having suffered horrendous casualties. The Innskillings lost more men than any British regiment had ever lost in a single day. Of the 15th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, only 70 men answered a roll call on that night of 1 July. The total number of British casualties on that first day was 60,000. Many homes were affected in my constituency, in Ards and Comber, in the borough of Ards and North Down, and there are many memorials there to lost loved ones and to the injured. Families lost brothers, sons, fathers and uncles. Some families lost two of their members, and some lost three. The losses were horrendous.

Through no fault of their own, the blinding success that the Ulstermen had achieved had not been exploited, but the Battle of the Somme had inflicted on the Germans a wound from which they never fully recovered. I love this statement by Captain Wilfred Spender of the Ulster Division’s HQ staff, which was quoted earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley. It was reported in the press after the battle The captain said:

“I am not an Ulsterman but yesterday, the 1st. July, as I followed their amazing attack, I felt that I would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world.”

He further stated:

“The Ulster Division has lost more than half the men who attacked and, in doing so, has sacrificed itself for the Empire which has treated them none too well. The much derided Ulster Volunteer Force has won a name which equals any in history. Their devotion, which no doubt has helped the advance elsewhere, deserved the gratitude of the British Empire. It is due to the memory of these brave fellows that their beloved Province shall be fairly treated.”

In serving King and empire, the men of the Ulster Volunteers had in their incredible bravery in the 36th secured Ulster’s place within the United Kingdom. Let us never forget their sacrifice and let us live with the same vigour and valour that they did show.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. If all remaining colleagues who are interested in speaking in the debate are to be accommodated, each needs to be speak for no longer than six or seven minutes because we must have the winding-up speeches, and hopefully there will be an opportunity for the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) to wind up.

7.20 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). July 1 1916 was the bloodiest day for the British Army and the start of our bloodiest battle. As nations applied the lessons of the industrial revolution to the battlefield, there were casualty rates of 20,000 a day—60,000 casualties on the first day—and nearly 1 million men were killed over the course of the several months of the battle. Those rates are slightly numbing. How do you put faces

to close on 1 million men? How can you prevent so many tragedies from becoming, as the saying has it, mere statistics?

In my constituency of Solihull, we have a strong connection with our history—many Members have reflected on the history of their own constituencies. On 1 July, the mayor will be hosting our borough's own commemoration of this pivotal battle, next to a replica trench in the grounds of Kingshurst academy. That will bring history to life for a new generation. I always find with younger people that they have a real, deep respect when faced with the sacrifices of our forebears and have real empathy for what they went through.

I would like to pay tribute to the men and women from my community who paid the ultimate price during the Battle of the Somme and during the Great War. There is not time enough to list them all: 24 Solihull men—Silhillians—died on the first day of the battle, and 127 would die before it concluded in November. Solihull was a very small place then in comparison with now, so we can imagine the impact on the community. Many hon. Members have mentioned that in relation to their own communities. These were people everyone knew. I remember the names I have seen and taken note of on the local war memorial: William Bolton, Charles Frost, Charles Haynes, David Jelfs, Clive Latch and Claud Wilks. Also listed are three members of the same family: Albert, Henry and Sidney Britt, all of whom served and died during the Great War. We are very lucky to live in a country where it is difficult to imagine any family suffering so terribly in a war. However, perhaps these days such things are becoming all too more frequent in our civilian lives.

For every man who died, another came home with life-changing injuries to a society ill prepared for them. This centenary offers us an important opportunity, amidst the sadness and respect, to recognise how far we have come in our treatment of veterans. This is not just about medical science, although that has come an astonishing distance since the Somme, as society has applied the same innovative genius to healing men as it once did to killing them. It is also about our much greater understanding of the mental and spiritual traumas that war inflicts on those who serve.

I am pleased that our country is making great strides towards improved mental health support for our servicemen and women, but we still have a long way to go and for many years our progress was too slow in that regard. I always think it is a great shame in our society that many of those who are homeless are former armed services personnel. I will do my best to support those efforts in my role as a Member of Parliament.

Of course, the age of total war meant that the wounds and risks were not borne by soldiers alone. A huge number of courageous men and women on all sides served in medical and technical positions, which were essential to the war effort. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) mentioned that many of the shells fired at the Somme were dud. It was very much a testament to the women of this country working in the munitions factories that they made such a difference in improving the quality of the armaments, thereby helping to deliver victory. So let me pay tribute to them now, especially to the extraordinary women who overcame great prejudice to play their vital part.

Even before the sheer scale of the slaughter, the authorities had invited them to serve in a wide range of important roles.

Events like this centenary remind us not only how lucky we are to live in an age when mass mechanised warfare is seemingly not imminent but of the incalculable debt all of us owe to the men and women of our armed forces today.

7.25 pm

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): It is an honour to follow the thoughtful speech of the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) and it is good to be speaking today. I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) for securing this debate.

It is also slightly embarrassing to think that the right hon. Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) talked about those of us who might have been sleeping at Sandhurst in the '70s while he presented his lectures. I do remember the lectures from him and John Keegan. They were lectures where someone could stand and speak and, although we were exhausted, keep our attention all the time; they were fantastic, and I am sorry the right hon. Gentleman is not in the Chamber at the moment.

I also thank all those who worked in Northern Ireland, particularly the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) for all the hard work he has done with the centenary committee and all the work that has gone into pulling everything together in Northern Ireland. This is sounding rather like a wedding speech with lots of thank yous. I also thank my colleague the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for going into the history and detail because it saves me from having to do so. I knew that both of them would be speaking before me.

One thought always runs through our minds when we have gone to the Somme and have stood in the trenches. I sit there as an ex-member of the armed forces and think, "Could I have done it? Could I have led men out of those trenches on the sound of the whistle?" The answer has to be yes, but with knees knocking, and worry and concern. I think we all learned something from those battles—it has come all the way through the military to today—about how we look after each other and work together. They were heroes and people we should all be saluting.

I also remember from my time at Sandhurst going to the memorial chapel. I was brought up on the basis of the Somme and the Ulstermen, but I remember sitting by a pillar for, I think, the Middlesex Regiment, and looking at the names of a family called Usher, of whom there were, I think, some 12, all killed. We have already heard of the Pals battalions. This brought home to me that it was not just Ulster; it was the whole of the United Kingdom; it was everybody giving their blood so that we could have our freedom in the future. That really ran through me and made me realise how brave they had all been.

We have heard much about the Ulster Division, but we have not really made the link on our side to the fact that the Easter Rising was the same year. The Ulster Volunteer Force, which became that Ulster Division, was in France and Belgium to stand up for the freedom of Ulster, and while they were there, all the wrong

[*Danny Kinahan*]

things were happening at home. I would like to thank the Irish Government for all the work they have done this year with the centenaries—the wonderful work to mark them all in absolutely the right way. That has been exemplary.

Bob Stewart: I am only going to repeat something I have said in this House before, but it is terribly important. The men from the north of Ireland—Northern Ireland—and from the south of Ireland together got more Victoria Crosses than the Scots, the English and the Welsh put together. They were incredible.

Danny Kinahan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment. It is so true, and perhaps it shows that our wish to fight has always run through us strongly. It shows how brave they were.

We also had the honour of the Queen unveiling the statue of Robert Quigg, which was touched on earlier. It is wonderful that he is being remembered. He went out seven times to pull back those who were injured when looking for his previous employer, an officer who was never found. He, however, survived the war. He was one of the few VCs to do so.

As I wonder whether I could have gone over the top, I must point out that every person who did so was brave. Everyone who went over the top and into those guns deserves to be remembered, not just those who got the medals. It is also poignant that the Irish were there with us all the way through, and we must always mark their bravery. We must remember everyone together.

When I started in politics, I went to the Somme with the various bonfire groups from my local town. Watching people standing to attention like ramrods in front of the graves of their grandfathers really brought it home to me that this was their battle and that they were proud of it. That is what we should all remember today. On Saturdays, when I can, I go to the Ballyclare Comrades football club, which has a historical connection with C company the 12th Irish Rifles, who were said to have played football between the trenches. I am never quite sure whether it is true that they were the ones from the story, but that is always what is said. Today, let us all remember everything. Walter Lord, in his book on the Titanic, said that when questions were being asked afterwards, the need to look after the third class passengers was raised. The first world war also brought home the fact that we had to look after everyone and that every life mattered.

7.31 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. It is entirely appropriate that, within our commemorations of the Great War, we take particular note of the Battle of the Somme. I want to highlight the role of my local Pals battalion, which was raised in the Grimsby and Cleethorpes area. It was not unique, in that young men up and down the country were signing up, but it was unique in that it was known as the Grimsby Chums. “Chums” has a rather old-fashioned sound to it these days, but the name emphasises the camaraderie that was needed by our serving forces.

Kitchener was appointed on 6 August 1914. He said that he did not believe that this would be a short war that would be over by Christmas. The Army at the time was 450,000 strong, but 118,000 were serving in India and elsewhere in the empire. However, we had 250,000 territorials. Kitchener was determined to get millions into uniform, and on 7 August he launched his campaign to recruit 100,000 men. The response to his appeal was unprecedented, and the system was overwhelmed.

In Grimsby and Cleethorpes, as elsewhere, local dignitaries stepped in with offers of help. Kitchener agreed to the formation of the Pals battalions. They had certain things in common—recruits’ work, background or the town where they lived—and 304 such battalions were formed. On 9 August, Alderman John Herbert Tate, the Mayor of Grimsby, received a telegram advising him that he had been appointed by the War Office to take charge of local recruitment. The patriotism and determination of the local men from Grimsby, Cleethorpes and the surrounding district were never in doubt. Grimsby had never been a garrison town. Until the time of the Great War, it had been relatively small and had only recently been transformed into a major fishing town. That industry was to expand to make it the greatest fishing port in the world.

The opportunity for adventure and to become a soldier of the empire was irresistible to many. Alderman Tate appointed George Bennett, a local timber merchant, as acting commanding officer. Bennett was a retired captain from the 1st Lincolnshire Royal Garrison Artillery (Volunteers). A permanent CO was subsequently appointed: step forward Lieutenant Colonel the right hon. George Edward Heneage. Plucked from retirement, he answered the call. His father, Lord Heneage, had been Grimsby’s MP and was subsequently high steward of the borough—incidentally, a position now held by our former colleague Austin Mitchell. The name “Chums” appeared in print on 11 September 1914 in the *Grimsby Daily Telegraph*. The term was taken up by the redoubtable Lady Eugenia Doughty, wife of Sir George Doughty, who was Grimsby’s MP and owner of the said newspaper. Wouldn’t it be nice for present-day MPs to own their local newspapers? Think of the headlines we could get.

Initially, there were no uniforms or cap badges, but they gradually took shape. Recruitment was encouraged by headmasters at local schools. Clee Grammar and St James’ School in Grimsby were prominent among them, but also in the local area was the grammar school at Louth. In an effort to establish a more permanent camp, Alderman Tate approached the Earl of Yarborough, whose Brocklesby estate lies just 10 miles out of town. His lordship was pleased to agree to the request. The months passed, but the battalion was eventually to leave Brocklesby in May 1915. Before it headed south, it marched through the streets of Grimsby and Cleethorpes, with thousands lining the route. More training and preparation followed before the battalion departed for France on 4 January 1916.

The early months were but preparation for what was to follow. As the Battle of the Somme approached, officers were confidently telling men that the enemy could not survive the “big push”. The Somme assault was the first attack on prepared German positions that had been held since September 1914 and was designed to reduce pressure on French troops at Verdun. On

1 July 1916, the 101st Brigade, as part of the 34th Division, within which the Grimsby Chums were found, was situated near La Boisselle. The Chums were ordered to take the town. As the attack began, a mine was to be detonated and the Chums were ordered to occupy the crater itself. Rum was issued to the troops at 4.30 am and they moved into their positions. The mine was detonated and the attack started at 7.30 am. However, the two-minute wait between the explosion and the attack was long enough for German gunners to set up machine guns and aim at the British lines.

The Chums were forced to begin their attack from the communication and reserve trenches due to the size of the explosion and the danger of falling debris, adding 150 yards of unprotected advance before the British front line was even reached. From this point, the Chums had to advance across 500 yards of no-man's land. Three companies were sent into the attack, advancing in four lines and walking slowly through no-man's land. The idea was that the enemy had been weakened by a combination of mine and artillery bombardment. In a description by the commander of the 34th Division, the men

“advanced as on parade and never flinched.”

One description stated that

“it was wonderful the way they were dropping in perfect coordination. But then I noticed they were not getting up. They were being dropped by bullets.”

The men were almost immediately mowed down with no gains made. By noon, it had become apparent that the main German trench was intact and German weapons were still functioning. The Chums were involved in other actions, suffering many hundreds of casualties.

When the war ended in November 1918, the colours of the 10th (Service) Battalion the Lincolnshire Regiment were handed over to the St James church in Grimsby—now Grimsby minster. Parades were held for the remaining men of the battalion. The young men of Grimsby and Cleethorpes had stepped forward in 1914, as they would again in 1939, and they did not flinch. They stepped forward to serve King and country. Of course, a sense of adventure played its part, but patriotism and pride in their country and a determination to protect freedom were also in their thoughts. Between 1916 and 1918, the Chums fought in six major engagements. Some were successful, but others were appalling defeats. At the Battle of the Somme, 15 officers and 487 men were declared killed, missing or wounded. That pride and patriotism were on display again only four days ago when Cleethorpes hosted the national weekend event for Armed Forces Day. Cleethorpes attracted 120,000 people to honour our forces.

Many Chums who survived the horrors of war rose to positions of leadership in the local community. On 14 August 1918, Charles Emmerson wrote in his regimental diary:

“There is not another battalion like the 10th Lincolnshire and there never can be.”

They were the town's best and bravest.

In his book “Grimsby's Own”, local journalist and writer Peter Chapman concludes by stating he hopes that Grimsby—I would add Cleethorpes and district—will never forget those who came home with their memories and those who gave their lives in the 10th (Service)

Battalion. May that be so. Grimsby and Cleethorpes are proud of the Chums. We honour them today and always.

7.40 pm

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for securing this debate.

I grew up with the Somme. My grandparents and great grandparents served on the Somme. My neighbours in the council estate in south Manchester where I grew up served on the Somme. I used to speak to them as a very young man. I have a great uncle who was named after the Battle of Verdun. I have walked the Somme and cycled the Somme. I took my girlfriend round the Somme, visiting the battlefields. She is now Mrs Evans—I know how to treat a girl.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) for putting this battle into historical context as only he can. We had friends—they were the French, the Russians and the Italians. As he ably said, we were planning an attack to kick the Germans out of territories in Belgium and France. However, the Germans struck first. They took Verdun, which was critical to the French, who were being bled white. Our allies and friends called on us to join the attack, but we were not ready. The Somme was not the area or the time of our choosing, because our Army was a citizen army and only half trained. None the less, we chose to help our friends then. If we were called on today, 100 years later, to vote in this House on such action, would we as politicians go to the aid of our friends and neighbours? If members of NATO were attacked in the same way, would we go to their aid? I do not have an answer to that.

Bob Stewart: I have—yes, we would.

Graham Evans: I am glad to hear it.

Let me go back to the Somme and how it affects our communities. If Members go to a war memorial in their constituency, they will see names such as Thomas, James, Harry and George. If they then go to their local primary school and look at the children's coat pegs, they will see Thomas, James, Harry and George. Those forebears grew up in our communities 100 years ago. If they were here today, they would recognise those communities. It is important to remember that they were once young people who sacrificed their lives.

I have a couple of examples from Weaver Vale to read out before I give others a chance to speak. The Norley wildflower walk is about the men of Norley. Eighty-seven served in the first world war and only 77 returned, which meant that 10 were killed. The community looked at where those men lived. Norley is a classic Cheshire village—a beautiful little village. People can walk around the village and see shrines made up of wild flowers commemorating those 10 men of Norley, three of whom died on the Somme. That is an indication of the significance of the Battle of the Somme. The three men were: Lance Corporal Samuel Grindlay, aged 35, who joined the East Lancashire Regiment; Private Arthur Rutter, aged 25, who joined the Manchester Regiment; and Private Edward Parrot, aged 20, who joined the Cheshire Regiment

[Graham Evans]

and was killed on 5 September. By coincidence, my parliamentary researcher realised that her great grandfather—a chap called Bernard Quigley—was killed in the same battle as Edward Parrot.

When I visited the Somme with my family, we tasked our children with finding Bernard Quigley's grave. It is in the big Serre Road cemetery on the Somme. It is always sad to hear the personal stories. Bernard had three children. When he went off to fight, his wife was pregnant. She died in childbirth and the four children were orphaned. That shows the tragedy that that war brought to so many.

Todger Jones served in 1st Battalion the Cheshire Regiment. Todger was a great man, although diminutive. In photographs his rifle and bayonet look bigger than him. What did Todger do? The Germans were shooting at Todger and his comrades. Against orders, he decided to take the German sniper out. He jumped into the trench and shot three Germans very quickly, firing from the hip—he had learned to shoot his Lee-Enfield from the hip. Little did he know that there were 150 Germans; they took one look at Todger and went into their dug-out. He took 150 Germans prisoner and earned the VC.

Todger received the VC at Buckingham Palace during the first world war and went to Runcorn and told the people that he dedicated his VC to his comrades on the front line. Despite what we have said about the horror, all he wanted to do was to go back and serve on the front line. He earned a DCM for an act that, in my view, was even braver than the one for which he earned the VC. That says something about the character of the British nation. I was pleased to raise funds for a magnificent bronze statue of Todger in Runcorn.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) is a good Yorkshireman. The memorial of the Serre massacre is in the Sheffield memorial park. That is a misnomer because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, it commemorates the contribution of not just Sheffield, but Barnsley, Accrington and Chorley. The 31st Division is the epitome of the service battalions, the Pals battalions, the Kitchener's army, because the whole lot were volunteers and suffered significant casualties on the first day.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central mentioned the Devonshire memorial. For me, there is no better place on the Somme. It is a beautiful area, but sombre if one knows the story behind it. Mansell copse is very special not just because of the Devonshires and what happened there to the 8th and 9th Devons, but because of Lieutenant William Hodgson, who was a very famous poet. He had already received the Military Cross when he looked at the area that was to be attacked on the first day and he recognised a German emplacement in an area called the shrine. In there was a German machine gun post, and he knew that that machine gun was in a position to take them out when they went over the top. He trained his men to try and take the position but, sadly, they failed.

Exactly 100 years ago, on 29 June 1916, Lieutenant Hodgson wrote a poem. He was a young man leading his men over the top on 1 July. He knew that he was going to die. To conclude my tribute to the men who fought on the Somme, I will read the poem, which is called "Before Action":

"By all the glories of the day,
And the cool evening's benison:
By the last sunset touch that lay
Upon the hills when day was done:
By beauty lavishly outpoured,
And blessings carelessly received,
By all the days that I have lived,
Make me a soldier, Lord.
By all of all men's hopes and fears,
And all the wonders poets sing,
The laughter of unclouded years,
And every sad and lovely thing:
By the romantic ages stored
With high endeavour that was his,
By all his mad catastrophes,
Make me a man, O Lord.

I, that on my familiar hill
Saw with uncomprehending eyes
A hundred of Thy sunsets spill
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice,
Ere the sun swings his noonday sword
Must say good-bye to all of this:—
By all delights that I shall miss,
Help me to die, O Lord."

7.48 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I thank my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and the hon. and gallant Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for giving us this opportunity to pay our respects as we commemorate the centenary of the Somme, a battle that had such an unhappy impact on so many homes in our country.

We also raised a Pals battalion in Portsmouth. The Pals battalions were made up of men drawn from recruiting drives from local areas which benefited massively from the wave of patriotic sentiment that swept the nation at the outbreak of war. Pals battalions allowed friends, colleagues and even relatives to join up together, to do their bit for king and country. However, the Pals battalions system was a double-edged sword. Pals battalions meant that many men from a single town or city all fought in the same battles, in the same section of the battlefield. It was perhaps an unforeseen consequence that where the Pals battalions suffered heavy losses, there would be an immediate, devastating impact on the local community that they came from.

The Somme marked a change in how the Army was supplied with recruits. The close-knit Pals battalions were replaced with largely indiscriminate conscription, bringing together men from across the country to fight together in single units. That may have lessened the impact of a single day's losses on local communities, but the industrial scale of the first world war would mean that no town, city or village would find that their men were immune to the slaughter. The Pompey Pals took part in the battle of the Somme, and they fought in battles before and after it during world war one. Many other men from Portsmouth took part in other formations in the Army at the Somme.

We are fortunate to have in Portsmouth some great people who keep alive the memory of the Pompey Pals. I should like to pay tribute to Bob Beech, Alan Laishley and their colleagues who have been doing this work for many years. A couple of years ago, they created a memorial to our battalions at Fratton Park, our football ground in the heart of the city. It is a fitting place for it, since many of those who joined up were recruited directly from the crowds who poured through the turnstiles there.

The 14th Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment was the formal name of the first Pompey Pals. They participated at the Somme from August 1916, taking part in the push on the River Ancre. In their first major engagement, the battalion suffered 440 casualties in one morning. The 15th Battalion of the Hampshires, the second Pompey Pals battalion, joined the Somme campaign at Flers in September 1916. With several displays of courage, they secured the village of Flers and held it despite constant artillery fire and German counter-attacks. As a result of this action, 305 men were wounded or killed. The two battalions fought along the western front throughout the war, and the second Pompey Pals formed part of the Army of Occupation of Germany afterwards. When the war memorial by Portsmouth Guildhall was unveiled in 1921, a parade of veterans from both battalions was held. The memorial remains a focal point for commemorations to this day, and it is a place for reflection.

We should remember the role played by women in supporting the troops at the front. Many of those women were nurses close to the lines, and they were not immune to the risks of war or the hardship it imposed. Many nurses, in places of grave danger, cared for the wounded and dying with great devotion. We had a memorial service in their honour last autumn in Portsmouth, under the direction of Emma D'Aeth, at the Holy Spirit church in Southsea. Our general hospital in Portsmouth, Queen Alexandra, was originally a military hospital. It was named in honour of the Queen of Edward VII, who sponsored the Army Nursing Corps. As well as those in the Army Nursing Corps, we must remember the women of the Voluntary Aid Detachment who worked in hospitals in the UK and in field hospitals near the front. World war one was the first time that women started taking on roles traditionally done by men, and our nurses were there at the front.

Last November, I visited the battlefields of the Somme and the memorials when I visited my great-uncle's grave. Francis Douglas Adamson died at Cuinchy in November 1915, aged 24. Like many others, he was a much loved son and brother, and his death had a major effect on my family. I recently read a letter from his father—my great-grandfather—in which he reflected on the fact that it was difficult to travel to see the grave, and he said that he hoped that members of the family would visit it. I think I am the first one of my generation to have done so. My great-uncle's photo hangs on the wall in my house in Southsea, and I think of him often.

So many of those who died in the first world war were young men who did not have a chance to start families of their own. These men left no direct descendants to remember them, and it is important that the great-nephews and nieces pass on their stories to the children whom we have been blessed with. I hope that others, like me, will track down the graves of their family members,

which remind us all of why we need to continue to work closely with our dear friends in Europe to stop any further conflicts.

7.54 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for organising this centenary debate. Its subject matter is far enough away in time for many to feel as though it is ancient history, but it is close enough for some of us to have known veterans of that battle.

Let me pay a brief tribute to those in my family, my city and my county who were at the Battle of the Somme. My grandfather, Ogilvie Graham, was 22 at the beginning of the war and an acting Lieutenant Colonel in the Rifle Brigade at 25, with responsibility for others far beyond his years, as was the way in that and many wars. In the Battle of the Somme, he was badly wounded and awarded the DSO.

Like so many of his generation, my grandfather never spoke about the war afterwards. However, there was one great, good thing that came from the Somme, for it was there that he met a young unit administrator in Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. She refused to allow him to take over a farmhouse where her team of nurses, cooks and secretaries was based. Winifred Maud Harford did, however, allow my grandfather to marry her, so the Battle of the Somme is indirectly responsible for who I, my brother and my sisters are. I am just as proud of my grandmother's military MBE from that war as I am of my grandfather's medals.

My city of Gloucester, and the county of Gloucestershire, made an immense contribution to the Battle of the Somme. There were 13 battalions of the Gloucestershire Regiment—the Glosters—in that battle. Some 1,813 members of the regiment died, and about 6,000 were wounded. Carton de Wiart, who himself won a VC commanding the 8th Glosters, noted at one point that he had “eight new officers arrive in the morning, and all were lost by the evening”.

Among the many grisly statistics of death from the Battle of the Somme, I find those among the saddest, alongside the story of the Soul family, from Great Rissington, in Gloucestershire. Mrs Soul had five sons who fought in world war one in different regiments, and all were killed.

On Friday, we will hold a commemoration in Gloucester cathedral, close to the stained glass windows that celebrate Ivor Gurney—Gloucester man and poet of the Severn and the Somme. In his poem “On Somme”, he started with these lines:

“Suddenly into the still air burst thudding
And thudding, and cold fear possessed me all,
On the grey slopes there, where winter in sullen brooding
Hung between height and depth of the ugly fall
Of Heaven to earth; and the thudding was illness' own.”

The thudding is over, but Ivor Gurney never really recovered; he spent years in a mental hospital.

This Friday, in the cathedral, we will commemorate Ivor Gurney and all those from our city and county who fought at the Battle of the Somme. Nearby, in the parish of Hempsted, there will be on display all the research done by Hempsted primary school on those

[Richard Graham]

from the village who fought and died. That will be supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund's special world war one fund.

In our cathedral and in the Lysons memorial hall, we will all be moved again, as Members have been here, by the tragedy of waste, whichever army it was in, and even by the story of the mules from Shandong province that my wife's grandfather shipped to the front for a muddy death.

7.57 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I wish to make a few comments because the Staffordshire Regiment played a magnificent part in the first world war. I also want to commemorate those we remember on Remembrance Sunday. Their names are read out in St. Mary's church in Cheadle and in Stone church. We listen to the roll call and think of the brothers, sisters and all the others who were affected by this enormous tragedy.

I simply want to say this: war is dreadful. My father was killed in the second world war, but people were killed on a massive scale in the first world war, and we do not want that ever to happen again. I am not going to speak about current matters—I just want to remember these people.

I also want to remember those from southern Ireland who took part in the war, just like those from Northern Ireland and from across our territories. There were many such people, including people like Victor Cullen from the Royal Irish Rifles. I would like to mention the names of the regiments: the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, the Royal Munster Fusiliers, the Connaught Rangers, Princess Victoria's Regiment, the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Royal Irish Rifles. It is impossible for us to imagine that the people in these regiments, who became part of southern Ireland for the most part, actually fought with our people. As a result of the troubles, they were vilified afterwards, but now they are entrenched in our memories.

I want to read out, in final tribute, just one part of a poem by Wilfred Owen:

“What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
 Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
 Can patter out their hasty orisons.
 No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,
 Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,
 The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.”

8 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I thank the hon. Members for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for bringing this debate to the Chamber today. It is a pleasure to sum up for the SNP, and to commemorate all the men—so many of them—who lost their lives at the Somme. There have been excellent speeches throughout the debate. They have been informative and moving, for me none more so than that from the hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart).

The war of 1914 to 1918 was terrible and destructive. It tore the continent of Europe apart. Of all the terrible battles, even now, so many years later, the Somme is recognised as defining. More British Army troops died on the first day of the Somme than on any other single day in history. The description by the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) of war as terrible is quite right in that context. As we heard from the right hon. Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson), the Somme was the allied forces “big push” to break German lines, but they were met with fierce resistance from the well-prepared German forces, and the result was months of fighting and terrible loss of life for the British empire, French and German forces. That was in only this one battle, such was the terrible nature of the attrition that characterised the strategy—if that is a word we can use here—of this war.

After a week of heavy artillery bombardment, the British infantry advanced at breakfast time on 1 July 1916. They did so following a whistle blown, in some cases, by Robert Cameron. One hundred years on, to the minute, his nephew, Alan Cameron, chair of the Royal Army Service Corps, will blow the same whistle to mark the end of two minutes silence at the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh castle, where an overnight vigil of remembrance is being held. The fighting at the Somme ultimately lasted from 1 July until 18 November. During that time, the conditions were indescribably horrific, and the battleground was fluid; it was not really clear, a lot of the time, what significant gains or losses were being made.

As we have heard from a number of Members, along with the troops from Britain and European countries British empire troops played a key role in the Great War. Among those involved at the Somme were two Indian regiments that took part in the first and only cavalry charge of the battle, between the High wood and the Delville wood areas, before they were forced to retreat under heavy fire. In common with many other potential advances, this joint Indian and British assault failed because of poor communications. British troops had captured a large amount of ground in the area, and it was planned that the cavalry would exploit this, but because orders came through so slowly, they had to wait around for a fortnight before they saw action, which gave the Germans time to regroup, with disastrous results. The terrible fighting was quite shocking to the Indian soldiers, with one writing home, “This is not war; it is the ending of the world.”

It was indeed the ending of the world for so many of the young men sent to the Somme. They are a lost generation of young men—the Harrys, Jameses and Georges described by the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans)—cut down before they had any chance of a life. Britain, like other countries, sent its young men in numbers, and in reality they were simply numbers, lost to the stalemates and hellish trench warfare of the Somme.

As the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire described so well, the first world war has an enduring association with poetry, with many plunged into hellish conditions reflecting their surroundings in writing and in poems. In his “Anthem for Doomed Youth”, Wilfred Owen described “the monstrous anger of the guns.”

He reflected that war was not glorious, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, of course it is not. We can, and we should, remember those who fell. We should do so

soberly, with respect and with honour. To describe their deaths as glorious, however, does nothing to acknowledge their terrible experience, nor the bravery that service personnel show today, standing for us in the most difficult of circumstances.

As well as the excellent work of charities, such as Poppy Scotland and the Royal British Legion, in commemorating the Battle of the Somme during the first world war, many groups and organisations, including the University of Glasgow, are remembering those lost at the Somme. Huge recruitment drives took place at the Glasgow University Union, a former haunt of both my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) and mine.

In a project taking place near my home, knitted and crocheted squares are being made, each of which represents one of the men lost in the Glasgow Pals battalions we heard about earlier. Such battalions were formed as a result of the Government encouraging groups of young men who worked together or shared common interests to join up together, such as the Grimsby Chums that the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) told us about. It is fitting that these friends should be remembered together, and it is particularly fitting that the squares will be displayed on the rails of the People's Palace in Glasgow so that the Pals of today can remember those groups of Pals, about whom the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) spoke in relation to his community.

The knitting project also acknowledges the role of women at home, who were encouraged to knit for the troops, but were keen to do so much more to help, as the hon. Member for Barnsley Central said. The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) spoke powerfully about the role of women much nearer the battle. It was particularly moving to hear about the meeting of the grandparents of the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham).

The speeches by the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) made clear the scale of the contribution made by soldiers from Northern Ireland. The Scots also played a very significant role at the Somme, with the involvement of 51 Scottish battalions. The Irish and Scottish Brigades of the 34th Division suffered terrible losses, as did the Pals battalions in general. The Glasgow and Edinburgh Pals battalions lost over 1,000 men in the opening days of the offensive. In total, 7,000 men of the 34th Division lost their lives.

Famous among those who fell were the men of the McCrae's battalion of the Royal Scots. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) told us, the battalion was raised in Edinburgh and was made up of football players and supporters, not unlike the Pompey Pals the hon. Member for Portsmouth South told us about. In the opening days of the offensive, the McCrae's battalion alone lost 12 officers and 573 men, which was three quarters of its attacking strength.

All these men and many more are commemorated at the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh castle. I would echo the words of the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and encourage people to visit such memorials. A statue has been placed above the exit door so that it is the final thing that people see before they leave the memorial. The bright golden figure, the

only colourful thing in the whole memorial, is a representation of peace—a figure with a broken sword and the sun rising behind her. That is the sentiment with which we should remember the men who fell at the Somme, as we aspire to maintain peace today.

As the right hon. Member for Broadland so eloquently described, 100 years ago Europe was in turmoil. Europe is in a different kind of turmoil today. The path of European relations, either before or after the first world war, has never been entirely smooth, but it is undeniable that we have been at peace in our area of Europe for 70 years and that earlier times of peace were inextricably linked to the hard work done to maintain good relations and co-operation between sovereign states. While we remember, let us—particularly those in this House—always aim to learn from the past and to work together, and always aspire to peace, because that is truly the only way properly to respect and remember the terrible tragedy of all those young men who went to the Somme and never came home.

8.8 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on securing this important debate on the centenary of one of the most tragic events in Europe's history, and on their very fine and moving speeches. I also congratulate all hon. Members on their equally fine speeches. We have heard not just very moving words, but interesting speeches from people who know a lot about what happened in those terrible times during the first world war.

I wish to pay my personal tribute to those who fought and died on the Somme in the weeks that followed 1 July 100 years ago. Controversy has raged for decades about why such suffering of hundreds of thousands of men should have been first initiated and then tolerated, even as an act of war. The particular role of General, later Field Marshal, Haig, has been considered controversial, but perhaps that is a debate for another day. It is the men who died and were wounded on the Somme that must be and are uppermost in our thoughts today. Their incredible bravery and dreadful suffering are what we commemorate and are discussing. I hope I speak for all my party colleagues when I pay tribute to those men in this debate.

The Somme has come to symbolise the terrible nature of war at its most devastating and tragic. We must salute and remember all those who were killed and wounded on the Somme, and ensure that they are never forgotten. The first world war, and the Somme in particular, seem very close to me and are far from distant in my thoughts. I am older than the great majority of hon. Members in this House, and I have some personal associations with those events.

My maternal grandfather, Arthur Frost, was wounded early in the war, and could not return to the trenches. Instead—perhaps fortunately—he was employed as a chauffeur to a general, which is surely the reason he survived. My mother was born shortly after the war, and I would not be here today if my grandfather had not come through. I remember him telling me about his experiences in the war when I was seven and he was just 60—14 years younger than I am now. I, too, was lucky

[Kelvin Hopkins]

to survive the second world war. We lived in south London in Norwood in 1943, and my mother insisted that my brother and I were evacuated with her to my grandparents in Leicester, shortly before a V1 destroyed our house.

I have always been very conscious of war and its dangers and tragedies, but I have a particular association with the Somme. My wife Pat's grandfather, Private Arthur Thomas Langley, died on the Somme, and my late father-in-law was raised by his mother and his aunt, whose fiancé had also been killed. I remember Nan and Auntie Sis, as they were known in the early 1960s—two dignified and kindly women who had both suffered tragedy in their lives but retained an amazing serenity. They, too, were a good deal younger than I am now. I knew several such women in those years, and there were hundreds of thousands of them, together with mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers and children.

I have brought with me the posthumous medals that were awarded to Private Langley and later posted to my wife's Nan. We even have the registered envelope in which they were delivered nearly 100 years ago. My wife and I were the first members of her family to find out through the internet where Arthur was buried, and to make a journey to visit his grave. He lies in a war cemetery called Caterpillar Valley, alongside hundreds of his comrades. We took those medals with us and photographed them on his headstone as we paid our respects. We shall not forget him, nor the sight of the vast numbers of white headstones in one of many such cemeteries across the Somme. Each year we drive to see friends in Burgundy, crossing the Somme near Saint-Quentin, and we give more thought to those who died 100 years ago. The land around there is now calm, undulating and mostly grassy, and it is difficult to imagine the horror and slaughter that took place in those times.

I also remember the poems of Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, which we read at school—some of that has been referred to today. Those men were there, and they put into moving and eloquent language their thoughts on that war, and the death and destruction that they saw, and that two of them were later to suffer themselves. Their words are perhaps more telling than anything we might say today—moving though many of today's words have been—and they will live on.

We should also remember all those from other lands, about which much has been said today, who fought on the Somme on both sides. My constituency contains the largest Irish community in the eastern region of England, and, as we have heard, many thousands of Irish soldiers died on the Somme—indeed, last Saturday I was at the annual general meeting of the Luton Irish Forum, and mention was made of that. I also represent many communities from across the Commonwealth who suffered great losses in the war. It is astonishing to think that they came from all over the world to fight and die in what was essentially a European war, and we should not forget that. I have many thousands of constituents from south Asia. They know that their parents and grandparents were associated with and involved in those wars, and we remember and pay tribute to them.

It has been a privilege and an honour to make my first speech from the Dispatch Box in this most significant, honourable, and heartfelt debate.

8.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): I am absolutely delighted to be able to respond to this important debate this evening. I would like to begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and the Backbench Business Committee on securing this important debate on the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. I would also like to thank him personally for all the work he has done and continues to do for the first world war commemorations. His speech was measured, effective and very moving. I would also like to commend the very powerful speech by the co-sponsor of the debate, the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). I welcome the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) to the Opposition Front Bench and congratulate him on his first performance on behalf of the official Opposition. I found his speech about his family history and his contribution not only very effective and interesting but very moving.

We have heard really powerful and informative contributions from across the House. We have had an impressive debate of commemoration and remembrance to do justice to those who served 100 years ago at the Battle of the Somme. Our commemorative programme is built around the themes of remembrance, youth and education. We do not dictate how people should interpret the war's origins, the conduct or the consequences, but rather we want to encourage people to discover and debate this most crucial of periods in their own way.

As many speakers have alluded to, there are lots of events planned to commemorate the Somme. Tomorrow evening, on the eve of the battle, there will be a service at Westminster Abbey attended by Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. This will be followed by an all-night vigil around the Grave of the Unknown Warrior to which all are welcome. The vigil ends in the morning of 1 July. At 7.25 am in Parliament Square, three guns from King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery will fire in Parliament Square for 100 seconds. This will be followed by a two-minute silence. Then, at 7.30 am, one long whistle blow will mark the moment the men went over the top 100 years ago.

There will, as we have heard, be a military vigil at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing in France, attended by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Henry of Wales. The memorial has been restored and a lighting scheme installed, all made possible by a £1.6 million LIBOR grant from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I shall be privileged to be at both the Abbey and Thiepval to remember and commemorate the battle and all those who served. Overnight vigils will also be held at the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh castle, the Welsh National War Memorial in Cardiff and the Somme Museum at Clondeboye, County Down. The whole nation will come together to commemorate the events of 100 years ago.

At 11 am UK time on 1 July, a national commemorative service will be held at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Thiepval memorial in France. The service will reflect the story of the whole battle, capturing the scale and reach of the conflict, and the impact it had on all the lives of all communities in the UK and France. I would particularly like to acknowledge the support of the French authorities, with whom we have worked very

closely in planning these events. The occasion will be attended by about 10,000 guests, including members of the royal family, Heads of State, senior politicians and representatives from all the nations involved, and about 8,000 members of the public.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the fantastic work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, one of our key partners in our commemorative programme. The CWGC does excellent work in ensuring that the 1.7 million people who died in the two world wars will never be forgotten. It cares for the cemeteries and the memorials at 23,000 locations in 154 countries across the globe. All are perfectly maintained. I pay tribute to all the people involved in the CWGC, including the administrators, the gardeners and those responsible for the gravestones. They do a fantastic job.

I recently visited the Thiepval memorial and many of the other cemeteries in France. I can advise hon. Members that they are fantastically well maintained. I had the privilege of climbing to the top of the memorial and looked out across the surrounding landscape. One thing I observed was how quiet it was and how different and terrible it must have been 100 years ago.

On the afternoon of 1 July, our focus moves to Manchester. A significant number of Pals battalions, which we have heard a lot about from Members on both sides of the House this evening, were raised in Manchester and the north of the country, and the industrial north made a huge contribution to our war effort. His Royal Highness the Duke of York, representing Her Majesty the Queen, will take part in a wreath-laying service at the city's cenotaph, which will be followed by a national commemorative service at Manchester cathedral.

After the cathedral service, a remembrance walk will take place, involving a first world war wagon collecting all the memory pieces that have been made as part of the "Path of the Remembered" project, ending at Heaton Park. In the evening, a cultural concert will be held, featuring a national children's choir, film, dance, and the Hallé orchestra—19,240 tickets were made available, one for each soldier of the British Army who died on the opening day of battle, and I am delighted that every one of them has been taken up.

Heaton Park, which was used as a military camp in the first world war, will host over two days "Experience Field"—there will be talks, exhibitions, performances and activities from leading experts on the first world war. I am particularly delighted that more than 1,400 pupils from 37 schools will visit on 1 July. It will be open to the public on 2 July. I put on record my sincere thanks to Manchester City Council, Manchester cathedral and all partners involved in organising those important events.

As we have heard, the Battle of the Somme lasted 141 days, and to ensure our focus is not just on the opening day of battle, the Royal British Legion and the CWGC will host a daily public service of remembrance at the Thiepval memorial through to 18 November. CWGC is facilitating a range of events at cemeteries across the region throughout the period. Regimental associations, communities and descendants can therefore participate on a day that is particularly significant to them.

We want to ensure that there are opportunities for everyone to learn about the Somme and commemorate the courage and sacrifice of all those who gave their

lives during the first world war, which has been discussed by the many hon. Members who have participated in the debate this evening. Many people were affected, and we remember the impact it had on those families who were never to see their loved ones again. We also remember the huge effort that took place on the home front, and all the factory and munitions workers, particularly the women, who did so much at home and who played such an important role in the first world war.

As well as the national commemorative events, Government partners will be involved in other Somme-related activities. We are funding a series of 12 regional debates for schools in 2016-17, which will enable year 12 and 13 students to debate the causes, the conduct and the consequences of the war. The first of those was held last night at Manchester cathedral.

The 14-18 NOW arts programme is connecting people with the first world war. It has so far reached 20 million people through events such as "Lights Out", the "Dazzle Ships" and the UK-wide tour of the poppies. There are a number of events this year, including the Welsh National Opera's "In Parenthesis"; and "Memorial Ground", a major participative project featuring choirs and singing groups across the UK. The poppies continue their tour. The "Weeping Window" can be seen at the Black Watch Museum in Perth, and "The Wave" can be seen at Lincoln castle.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I apologise to the House for not being present earlier, but I had other commitments. Will the Minister join me in congratulating McCrae's Battalion Trust, which built a cairn in the French village of Contalmaison in 2003 to commemorate the deaths of the Edinburgh men and women killed on 1 July 1916, and whose members are going on their annual pilgrimage this week? We owe a great deal of respect to the people who continue to make these pilgrimages to the Somme to remember those who fought and made the ultimate sacrifice.

Mr Evennett: I am pleased to join the hon. Gentleman in commemorating those events and in congratulating those involved. I am grateful to him for bringing that to the attention of the House.

The Imperial War Museum will also open late on 30 June, with film screenings, live music, immersive theatre and poetry, while the film "The Battle of the Somme" is available to Centenary Partnership members to show in public venues—there will be more than 100 screenings.

So far, I have focused on what the Government will deliver or help to facilitate, but what is really heartening is the response to our call to the nation in April. Many hundreds of remembrance activities will be taking place in local communities up and down the country, and many of them have been registered on our map on the centenary pages of gov.uk. I would like to mention a few: a vigil at Clifton cathedral in Bristol; a parade through Wick in Scotland; an event at the war memorial at Barnsley town hall; a whistle ceremony at Fivemiletown in Northern Ireland; and a special concert at St Collen's church in Llangollen, Wales—all local communities commemorating the 100th anniversary of the start of the Battle of Somme. Communities are coming together

[Mr Evennett]

everywhere to remember. I particularly thank the Royal British Legion for all its work in helping local communities with these remembrance activities.

There are also many Heritage Lottery Fund projects taking place up and down the country. Local communities are exploring their first world war heritage. The CWGC has recently launched its “Living Memory” project, calling on communities to rediscover war graves in their local cemeteries and to remember the lives of those who lie within them. The project encourages people young and old to discover and learn about war graves and their heritage, and anyone can get involved. I strongly recommend that people visit the CWGC website and encourage local communities to do the same and to get involved in this project marking the 141 days of the Somme.

We all have a history of family members involved in the first world war. One of my grandfathers, Thomas Evennett, fought not at the Somme but in France in the Army. My other grandfather was in the Royal Navy and was at Jutland—we recently commemorated that battle in a moving ceremony up in the Orkneys. We all should learn more about the history of our communities and families and make sure they are remembered not just by us but by our whole communities. This debate has been an opportunity for people across the House to pay moving tributes to families, communities and constituencies across our United Kingdom.

Individuals and communities across our country have an opportunity to come together on 1 July and throughout the 141 days—yes, 141 days—and to learn about the Somme and all those affected by it, on the battlefield and, subsequently, at home. One hundred years ago, the bloodiest battle in our history was about to begin. It is right that the House remembers all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country. We will remember them.

8.29 pm

Dr Murrison: We have had a debate of superlative quality this evening, with 20 right hon. and hon. Members speaking extremely movingly on this the eve of the centenary of the bloodiest day in British military history.

The 19th century French army officer and author, Alfred de Vigny, spoke in his book “The Servitude and Grandeur of Arms” of military service as the most

fearsome of contracts. It was true then; it was true in 1916; it was true in 1982, as my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) so movingly reminded us; and it remains true today.

The hon. and gallant Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) quoted AJP Taylor and disagreed with him. I think the hon. Gentleman is allowed to disagree with him; I am not sure that I am. Nevertheless, I hope he will allow me the indulgence on this occasion, because I, too, disagree with him. It is certainly the case that idealism did not die on the Somme; neither did the lights entirely go out across Europe.

If we are to avoid the loss of our 21st century lives and loves in the mud and blood of continental Europe, we need to ensure that we have eternal vigilance across all the Parliaments and Assemblies of our continent. I think that should be our tribute to the fallen this evening—lest we forget.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I am sure that the Minister wanted to point out that Chorley’s own celebration will take place at 10 o’clock tomorrow night and Friday morning, and that the 3 Medical Regiment will take the freedom of the town in Chorley, with the dedication of the cenotaph taking place on Saturday.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the centenary of the Battle of the Somme.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENERGY

That the draft Contracts for Difference (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 9 May, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*(Julian Smith.)*

Question agreed to.

UK Involvement in Rendition

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Julian Smith.)

8.32 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I want to say how pleased I am to have secured this Adjournment debate on the subject of the UK's involvement in rendition. I wish we could find a better word than "rendition" for what this involves. It is a very dry, technical and legalistic term, suggestive perhaps of involvement in a performance of a piece of poetry or a song. It is, in fact, one of those terms that obscures rather than reveals its true meaning.

Rather than find another term for it, let me quote the words of Khadija al-Saadi who at the age of 12 was rendered from Hong Kong to Libya in a joint CIA/MI6 operation in 2004. She describes the 16-hour flight in which her father, an opponent of the now deposed Libyan dictator Colonel Gaddafi, was chained to a seat with a needle stuck in his arm. She wrote:

"I was 12 years old and was trying to keep my younger brothers and my six year old sister calm. The guards took us to see our mother once on the flight. She was crying and told us that we were being taken to Gaddafi's Libya. Shortly before the plane landed, a guard told me to say goodbye to my father, at the front of the plane. I forced myself ahead and saw him with a needle in his arm. I remember guards laughing at me. Then I fainted. We were taken off the plane and bundled into cars. Hoods were pulled over my parents' heads. Libyans forced my mother, sister and I into one car, my brothers and father another. The convoy drove to a secret prison outside Tripoli, where I was certain that we were all going to be executed. All I knew about Libya at that time was that Colonel Gaddafi wanted to hurt my father, and that our family had always been moving from country to country to avoid being taken to him. Now we had been kidnapped, flown to Libya, and his people had us at their mercy."

Khadija's father, Sami, was subsequently held for six years and severely tortured.

That, Mr Deputy Speaker, is why it is important for this House to debate rendition this evening. That act and all that followed from it was done as a result of the efforts of British intelligence officers. These illegal acts were done in our name, and it is right that Parliament and the public should be told what was done by whom and on whose authority.

The circumstances surrounding the al-Saadi case were one of two sets of circumstances that came to light following the fall of the Gaddafi regime, when documents were found by the organisation Human Rights Watch in the Tripoli office of Gaddafi's spy chief Moussa Koussa. The content and tone of some of that correspondence is shocking, but it provides an insight into the minds of those responsible. The rendition, it is boasted, was

"the very least we could do for you and for Libya."

If rendition was the least that he could have done, I hate to think what might have been possible at the upper end of the scale.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I clarify a point? Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that our secret services were used to move a person to Libya, under Gaddafi, at the express wish of Gaddafi?

Mr Carmichael: That is what I understand the position to be, although obviously our knowledge is incomplete.

The correspondence continues:

"I know that I did not pay for the air cargo but the intelligence on him was British."

To refer to another human being as "air cargo" is just about as degrading and dehumanising as it is possible to imagine.

When I raised the issue with the Prime Minister today, during Prime Minister's questions, he told me that

"very few countries in the world would have had such an independent and thorough investigation into an issue like this."

He was right—up to a point. The investigation of the role of senior British officers in the rendition of the al-Saadi family and another one was carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service. It was a thorough investigation, which does the police credit. At the end of it, a report running to 28,000 pages was sent to the Crown Prosecution Service, which announced on 9 June that no proceedings would be taken against the suspect in the inquiry.

I shall turn to the question of the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service in a moment, but first I want to address the Prime Minister's assertion about the rigour of the investigation. As I have said, the Metropolitan Police Service appears to have done a thorough piece of work; the fact remains, however, that the whole investigation only ever happened because, in the chaos following the fall of Gaddafi, someone from Human Rights Watch happened to come across those documents. But for that, we would almost certainly never have known of our country's involvement in this affair.

A number of issues arise from the statement made by the CPS on 9 June, and I would be grateful if the Minister addressed them in his reply. The first relates to the review of the decision. The decision itself has been greeted with some scepticism and incredulity. I understand that there is to be a review of it, but that the review will be carried out by other CPS officials, subordinate to those who made the decision. Surely a case of such political sensitivity deserves better than that. There is a precedent for the review of a politically sensitive decision being conducted by lawyers who are independent of the CPS: that was done in the case of the decision not to prosecute the late Lord Janner. I suggest that this is another case in which an independent review is appropriate. Will the Minister tell me whether or not there will be such an independent review?

Most remarkably of all, the CPS statement of 9 June concludes that the CPS has sufficient evidence to conclude that

"the suspect had...sought political authority for some of his actions albeit not within a formal written process nor in detail which covered all his communications and conduct."

Let us pause for a second to consider the significance of that. Officials of the Crown Prosecution Service have evidence that politicians—presumably that means Ministers of the day—were told of an illegal act by British intelligence officers. It cannot be right that officials of the CPS can know that, but we as parliamentarians cannot. It is ironic to think that if the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) had remained in his post as Director of Public Prosecutions, he would know more about this than he can today, having faced the voters and been elected to the House. So how are we to get to the truth here? The Prime Minister when he was the Leader of the Opposition said of rendition:

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

“As a moral purpose always must be accompanied by moral means, surely we must recognise that, in the last six years, issues like Guantanamo and extraordinary rendition have done huge damage to our moral authority.”—[*Official Report*, 21 February 2007; Vol. 457, c. 267.]

It was unsurprising, therefore, that in July 2010, in the first couple of months of his time as Prime Minister, he set up an independent judge-led inquiry into torture under Sir Peter Gibson. At that time, the Prime Minister took the view, and told this House,

“For public confidence, and for independence from Parliament, party and Government, it is right to have a judge-led inquiry.”—[*Official Report*, 6 July 2010; Vol. 513, c. 185.]

He expressly excluded the use of the Intelligence and Security Committee for the task. The Gibson inquiry was suspended in 2012 when the documents discovered by Human Rights Watch were published. At that time, the then Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), said:

“The Government fully intend to hold an independent, judge-led inquiry, once all police investigations have concluded, to establish the full facts and draw a line under these issues.”—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2012; Vol. 538, c. 752.]

The view expressed by the Prime Minister today about the investigation of this by the Intelligence and Security Committee is the direct opposite of the view he expressed in 2010. When the Minister replies, will he tell the House when Government policy changed on this and why? Surely public confidence demands that a full, independent and judge-led inquiry be reinstated.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. While we may have every respect for the commitment by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the Chair of the ISC, that he will carry out an inquiry into rendition, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that reform and much greater transparency are needed on the way in which this House scrutinises MI6 activities in future so that this cannot happen again?

Mr Carmichael: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady and I think she will find that the Chairman of the ISC himself has said that he sees the need for a measure of reform there.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): I am a member of the ISC and I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would accept the fact that we are in the midst of a major investigation into rendition. There is nothing that we cannot see. There is no one within the Government or the agencies, past or present, whom we cannot question. The only restriction, of which the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) will be aware, is that, by the very nature of our Committee, the questioning of the agencies themselves has to be done by us; otherwise they would not appear. However, I can assure him that our Committee is following every line that he and others are raising.

Mr Carmichael: Of course, I take the right hon. Gentleman’s assurance—indeed, I have to because there is not an awful lot else that we can know about this. However, given the nature of the information that is now in the public domain about authorisation or the request for authorisation from the suspect who has just

been told by the CPS that he will not be the subject of prosecution, that is not something that it is appropriate for a Committee of this House to be doing. It is something that requires to be done by a body that is seen to be independent of Parliament and of party, as the Prime Minister himself said in 2010.

Beyond the matters about which I have spoken this evening, there are outstanding questions about the use of Diego Garcia for rendition flights. The same batch of documents discovered by Human Rights Watch included CIA flight plans that indicated that the US intended to use Diego Garcia as a stop-over. Will the Minister tell the House why the Government continue to block the release of flight records that could settle once and for all the extent of the use of that territory for rendition? Then there is the reported letter from the then head of MI5 to the Prime Minister complaining about what had gone on in Libya. Clearly, there is no shortage of material for an inquiry to be considering.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he share my concern that as late as 2013 research from the universities of Kingston and Kent identified 13 instances where Scottish airports had been used for CIA renditions? Will he echo my hope that, when the Minister responds, he will confirm that the Government were aware or have become aware of that? Will he confirm whether they sanctioned that and whether they will fully investigate with a Police Scotland inquiry?

Mr Carmichael: I would hope that that would be the case. I suspect it might be a forlorn hope, but we shall see when the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box. Certainly I think there would need to be some very good reason if the Government were not to co-operate with a police inquiry, and at the moment I do not see what that would be.

If ever there was a case where sunlight was needed for the purpose of disinfectant, this is it. Only by thorough investigation and disclosure of what has been done in our name, by whom and on whose authority, can we ever have confidence that this sort of thing will never be allowed to happen again.

Let us remember the words of Khadija al-Saadi with which I opened this debate tonight. The al-Saadi family were compensated by our Government to the tune of £2.2 million of taxpayers’ money. A further compensation claim by another family is currently before the courts. It was reported at the weekend that the Government so far have spent £600,000 in legal fees defending that case, although the plaintiffs are prepared to settle for £3 and an apology for what was done to them.

Khadija al-Saadi is now in her mid-twenties. She describes herself and her siblings as “the future of our country, and the future of this region.”

She goes on to say:

“That future, though, needs to be based on a full admission of what has taken place in the past. No one has ever explained to me who was to blame for what happened to my family.”

She is right.

That explanation is needed and not just for the al-Saadi family, but for others and all in this country who care about the rule of law and the standing of our nation in the world. I believe the Minister cares about these things, and that is why he should act.

8.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I welcome this important debate and congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing it. He raises a number of serious issues about a matter in which I have a personal interest. As he is aware, I lost my brother in the Bali bombing and I understood that some of those involved in its planning were moved across the world in different formations, so I took an interest in this as a Back Bencher and continue to do so as a Minister.

Before going into the details of the subject, I will step back and look at what has caused a lot of questions to be raised about the style in which we deal with terrorism post-9/11. I am on record as saying that I believe the international community lost its way somewhat after 9/11. We were dealing with a new form of terrorism and extremism that we did not fully comprehend. I think that, in the desire to be seen to be doing something, the international community right across the piece ended up creating a new forum of justice that was not at all just by placing terrorists into parts of the world such as Guantanamo Bay where they could not receive the law of the land because it was not clear what the law of the land was, given the very land they were taken to. It is important that we learn the lessons of the past and ask why it was not correct that we should use procedures that had been in place over many years. Why did we feel the need to create something new about which we now look back on and say, “Actually, we did lose our way somewhat”?

I am therefore pleased that this debate has come forward. There are still questions being put. I will do my best to answer them, but the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that because a case is ongoing, I am limited in what I can say.

Mr Keith Simpson: I rise briefly to caution Members. This is the subject of a major ongoing investigation by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which is determined to find out who knew what and when. We have to be very careful about talking about “we” or any allegations that are made. Our Committee is following this through, with no fear or favour to anybody. The report will be published and then it will be very properly debated and questioned by the House.

Mr Ellwood: I have not gone into any detail, but my right hon. Friend makes a point that I shall develop later. The Committee has yet to produce its report and, until that happens, it would be wrong of the Government to comment. We will, of course, respond in full once the report has been published.

I want to outline Her Majesty’s Government’s position on rendition. The Government support the rule of law, and as the Prime Minister said today in response to a question from the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, we oppose any form of deprivation of liberty that amounts to placing a detained person outside the protection of the law, including so-called extraordinary rendition. We also recognise that we face a serious, complex and diffuse threat from terrorism, and we should not forget that. The Government have a duty to protect British citizens from that threat, both at home

and abroad. Our policy remains that individuals suspected of involvement in terrorism should be brought to justice whenever possible.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that all rendition is necessarily unlawful. The right hon. Gentleman described the word, but it has perhaps been taken out of context on occasion. Rendition may, in certain circumstances, be acceptable. For example, we would support the transfer of an individual to safety, from a place where there was no apparent legal framework, or if there was some other legal basis for the transfer, such as a United Nations Security Council resolution.

The Government remain committed to ensuring that allegations of UK complicity in alleged unlawful rendition and mistreatment overseas are examined fully. In July 2010, the Prime Minister announced an inquiry, led by Sir Peter Gibson, to consider whether the UK was implicated in the improper treatment or rendition of detainees held by other countries. The inquiry undertook extensive preparatory work. However, following the launch of a new police investigation, the Government closed down the inquiry in January 2012 as there was no prospect of it being able to start in the foreseeable future.

Rather than wait for the police to complete their investigations, the Government agreed with the Intelligence and Security Committee of this Parliament in December 2013 that that Committee would carry out its own inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) has referred to that inquiry. It was decided that the Committee would consider the themes and issues that Sir Peter had raised in his preparatory work, take further evidence and report to the Government and to Parliament on the outcome. I hope my right hon. Friend will agree that the Government are co-operating fully with the Committee’s inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave evidence to the Committee on 9 June. The Home Secretary and the agency heads have also given evidence.

I do not want to pre-judge the findings of the Intelligence and Security Committee—my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) has already pointed out the importance of avoiding that. Once the Committee has published its report and the outcome of the police investigations is known, the Government will be able to take a final view on whether it is in the interests of the country or of future policy making to hold another judge-led inquiry. I hope that answers the call of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

I turn now to the specific cases of Mr al-Saadi and Mr Belhaj. The Government have co-operated fully with the police investigation into the cases of those two individuals, and we acknowledge the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service not to bring charges. The CPS has stated clearly the reasons for the conclusions that it has reached. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further, as separate civil proceedings are now under way, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. He looks poised to intervene, and I am happy to give way to him.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: The civil proceedings relate to only one of the families. The al-Saadi family has already settled, as I indicated in my speech. I appreciate that this matter falls more within the ambit of the Attorney General’s Department than the Minister’s,

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

but does he accept that any review of the CPS's decision needs to be undertaken by lawyers who are independent of the CPS? If he cannot answer that question, will he get me an answer from the Attorney General?

Mr Ellwood: As the right hon. Gentleman suggests, I think it would be better for the Attorney General to make that comment. However, I underline the point that the Crown Prosecution Service has stated clearly the reasons for the conclusions that have been reached, but I will invite the Attorney General to write to the right hon. Gentleman with clarity on the second case.

I now turn to some of the right hon. Gentleman's specific points. On US rendition flights, we have received from the US assurances, which are renewed annually, that apart from two declared incidents in 2002, the US has not held or moved any detainees through the territorial land, air or seas of the UK or our overseas territories. On Diego Garcia, the British Indian Ocean Territory continues to be a vital strategic defence asset to the UK and its allies, including the US, contributing significantly towards global security and efforts at countering regional threats such as terrorism and piracy. The Government welcome the US presence on Diego Garcia and have made it clear that we want that to continue. The Prime Minister discussed Diego Garcia's future with President Obama on 22 April and discussions are continuing. The issue of rendition is dealt with separately through the yearly assurances that we now receive from the US Government.

On the transit through UK or overseas territories of foreign rendition flights, such requests are considered on a case-by-case basis and are granted only when the purpose of the transit complies fully with international law. Under no circumstances would we approve a rendition that was not in compliance with international law. In the unlikely event that a foreign rendition flight were to land or to pass through UK airspace unexpectedly, we would again consider the case on its merits. There is no point in speculating on hypothetical scenarios, but our actions would always be consistent with our legal obligations.

It is worth mentioning the US Senate report. We welcomed the thorough US Senate Committee investigation into the CIA's involvement in detention and rendition. We further welcomed President Obama's acknowledgement that such actions were contrary to US values and did not serve the country's counter-terrorism or national security interests.

The Government are certainly co-operating fully with the Intelligence and Security Committee's inquiry. The ISC has confirmed to the Government that it has received

all but one of the relevant documents to date, but if it requires any further documents, it only needs to let the Government know.¹

The UK Government do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture for any purpose. We have made that position absolutely clear, both publicly and bilaterally with our overseas partners. It is vital that our security and intelligence services are able to work with liaison partners overseas. The reality is that they will need to work with partners who do not always share our values, but we seek to ensure that acceptable standards are adhered to by those partners when they choose to work with us and to help them to raise their own standards across the board.

In July 2010, the Government published consolidated guidance for the first time setting out the standards that our intelligence officers and service personnel must apply during the detention and interviewing of detainees overseas and in the sharing of intelligence with liaison partners. It makes it clear that we act in compliance with our domestic and international legal obligations, and our values as a nation. Ministers must be consulted in circumstances where personnel judge that there is a serious risk of cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment taking place, and Ministers will consider all relevant factors when deciding whether an operation should proceed. The independent Intelligence Services Commissioner, a former senior judge, oversees compliance with the guidance. He reports annually to the Intelligence and Security Committee, and his role in that regard was put on a statutory footing by a direction from the Prime Minister in November 2014.

I have already touched on Guantanamo Bay. The Government support President Obama's continued commitment to close down that detention facility, which I visited a number of years ago. When that might happen remains a matter for the US Government. The UK Government have made a significant contribution to reducing the number of detainees by taking back nine UK nationals and, exceptionally, six former UK legal residents.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for this opportunity to set out the Government's position today, and I am certainly grateful to other hon. Members for their contributions. In conclusion, I wish to emphasise again that the actions of Ministers and Government officials are bound by their duty to comply with the law. It therefore follows that the Government oppose any means of depriving any individual of their liberty that amounts to putting them outside the protection of that law.

Question put and agreed to.

9 pm

House adjourned.

1. [Official Report, 11 July 2016, Vol. 613, c. 1MC.]

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 29 June 2016

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Dog Fighting

9.30 am

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I apologise for the fact that the screen behind me is not working. We will have to manage with the two that are working, so do not rely on the other one. I am also sorry that, apparently, we cannot raise the blinds. It is one of those mornings.

Looking around the Chamber, although relatively few people have submitted an application to speak, it is clear that there is a lot of interest in all parts of the House. I will therefore give an indication now, which is unusual, but I think people need time to adjust, that I will impose a five-minute time limit on speeches.

9.31 am

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered dog fighting.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and it is a privilege to bring this debate to the Chamber to highlight the extreme plight of those dogs around the UK that are subject to the cruel and callous animal abuse of dog fighting. They have no voice of their own, and we must give them a voice; I am heartened that so many hon. Members are present to contribute to the debate and to do just that—to give them their voice. I am proud that so many of my constituents and those of other Members have been in contact to emphasise the importance of the debate and the impact on animal welfare and our legislative process.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): I am delighted that the hon. Lady chose this topic for debate. Is she aware that she has widespread support throughout the House and that some of us have tabled early-day motion 64, which calls for a national dog-fighting strategy to stamp out this awful crime?

Dr Cameron: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am delighted that I have so much support in all areas of the House, from all parties. I have signed the early-day motion and fully support it.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): To pick up on the point made in the previous intervention and the comments of the many constituents who have contacted me, the frequency of the occurrences of dog fighting in the country is the real problem and shows the urgent need for action, along the lines suggested.

Dr Cameron: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman and his valuable contribution. There is a need for urgency. I am hopeful that we can make progress on that urgency today.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Is it worth putting on the record from the start the excellent work of charities and rescue centres? We are a nation of dog lovers. The

vast majority of dog owners, including those like myself who have rescue dogs, think that dog fighting is an extreme element that we must deal with.

Dr Cameron: The hon. Gentleman makes his point extremely well. I will come on to echo his words.

Events in recent weeks might have divided some communities and, indeed, the direction of the different countries in the United Kingdom, but what brings us together is our deep convictions about animal welfare. We are dog lovers and want to see the eradication of cruelties such as dog fighting.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Does she agree that we need to consider the wider context of sentencing for animal cruelty in this country? In the UK, we have a lax regime, because it is based on the fact that we think of animals, frankly, as chattels or property. That attitude has to change. Does she agree?

Dr Cameron: I do, and I echo the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. Dogs are man's best friend, not property. I will be calling for tougher sentencing throughout the UK.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. No doubt she will comment on the fact that within the UK there is variability in the sentencing regimes. In fact, Northern Ireland has increased the sentence capacity to between two and five years, compared with six months in our own nation.

Dr Cameron: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention. That is something of which Northern Ireland should be extremely proud. I hope to see similar progress in the rest of the UK.

I pay tribute to the many organisations involved in the field, including the League Against Cruel Sports, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the Dogs Trust, Middlesex University, the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, and Marc the vet, to name but a few. Without their vital work, we would have little awareness of the existence of the hidden, heinous crime of dog fighting. They also work tirelessly for the protection and rehabilitation of dogs. I thank them for their work and for the recent reports bringing dog fighting to the mind of the public, including, crucially, our first national report on the state of dog fighting in the UK, from Project Bloodline, which was launched last year by the League Against Cruel Sports.

I also thank two of my constituents, Lisa Glasham and Paul Meecham, who are present today. They know the importance of the issue and of the debate. Lisa is never seen without her dog, although I understand she could not bring him in today.

Peter Egan, a vice-president of the League Against Cruel Sports, said:

“Dog fighting is a crime committed against our best friends, by humanity's worst enemies, the criminals making money from indescribable cruelty. Where are we as a society if we allow our dogs to be abused in this way?”

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): I have had hundreds of emails from concerned constituents, and I am sure the hon. Lady has support in Wales. It is the absolute brutality that gets to me; cats are used as bait; dogs are trained to be absolute fighters; and it is so graphic. I have a little Staffie who is absolutely gorgeous, and timid and everything. The thought of him having his teeth ground down to become an object for brutality breaks my heart. The hon. Lady has my wholehearted support.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Lady. Putting together my speech for the debate has been a traumatic process, and I am sure that constituency emails and her own experience have heralded the same feelings of disbelief and complete concern for the animals that are abused in such a manner.

Bill Oddie has said:

“Dogs are perhaps the most beloved and valued animal on earth. Humans look after them, and they look after humans. They represent companionship, affection and loyalty. I can think of few evils so perverted—and cruel—as dog fighting. This is humanity at its worst.”

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Yesterday, I had the privilege to meet a United States military veteran with his assistance dog. Does my hon. Friend agree that it defies belief that, when dogs can be so positive and do so much good, people treat them in this cruel way?

Dr Cameron: I very much agree with my hon. Friend’s comments. We have to remember that we have hearing dogs, dogs that work for the blind, dogs that help us in the police force and the fire brigade and dogs that help us in all aspects of our lives. That is why it is quite so unbelievable that some people treat dogs in such a way.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I point out that we have dogs that have saved the lives of our soldiers on many occasions, such as in Northern Ireland, Iraq or Afghanistan, and will continue to do so? God bless them.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Yes, it is extremely important that we recognise the value of dogs in every aspect of our society and in our armed forces.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): This week marks the 100th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, so given the role of military dogs then and now, today it is apt and appropriate to do everything we can to defend them.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and for paying tribute to those dogs who have worked for this country in such an admirable way.

What are the facts as we know them? Research, including that from the influential Project Bloodline, indicates that a dog fight occurs somewhere in the UK every day. Dogs involved in fighting are pitted against each other, with the aim of inflicting as much pain and damage as possible. For dogs that fall into the hands of dog fighters, life is full of pain, suffering and violence. Dogs are left with horrific injuries, and rather than taking them to a vet and risk being caught, dog fighters perform crude surgeries without anaesthetic, adding to

suffering. Most dogs used for fighting ultimately are killed in the fight, dying as a result of their injuries or just killed and discarded.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The hon. Lady is being generous with her time. She mentioned Project Bloodline, which is an excellent initiative by the League Against Cruel Sports. I see signs in my constituency on trees, where dogs have been hung from trees to strengthen their jaws, but dog fighting is done very much under cover and it is difficult to track down. Will she join me in congratulating the league’s initiative under Project Bloodline to offer a £1,000 reward to people in Luton under a pilot where people can come forward with any information they have about illegal dog fighting in their area?

Dr Cameron: That sounds like an excellent pilot, and I would like to see it expanded throughout the country if it is successful.

During training, dogs are usually kept penned or chained. They are raised in isolation, yet we know they are man’s best friend. They are starved and taunted to trigger extreme survival instincts and to encourage aggression. They may be forced to tread water in pools, to run on a treadmill, while another terrified animal is dangled in front of them as bait, or to hang, as described, from their jaws, while dangling from a chain or tree baited with meat. They are slammed against walls to toughen them up. Many may be injected with steroids. Some dog fighters sharpen their dogs’ teeth, cut off their ears to prevent latching during fights or even add roach poison to their food, so that their fur tastes bad to other dogs.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. What she has just outlined shows a massive scale of premeditation, planning, thought and—I hesitate to use this word—investment. Does she not agree that the people who put in that effort to cause such suffering to animals must have sentences that properly reflect the activities they have engaged in, not just in fighting dogs but in the planning for that?

Dr Cameron: I wholeheartedly agree. We know from research on psychology that individuals who engage in animal cruelty show traits of psychopathy and are then very much more likely to engage in cruelty against humans.

Dog fighting results in torn flesh, blood loss, disembowelment and death. Many dogs are found dead, dumped in the countryside. Dogs that win are forced to fight again. They are sold on to breed puppies for profit. Female dogs are strapped down on rape stands, while males impregnate them. There is new evidence of casual dog fighting, with offenders fighting their dogs in public places and then capturing that on mobile telephones.

Many of the dogs that do not fight, or lose fights, are used, as described, as bait animals. Undercover reporters from animal welfare charities have met dog breeders who offer pit bull puppies and dogs of the bully kutta breed for protection and fighting. The story of Cupcake, brought to our awareness by the League Against Cruel Sports, highlights the issue of bait animals. Cupcake’s life was basically torture: her teeth were ground down

to prevent her from protecting herself and she was used as bait for other dogs. Kay, who is now looking after Cupcake, has said:

“Man up—if you have a lust for fighting go out and fight yourself... To victimise and torture a vulnerable creature...to create a status or an image...is...despicable”.

Battersea Dogs and Cats Home regularly takes in dogs bearing the physical or mental scars of dog fighting: traumatised animals with tell-tale bite marks and filed down teeth. Many have had their jaws wired shut. They are cast out, although, as we have described, many are never found or they are killed and discarded. We need to establish a simple message: people involved in dog fighting are cruel and callous, and they must be convicted. We ask ourselves: why does dog fighting happen? Who on earth would want to engage in this violent pursuit for pleasure or profit?

The RSPCA has identified a typology of dog fighting that helps to categorise those involved. There is traditional organised dog fighting, which involves working-class males and is an underground activity, where a large amount of money is gambled on dogs. Pit bull terriers are almost exclusively used for that type of fight. Individuals involved do not just happen upon it—they may well be involved in other forms of organised crime. They have a life of violence and torturing, and killing animals is an adjunct to criminal lives.

There is a cultural typology whereby individuals from differing cultures that do not prohibit dog fighting bring those activities to the UK despite their being banned. Those individuals require education. Chain street is described as a new trend for dog fighting, which is seen in inner cities, where young men in gangs or on the fringes fight dogs to settle scores or to try to assert their standing in their communities.

The League Against Cruel Sports identifies different levels of dog fighting. Level 1 is impromptu street fights, part of street culture. Level 2 is hobbyist—I cannot imagine dog fighting as a hobby—operating on a localised fighting circuit. Level 3 is professional sophisticated dog rings, with trained dogs from particular bloodlines, taking place in a pit, with high-stakes gambling, which is highly secretive and invitation-only.

Research by Middlesex University in November 2015 indicated that dog fighting has historically thrived on its ability to convince our society that it does not exist. There is a severe lack of information and data on dog fighting. Further research is therefore required. There are varied measures of recording such offences, which limits data analysis. The largest element of known and recorded dog-fighting activity relates to the possession or custody of fighting dogs, but data do not distinguish between possession and involvement in dog fighting.

There is also inconsistency in procedures between agencies when it comes to tackling the issue. Dog fighting may not even be identified if it is easier to address the issue under animal welfare legislation, so there is under-reporting and under-recording. There is a lack of recording between dog fighting and other offences. Such recording is very much needed now that we know it is recognised as a gateway crime.

Inadequacy in reporting, recording and prosecution is important, because it impacts negatively on the resources provided for dog-fighting enforcement. It also impacts negatively in appropriate convictions and the severity of sentences.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech, and I congratulate her on securing the debate. The point she makes about dog fighting being a gateway crime is vital. Is it not the case that in the United States dog fighting is recognised as a grade A felony, and the FBI prioritises tackling it because of the impact that it has on detecting and preventing other offences?

Dr Cameron: I cannot emphasise that point enough: it is a gateway crime carried out by organised people who are involved in crime. They are callous towards animals, which research indicates leads them to a propensity to be callous towards humans. That must be tackled as a serious issue.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I think we are all astounded that we hear these points being made in 2016. This underground behaviour is being allowed and sustained through a combination of organised work and dog breeding, and people are making money off pets that should be looked after. That is abhorrent behaviour.

I pay tribute to Blue Cross, which rehomes animals in West End in my constituency, and I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this issue to the table. I have constituents who have been able to give dogs from the area a better life. We must not let dogs have the awful life that those dogs used to have.

Dr Cameron: I, too, pay tribute to Blue Cross. It is extremely important that we rehabilitate as many such dogs as possible, although, given their traumatic early lives, that is often not possible and they meet a sad end.

Dog fighting has been an offence since the 1800s. The current provision can be found in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. There are penalties of up to 51 weeks' imprisonment and a fine in England and Wales, and up to 12 months' imprisonment and a fine of up to £20,000 in Scotland. The Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 was designed to highlight the responsibilities of dog owners by putting in place a regime to identify out-of-control dogs at an early juncture, and by providing measures to change the behaviour of dogs—and their owners—before they become dangerous. We need specific legislation on the issue, because we must focus on everything we can do across the UK and consider whether we are doing enough.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. She outlined the different penalties. Does she agree that it would send out a strong signal, at a time when there are political divisions across the United Kingdom, if we could show the wider community that there is unity of purpose by increasing penalties in every nation of the United Kingdom for such heinous and unacceptable criminal activity?

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I would like collaboration and agreement across the UK on the issue. I also want to highlight the fact that the Northern Ireland Assembly has recently increased maximum prison sentences from two to five years, and

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

maximum fines from £5,000 to £20,000. That means that it will have the most stringent legislation in the UK on animal cruelty offences.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend is being extremely generous with her time; I apologise that I cannot stay to the very end of the debate. The League Against Cruel Sports has called for consistency in sentencing across Europe as well as in the UK. Does my hon. Friend agree that irrespective of the referendum result, dog fighting is an issue on which Governments should co-operate to ensure consistency across borders?

Dr Cameron: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Also, given that dog fighting is a gateway to serious organised crime, collaboration across the EU is required.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Further to that point, my Assembly colleagues in Northern Ireland are trying to secure the implementation of a register of those who are found guilty of this heinous crime. They should be forced to sign it—not that that would be a massive deterrent, but it would add to what has already been agreed.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman; that is one thing that I am calling for. I congratulate the Northern Ireland Assembly on taking the matter forward.

Analysis of court reports by Middlesex University suggests that there were fewer than 40 convictions for dog fighting between 2008 and 2014. Given that we know that a dog fight happens every day, there is clearly something not quite right about our ability to detect and prosecute. Mike Flynn, of the SSPCA, has told me that the last conviction in Scotland was three years ago. Once again we need to ensure that we can tackle the issue appropriately and take things forward consensually with best-practice evidence from the many organisations that contribute.

Project Bloodline asserts that it must be accepted that dog fighting remains a major criminal issue in the UK, both in itself and as a gateway crime. Vital work undertaken in the area must be resourced and collaborative. It is recommended that a taskforce be set up to ensure that there will be action to tackle dog fighting through a national dog-fighting plan. That plan would be pinned on three key areas: prevention, understanding and prosecution.

Community working groups can assist with the education of people and communities that are vulnerable to dog fighting. The public require increased awareness and education about the signs to look for, to aid in prevention and detection. There is a need for increased awareness about reporting through, for example, the League Against Cruel Sports' animal crimewatch line, which should be further publicised.

Details of individuals who have been banned from keeping dogs should be held by statutory agencies on a national register. Those people should not be allowed to keep animals, and their activities should be monitored. Local environmental auditing of hotspots should be undertaken by a multi-agency taskforce, to identify and remove environmental factors that enable people to

engage in dog fighting. We must ensure that, where possible, dogs used for fighting, whose lives have been utterly miserable and full of pain and suffering, and bait animals such as Cupcake, survive and are rehabilitated. Dog licensing should be considered. Reports on dog fighting as a gateway crime indicate that it must be treated seriously and that there should be intelligence crossover between agencies and across countries.

The League Against Cruel Sports and the RSPCA have called for changes to how dog fighting is tackled, including increases in penalties, which we have discussed. The RSPCA welcomed a statement made in 2015 by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the Government recognise the seriousness of fighting offences and are looking at legislative opportunities to increase maximum penalties. We need a review of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, and I request an inquiry by the Government. I will also write to the Scottish Government on that matter.

The League Against Cruel Sports recommends that dog fighting should be recorded as a specific offence. We need to improve data quality and assess the scale of the problem and the resources that we require. It does not consider that the existing offence of animal fighting should be changed entirely, but it does believe that some modification should be considered. The penalties should be brought in line with those in other EU countries, to achieve consistency—if there is now something on which we can achieve consistency across the EU. Penalties are two years in France and three years in Germany and the Czech Republic. The recommendation is two years, which would be consistent with Law Commission reports on other animal offences.

Politicians need to continue to raise awareness of dog fighting, assert our view that it is unacceptable in the UK, and promote the steps that are required to address such a heinous crime.

Sir Alan Meale (Mansfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing forward this important matter for debate. There are Members present who have spoken in the House on the matter many times, and some who have introduced Bills.

We all advocate increasing sentences, but another aspect of the matter is education, not only of those who engage in the practice in question, but of people who serve in courts administering and levying fines or dealing with imprisonment. The question is what levels of sentencing will stop people. We all know from research—our own or that of the League Against Cruel Sports, the RSPCA or other bodies—that such practices happen predominantly in certain areas throughout Britain. They go on time and again, and we all know where they are. The police try hard but are under-resourced, as are the animal welfare organisations in those areas. We need to get the Government to understand that more investment is needed in the police, local authorities and animal welfare organisations in those areas to eradicate something so pernicious.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I agree that we do not need a one-pronged approach. We need to address the issues that have been raised, and we should recognise that if those involved are also involved in organised crime and are making large amounts of

money from dog fighting, a small fine and a slap on the wrist will not be a deterrent. We need a deterrent in this case.

Dog fighting awareness day is on 8 April, which also happens to be my birthday. I had not been aware of that coincidence before I researched the debate. The day was established by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. As I mentioned, it has been traumatic for me, as an animal lover, to research and speak about the issue. I am sure that dog lovers and ordinary people across the country who have listened to the debate will have been sickened. Dog fighting is a cruel, barbaric, abhorrent and violent crime with no place in the UK. It is one of the most extreme forms of animal cruelty. I am pleased and heartened by the number of Members who have come to the debate, and I urge that we work together to eradicate dog fighting once and for all.

Sir Greg Knight: On a point of order, Sir Roger. You are in the Chair and are therefore properly impartial, but is it not appropriate that we place on record the work you have done and continue to do on animal welfare matters? We know that if you were not up there, you would be down here.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): My right hon. Friend is most generous: I could not possibly comment. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) has been very generous in giving way. I hope that hon. Members will not seek to rise to make speeches unless they have indicated already to the Chair that they will do so, because I am afraid there is no opportunity for me to facilitate that. Because of the time available, I will now have to reduce the speaking time to four minutes. If hon. Members can limit themselves to less than that, we might get everybody in, but it is a big might. I always do my best, but I cannot guarantee it.

10 am

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Thank you, Sir Roger. I reiterate the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight). I know what a great animal lover and dog lover you are. I thank and praise the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this debate.

There are so many dog lovers out there, and this debate is bound to touch people's hearts. I was not going to make a speech today, because I have to go and speak on climate change in a few minutes, but I felt I had to because I am co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for animal welfare. As a television reporter and environment correspondent for a long time, I reported on awful dog-fighting incidents and badger baiting before that, where dogs were also used. This subject is therefore close to my heart.

I applaud all the excellent charities that do such great work to look after rescue dogs. That is partly what prompted me to speak today. I recently visited Battersea dogs home and was deeply moved by the awful stories of dogs that have either been dumped outside it or picked up on the streets. They have been thrown out and are deeply scarred emotionally, because they were either fighting dogs that have had their teeth ground down, as the hon. Lady referred to, or poor bitches that have been used for constant breeding.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this debate. Does the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) agree that all these things—third-party puppy sales, puppy farming and illegal imports—are interlinked, and that something properly has to be done by Government? We need not warm words, but actions.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He makes a very good point—all these things link up, and I will refer to a few of those issues in a minute.

It is horrific that something like dog fighting still exists in our society. It is almost impossible to believe that that is true. I will make a few brief points that I hope might be constructive. One is about sentencing. Magistrates in this country can give a penalty of up to about six months for someone caught dog fighting, but they rarely even do that. There are so few cases where someone is actually caught and penalised, whereas in Europe the sentences are about two to three years. I reiterate the call to review the sentencing guidelines; that is crucial. Much more stringent fines would also perhaps be a disincentive.

I agree that people have an all-encompassing view of these dogs. They are regarded as status dogs and weapon dogs. I have seen such dogs when I have been out canvassing and been quite nervous about some of them. Some get wrongly labelled, but others are used as symbols. Somehow, we have to try to change the public perception that these dogs are a good, macho thing to have. That is all about education. We need to go into our schools and educate our children, teach people about respect for animals and how to care for them and love them—and not to have animals unless they can do those things. I personally do not have a dog—my children have never forgiven me for it—even though I love dogs, because I feel I would not be there enough to look after it, and that it would have psychological problems as a result.

Christina Rees: Education is really important, and we must educate people at a very young age to be responsible dog owners. I commend the Llys Nini centre in my constituency and the work that the Dogs Trust has done by going into young offenders units and prisons to teach offenders to be responsible and to develop better personalities, so that they can be caring individuals.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. That is a really good point. Evidence shows that those who abuse dogs often go on to abuse humans, including children and the elderly. There is a direct link, so we have to try, as a society, to stop such things happening.

Finally, I want to talk about breeding and call for a reduction in the threshold required for dog licences from five litters to two. These animals are truly being used as breeding machines. Often, the breeding starts far too young, so that the dogs are worn out and on the scrap heap very quickly. I saw some of those dogs at Battersea, and they are in a desperate and terrible state. Battersea dogs home has to not only nurture these dogs physically but also get over the awful psychological problems that those poor creatures have from the way they have been abused. That needs to be looked at.

[Rebecca Pow]

I think everyone agrees that this is a disgusting and appalling habit that we have allowed to carry on in our society. We have to crack down on it. I know much can be done. Lots of ideas have been mentioned today, and I press that we continue to look at them. I hope the Minister is listening and will give us some answers. I also hope that some of the points raised will be referred to in the current Government's response to the animal licensing consultation that is under way at the moment, which we are waiting to hear back from. I support the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow on this issue, and would like to be one of the people speaking up for our lovely dogs.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): I will now give some slightly conflicting advice. Members will be aware that every intervention adds a minute to the speaking time of the person who has the floor, and they must bear that in mind. The last two people on the speakers list are Patricia Gibson and Margaret Ferrier. We will do our best to accommodate you, but you might feel it more appropriate to intervene. I will try to accommodate everybody and ensure everybody has a say. We are down to three minutes, I am afraid.

10.7 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on her important and forthright contribution. Northern Ireland was unfortunately, until very recently, found wanting when it came to animal cruelty. Cases in Northern Ireland have been extreme, with 4,000 animal welfare cases investigated every year and 114 convictions for animal cruelty between 2012 and 2014, only 15 of which resulted in custodial sentences.

The Northern Ireland Executive brought in bans against the breeding of certain dogs, yet the practice continued. The problem lies in the fact that no dog is born bad or born dangerous. Some dogs may have more attributes that make them susceptible to having dangerous tendencies, but it is ultimately who owns the dog and how the dog is treated that decides the dog's outcome. The fact that a simple blanket ban on certain dogs did not work shows that we need a combination of legislation and information, and Northern Ireland has led the way on that. The public need to be informed of the problem so that they can assist to eradicate it, and awareness and education is needed so that this behaviour is regarded as totally unacceptable.

A raft of legislation has been brought in by the Northern Ireland Assembly, first to ensure that people cannot do this. There have also been prominent awareness campaigns highlighting the issue and making the public aware that they should not tolerate it, let alone take part in it. Just this month, the Director of Public Prosecutions was given stronger powers to fight animal cruelty by the Northern Ireland Justice Minister. The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, which will come into force this summer, will introduce fines of up to £20,000 and maximum prison terms of between two and five years.

However, the action does not stop there. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) referred to an official register of people convicted of animal cruelty offences. Northern Ireland is going to

the next stage to protect animals from being victims of those people's sick behaviour. It all started a few years ago with a case in east Belfast, as Northern Ireland MPs will be well aware. The people involved in the case were ignorant of animal welfare and of the law; they filmed the abuse, posted it on social media and gloated about it afterwards, and then got off with a suspended prison sentence. I and many other MPs wrote at that time asking for that to be changed to a custodial sentence. Unfortunately, that was not possible under the legislation.

Let us make it clear: we need registers and to ensure that those who look after animal sanctuaries are able to know who have done things wrong. The prospect of a register should be looked at, as it could start to address the problem at its root cause. The current strategy is not having all the desired effects, but Northern Ireland is leading the way, as it often does, and doing something different to protect dogs from being hurt or killed.

Championing policy against animal cruelty, whether it be dog fighting or similar sickening behaviour, is what we all need to do. We need to be sure that we always consider the voiceless—man's best friend—and give them the voice that they need and deserve.

10.10 am

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I am grateful to be able to speak in this debate, Sir Roger, and I know how important this debate is to you personally. I recently toured Birmingham dogs home—a newly created facility in my constituency—which had 90 dogs brought in on the day I went round. I was in pursuit of finding a new companion, having taken advice from the police, following the tragic events that befell one of our colleagues, that a dog might actually keep me safer, but I was appalled to see just how many of those animals are victims of this terrible crime of dog fighting and being used, essentially, as weapons. It is clear to me, as a former Secretary of State, that the measures that have been on the statute book for 175 years are not addressing the cultural change that we need to achieve in our society.

Successive Governments have done a number of things; the Animal Welfare Act 2006 was reformed in 2008, and when I was Secretary of State we reviewed it again in 2010. However, an undertaking was given in autumn last year that the Government would try to find a legislative opportunity to toughen the sentences for these kinds of offences, and we would very much like to hear from the Minister that such an opportunity will present in this parliamentary year, however eventful it may ultimately turn out to be.

I am also very conscious of another aspect of this and I commend it to colleagues: as part of the cultural change, there was a significant programme of re-educating offenders. As Secretary of State, I somehow found new money to give to police constabularies and to Battersea dogs home to try and change the minds of people who perpetrate this hideous crime. I say to colleagues that one visit to the RSPCA hospital in Harmsworth to see the appalling injuries that those fighting dogs suffer—those that survive the fights—would be education enough to turn any human being off the idea that man's best friend should be used as a weapon in a fight.

10.13 am

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Sir Roger, may I shock assembled company, and possibly some of my constituents, by saying that I am not generally a dog lover? In fact, I

have spent much of my political career dodging dogs, and my cats, Arthur and Wilson, wish me to put that on the record, but I am an admirer of dogs' qualities—their loyalty, their bravery and so on. I come from an area of Merseyside where there is an unsavoury subculture—a very small, but very troubling one—of dog fighting.

Dog fighting is only one of the aspects here. We have talked about trophy dogs, which are clearly a more obvious thing for most people. They are selected, bred and trained to be vicious and are subject to deliberate neglect. Quite how horrible that is has been well described by the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who so movingly started the debate. Such dogs are often discarded. I was told that the average life span of the average Staffordshire bull terrier is something like three years, as nobody wants from the RSPCA a dog that has been badly trained.

Dogs are becoming part of a testosterone-fuelled culture. It was put to me by experts, including a policeman who trained dogs for many years, that just as some people with a criminal or violent background should not have access to guns, they should also not have access to certain breeds of dogs. I think there is a case for licensing both dogs and ownership.

Dog control has at times been seen as a slightly marginal and difficult issue for Government. Legislation in this area has not been wholly successful—attempts to outlaw breeds, for example—but it seems to me that the Government have to take this issue very seriously. Issues such as dog fighting, out-of-control dogs, packs of dogs marauding through neighbourhoods and poor welfare of dogs generally are proxy for a wider range of issues, such as violent and socially disturbed neighbourhoods, drug and alcohol abuse and, importantly, serious family issues. I had a long conversation with the RSPCA at its last event here and I spoke to some of the inspectors who went into homes. They said that often when they went into homes apropos a dog and got access where social workers could not, they saw troubling instances of families and children in neglect as well.

We have made a lot in this Parliament of the issue of troubled families. It has been a high priority for the Prime Minister and everybody right through Government, but troubled families usually have troubled pets as well. Antisocial dog behaviour is often the most evident signal to the outside world of antisocial behaviour in general, and poor and disturbed families. I want to make a very simple point: although this issue may seem marginal and almost on the fringes of political debate, it is actually central to social policy.

10.16 am

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing a debate on such a vital issue, and I agree with what the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) has just said. In the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs we are conducting an inquiry into animal welfare, and there seems to be a direct correlation between dog fighting, the abuse of animals and the culture in neighbourhoods that frightens off people but is also destructive to animals.

It should hardly need to be said that dog fighting has no place in any civilised society. The fear and pain that fighting dogs suffer on a daily basis are difficult to contemplate. It constitutes an appalling breach of the trust that dogs have in their masters and the responsibility that we all have as human beings. That criminal violence, which is what dog fighting is, goes on to hurt communities, promoting lawlessness and frightening people on their own streets, particularly in impoverished areas. Given the callous mentality it requires, it is no surprise that where we see dog fighting, we often see links to other kinds of criminality and abusive behaviour. That is something that all Members of this House—and indeed, the vast majority of the public—can agree on, but the League Against Cruel Sports estimates that dog fighting takes place in Britain and Northern Ireland at least once every day. That is completely unacceptable.

I pay tribute to the League Against Cruel Sports for the academic work it has done to establish clear evidence of the extent of dog fighting. Given the difficulty in extrapolating specific dog-fighting statistics from the general animal fighting statistics, without the League's work this debate may not have been possible.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ritchie: I will not, as I am anxious about the time because other Members want to speak, but I understand that the hon. Gentleman's basic concerns will not be unlike mine and those of other Members from Northern Ireland. Even though we have certain, more restrictive legislation, it is only as effective as the enforcement that takes place.

It is important that the elements of the Wooler report are implemented quickly and effectively, and I look forward to the Select Committee report on animal welfare, which will concentrate on dogs, cats and horses.

10.18 am

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): When I came to the debate this morning I had not intended to make a speech, Sir Roger—only to make some interventions—but I feel so passionately about this issue that I had to try and catch your eye.

I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate. I had a debate on the Floor of the House some months back about a not-unrelated issue, because while we say we are nation of dog lovers, where is the evidence? Illegal importation is not properly stopped at the border because the border agencies, understandably, have other pressures on them. There is the issue of third-party selling. To my mind, we do not need a licensing scheme because there should be no third-party selling. Breeders should sell dogs. If they want to buy and sell things as a commodity, they should be a commodity trader in coffee or whatever. They should not buy and sell dogs.

Puppy farming is wrong, whether it is obscene, massive, industrial-scale puppy farming or just somebody breeding in the back of their house because all they are interested in is making a few quid. On an international scale, an appalling atrocity—the Chinese so-called dogmeat festival—is happening in Yulin. All those things are

[Robert Ffello]

interrelated and lead to a culture that thinks dog fighting is acceptable, that turns a blind eye or that does not have the resources to put into tackling it. We simply have to stand up and say, “No more.”

Dog fighting is linked to other things such as child abuse and domestic violence. If somebody thinks it is acceptable for one animal to tear another apart, they will think other things are acceptable as well. We say we are a nation of dog lovers. Let us start to see some evidence of that. There are other examples, such as greyhound racing, and what happens to the greyhounds afterwards. I could go on and on but, unfortunately, the 55 seconds I have remaining do not allow me to elucidate.

I know what a decent man the Minister is from before he became a Minister but, quite frankly, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has to step up. Warm words and platitudes are no good. We need action on importation, third-party selling, puppy farms, and all the related issues. We need firm action—not words—and we need it now. We have debated these things too many times. I do not want to be standing in this Chamber again in a year, two years or three years having the same debates. Let us have some action.

10.21 am

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing the debate, which has attracted so much interest across the Chamber.

Animal rights in Scotland are devolved to the Scottish Government, who keep a watchful eye on such matters because the public are concerned about the issues. We should all be concerned about the recent findings that one dog fight takes place every day somewhere in the UK. Dog fighting is a much bigger issue than an animal welfare issue, as important as animal welfare is. The crime does not operate in isolation; it is linked to serious and organised crime, particularly drug use and violence. Worse is the evidence that suggests that dog fighting is on the rise. Such barbarism must not go unanswered. The cruelty suffered by dogs in dog fighting is sickening, and we have heard some examples today. Dogs are often treated by so-called street surgeons with only superglue and staples. It beggars belief.

Much more can be done across the UK and all of Europe to promote animal welfare and to protect dogs and, indeed, the public from such exploitative owners. Perhaps one way forward would be to have a comprehensive register of those found engaging in the horrific practice, so that they are banned from ever having dogs again. That register could be shared across the UK and Europe. I urgently suggest that legislation is reviewed, revised and closely monitored. We must be unequivocal in our condemnation of dog fighting, which is a specific crime that carries punitive custodial sentences for offenders. The message must go out, loudly and clearly, that dog fighting cannot go unchecked in any society that considers itself to be civilised.

The vast majority of people in the UK have a great affection for dogs and we must help our citizens by educating them to identify the symptoms and signs of dog fighting to help us tackle the awful practice. The

more that we and the public understand about it, the better placed we are to tackle and eradicate it. Dogs cannot speak for themselves so it is our job to speak up for them. Our compassion and civilised values mean that we must take dog fighting seriously, and it is heartening to see the support from our constituents and across the Chamber.

10.24 am

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing the debate.

For the second time in a little over three weeks, I find myself in this room yet again providing a voice for the voiceless. Many of my constituents and staff have a keen interest in the treatment of man’s best friend. Unfortunately, the subject of the debate is troubling. As I am sure all hon. Members agree, the images and testimonies that are readily accessible online can only be described as harrowing.

The debate comes in the same week that, unfortunately and absurdly, 6,000 miles away in China, the annual Yulin dogmeat festival is taking place. The event was only launched in 2010 but has, unsurprisingly, garnered worldwide condemnation. We must be thankful that the international community has wholly rejected that so-called festival. However, we cannot be complacent about animal welfare on our own shores.

The problem of dog fighting is rife in the west of Scotland, and has been for years. The League Against Cruel Sports’ “Project Bloodline” report indicates that this abhorrent practice has had a major resurgence over the past few months. The report says that we need to educate the public about the scope and signs of dog fighting. According to the document:

“Greater understanding of the problem will lead to increased intelligence and more opportunities to prevent fights happening.”

We must ensure that dog fighting is portrayed not only as a rural problem but as one that is also found in urban areas. Will the Minister tell us explicitly how he plans to further tackle the issue rurally and in urban areas? No one here will disagree that dog fighting is a barbaric and cruel practice that is on a par with torturing animals. We must ensure that all relevant legislation is correctly implemented and possibly extended.

I am sure the Minister agrees that dog fighting is brutal and is no form of entertainment. From the stories that I have read and the evidence produced by the League Against Cruel Sports, it seems that one of the main methods used to facilitate the dog-fighting business is the selling of dogs online. What will the Minister do in conjunction with the police to tackle that growing online problem? Does he agree that dogs should be rehomed using renowned dog charities? I would much rather debate positive stories about dogs, but this is the world we live in.

I end with a quote from one of the earliest proponents of the animal rights movement, Jeremy Bentham, who said that

“the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?”

Of course animals suffer, and when they do, we, in turn, suffer. We must continue to fight for them until their voice is heard.

10.27 am

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. As you directed, I will be brief. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing the debate and other hon. Members for taking part with comprehensiveness, detail and enthusiasm. I thank all who have contributed.

Sentencing has been well covered in the debate, and most hon. Members agree with the call of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home to bring sentencing in line with the rest of Europe, which hon. Members from Northern Ireland have touched on. Dog fighting, at the most determined and organised end of the spectrum, is held nationally and internationally.

The League Against Cruel Sports is calling for an urgent review of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Battersea is opposed to all forms of breed-specific legislation. Last year, more than 70% of pitbull types that ended up being cared for by Battersea for various reasons would have been rehomeable if it had not been for the Dangerous Dogs Act. Dogs are not dangerous until they are specifically trained and maltreated to be. Dogs are abused and set against bait dogs, and that disgusting maltreatment must end.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who is no longer in his place, mentioned that in the United States, dog fighting is recognised as a grade A felony by the FBI, which understands the urgency of tackling this gateway crime. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow mentioned, dog baiting and fighting is a gateway crime due to its link with other serious crimes such as drug and gun dealing and domestic, child and elder abuse. I was utterly horrified to hear, only last week, that one of my constituents had lost their family pet to a dog that had escaped briefly from a life of being trained for hours on a treadmill to build up endurance for fighting. The dog had been treated so badly that it knew of no other reaction but to attack another dog on sight.

Although animal welfare is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, it is clear from the 2015 report commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports and produced by Dr Harding and Dr Nurse, "Analysis of UK Dog Fighting," that much more has to be done to address this growing and utterly abhorrent crime. We must consider the issues raised in that research, particularly the recommendations for addressing the crime nationally, and we must be cohesive in our approach. We may not see the crime, but the evidence is there. Along with sufficient police funding, community engagement is vital to gaining intelligence, teaching young people responsible ownership and reducing opportunities for irresponsible breeders to sell to just anyone.

Finally, I urge everyone to read the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home briefing on dog fighting, which addresses the need for sentencing and education to end back-street breeding. That is the key driver in ending this disgusting practice. I am thoroughly encouraged by the all-party support for this debate, and I trust that the Minister will do the right thing.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): If the Front-Bench speeches come in at slightly under 10 minutes each, Dr Cameron might get a couple of minutes to respond.

10.30 am

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I am grateful for this opportunity to consider the utterly barbaric practice of dog fighting. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing the debate, which has been intelligent and considered and had cross-party support. I also thank Marc Abraham, Blue Cross, the Dogs Trust, the League Against Cruel Sports, the RSPCA and the SSPCA for their briefing ahead of today's debate.

Although dog fighting was made illegal by the Cruelty to Animals Act 1835—the humane Act—evidence suggests it is resurging across the UK. Indeed, it is now a highly codified and organised practice developed for the entertainment of spectators. It is also an extraordinarily brutal, cruel and unsympathetic practice, as my hon. Friend noted.

The welfare of animals is covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in England and Wales, and by the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. Offences relating to animal fights were created by section 8 of the former and by section 23 of the latter. Despite being illegal, fights frequently take place.

Tom Elliott: There appears to be a lot of legislation, but the general consensus is that there is a problem with the enforcement of that legislation and with sentencing.

Dr Monaghan: I agree, and I will shortly make several suggestions as to how that might be addressed.

Several hundred, and possibly several thousand, organised fights take place each year, with hundreds of thousands of pounds changing hands in associated betting at some fights. Fights are organised in pits, on the streets and in parks, housing estates and fields—in fact, anywhere and everywhere. Three levels of fights are recognised. Level 1 fights are impromptu street fights, or "rolls." Level 2 or "hobbyist" fights revolve around localised fighting circuits. Level 3 professional fights are highly organised, often internationally. Injuries sustained by dogs at fights often lead to their death through stress and shock. Fights take place to the death simply for people's amusement. I understand from the SSPCA that the longest recorded dog fight lasted four hours and 12 minutes.

After such abuse the animals are ferocious. The injuries they inflict on other dogs are scarcely believable, and the notion that anyone would wish to participate in the breeding, training, fighting and/or sponsoring of such practices beggars belief—more so given that injured animals rarely receive veterinary attention. The crude analogy applied to such trained dogs is that of high-value pedigree racehorses, but in dog fighting, of course, the animals are expendable, and they are abused and abandoned if no longer match-fit. Grand champion fighting dogs are worth hundreds of thousands of pounds to their owners, with stud fees of £5,000 to £6,000 being common. The picture could not be clearer: dog fighting is big business and utterly horrific in every respect. We should consider dog fighting a serious organised crime.

[*Dr Paul Monaghan*]

The Scottish National party has been at the forefront of animal rights, both in this Parliament and in Scotland. Dog fighting should be seen as a gateway crime. Involvement in clandestine dog fighting leads to other crimes such as illegal gambling, the importation and exportation of animals, abuse of the pet travel scheme, animal theft and drug and gun crime. Strategies to address dog fighting should therefore follow the counter-terrorism strategy—engage and prevent.

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 bans the ownership of a number of dog breeds, some of which are considered fighting breeds. The Act applies to England, Wales and Scotland, but it has been amended separately in Scotland and in England and Wales. The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of which I am a member, has considered the Act's application in the context of England and will report in the near future. Suffice it to say that the Act appears to be ineffective and must be revised, because it focuses on breed, not deed.

Prohibited breeds are difficult to identify and categorise, and dogs are cross-bred to develop strains more suitable for fighting. We know that there is significant underground market activity in the trade in fighting dogs, with puppies being sold for thousands of pounds. Breed-specific legislation is fundamentally flawed. It is a startling statistic that, of the 623 dogs seized as being of a prohibited type over a two-year period, almost a quarter were later found not to be of a prohibited type and were returned to their owners, bringing into further question the concept of what constitutes a dangerous dog. The Act must be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

Although dog fighting is illegal across the UK, specific dog-fighting laws do not exist. Offences are recorded within broader animal welfare and cruelty Acts, which make it illegal to co-ordinate and promote a fight; to keep, possess or train a dog for fighting; or to attend a dog fight as a spectator. Direct animal fighting offences are set in section 8 of the Animal Welfare Act. The law defines an animal fight as

“an occasion on which a protected animal is placed with an animal, or with a human”.

However, it can be argued that street fighting is spontaneous and, as such, an animal is not placed, meaning that such fights are not covered by the legislation. Legislation has had no apparent effect on either dog fighting or the recorded occurrence of injuries from dog bites.

Three important steps can be taken to address the problem: increased sentences and penalties as a deterrent, education as a preventive measure and policy changes to encourage engagement. Currently, the maximum sentence for animal fighting in the UK is a term of up to 51 weeks' imprisonment. In reality, however, sentences are unacceptably low. The example set by Northern Ireland should be followed.

In the US, as we heard earlier, dog fighting is considered a felony in all 50 states, as well as a federal felony. In 2016, the FBI declared that it would track animal abuse in the same way that it tracks class A felonies for accounting, reporting and tracking purposes, and that felony-level penalties for repeat offenders would be enacted. We must recognise that the evidence shows links between animal abuse and other forms of abuse,

such as battery, child abuse, domestic violence, grievous bodily harm, serious violent offences, the use of firearms and so on. As such, dog fighting should also be considered a signal crime.

We call on the UK Government to review sentences under the Animal Welfare Act and introduce penalties that reflect the seriousness of such offences and the horrific abuse of animals, to ensure that punishments fit the crime. Dog fighting should be recorded as a specific offence, separate from animal fighting, to enable the scale of the problem to be more accurately assessed. Dog licensing should also be considered. There should be a presumption that court disposals use sentences at the upper end of sentencing scales—the maximum allowed by law, not the minimum.

The Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 is designed to highlight the responsibility of dog owners by introducing a regime that identifies out-of-control dogs at an early juncture. Many animal welfare charities invest considerable resources in excellent work to teach young people and others about responsible dog ownership. Programmes specifically target young people, those in prison and others who own a status dog or live in a community where status dog ownership is a problem. Such programmes are aimed at increasing awareness of the issues involved and stimulating debate and discussion on responsible dog ownership, antisocial behaviour and the law.

Third-party policing involves persuading organisations, groups or individuals—including community centres, veterinarians, schools, local government and business owners—to take some responsibility for preventing or reducing crime and encouraging people to report animal crime. In that way, crime control guardians are created. Crime control guardians can also be described as a multi-agency taskforce. That approach has proved effective in a number of communities in the US on animal cruelty in general and dog fighting specifically. We are calling for education programmes like those to be commended, encouraged and enabled.

As a matter of policy, sentencing for dog fighting should reflect the object of deterrence relative to the spectrum of offending. The detection of animal fighting offences should become a performance indicator for police forces, adding an incentive to deal with the crime. Details of individuals banned from keeping dogs and other animals should be held on a UK-wide register by statutory agencies. That would help prevent those convicted of animal cruelty offences from being able to commit further offences, as well as increasing opportunities for enforcement action. Rehabilitation programmes should be offered as part of the sentencing disposal to encourage a strategy of education.

Nevertheless, human behaviour is ultimately responsible for dog bites. Breed-specific legislation to ban the ownership of certain types of dogs merely addresses a symptom of an otherwise unaddressed underlying problem. It is likely that dog attacks are rooted in deeper and more diverse socioeconomic causes, such as deprivation and a lack of education concerning the handling of dogs. All those factors contribute to the growth of dog fighting at levels 1 and 2. Clearly, repeated presentations for medical attention could indicate involvement in lower-level dog fighting and associated handling. We are calling for the disclosure to police of those seeking medical assistance for dog attack injuries, to allow investigation and tracking.

It is also clear that mandatory reporting by veterinary professionals of dog-fighting injuries could help identify welfare issues and criminal activity and reduce crime.

Ultimately, we are calling for a senior law enforcement officer to be appointed to ensure that there is sufficient collaboration and action to tackle dog fighting across the four nations of the UK and internationally—including, dare I say it, across the EU. The individual should be responsible for integrating the three strands of increased sentences and penalties as a deterrent; education as a preventive measure; and policy changes to encourage further engagement on dog fighting and organised crime.

10.42 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I am also pleased to respond to today's debate, which I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for bringing forward. This is my first debate as shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The many excellent speeches and interventions we have heard today highlight the awful state we are in and the cruelty to animals experienced in our country. Today must move that debate forward.

Many of us are very proactive in campaigning for animal welfare. We all have a responsibility for good stewardship and wellbeing, but with our responsibilities, we in this place must also proactively address the real issues. For many years, I have represented RSPCA inspectors, so I know the real pressures they have come under. They have legal responsibilities, and in a time when resources are tight, they need our support to be able to fulfil their inspections. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) and others have said, those inspections identify not only issues related to animal welfare but wider domestic abuses and wider criminality.

While today's debate will be responded to by the Minister, there are many pertinent issues for the Home Office and justice teams.

Sir Alan Meale: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Rachael Maskell: No, I am rather tight on time, so I will continue for now. Following a surge in dog fighting, we have seen the legislation change. There was the Cruelty to Animals Act 1835, and Labour introduced the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which has been referenced today. The 2006 Act sought to bring harsher penalties on violators of the law and included the option for short custodial sentences. As we have heard, evidence shows that that option is insufficient to deter people from engaging in this illegal pursuit, whether for so-called entertainment or for gambling.

The League Against Cruel Sports, which I thank for its campaigning, has looked at the wide range of environments in which dog fighting occurs. There is street fighting, which relates to street culture. There are unplanned, impromptu fights that people sometimes gamble on, although not always, and are often associated with status. There is also more informal gambling around local circuits or highly organised fights where stakes of hundreds of thousands of pounds can change hands. There is still a real issue here and overseas with the dog-fighting culture. We have to get on top of that and address it with the application of tighter rules.

A number of questions arise from the number of prosecutions. The most stark is the difference between the number of complaints received by the authorities and the number of prosecutions incurred. Less than 5% of complaints translate into convictions. In 2014, 766 complaints were received, but only 31 convictions resulted, with just three people receiving a custodial sentence. In all, the rise in the number of complaints and the leniency of the criminal justice system demonstrates that needs are not being sufficiently addressed.

Campaign groups believe that tougher penalties, including longer custodial sentences—we have heard evidence about that today—would provide stronger deterrence. What are the Government doing to look into the effectiveness of longer sentencing, and not just here in Britain? We have heard from the hon. Members for South Down (Ms Ritchie) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and others about the experience in Northern Ireland of extending imprisonment. France applies a sentence of up to two years, and Germany and the Czech Republic apply a sentence of up to three years. We need to know the impact of that and whether the evidence is there that we should increase sentences, as so many Members have indicated.

We need to start looking at issues such as puppy farms, as the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) said, and breeding programmes. Tighter regulations would protect the interests and welfare of dogs. That is an issue for the domestic market, but we also need to control what is happening with dog fighting. In particular, we need to look at the breeds outlawed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 that are still being bred, such as pit bull terriers. They are still in circulation and thousands of pounds is changing hands in breeding programmes. There are a number of things that we need to look at, and we have heard horrific stories of what happens in fights. We need to get on top of those abuses. We know that many of these things lead into wider issues.

My next question to the Government is on how they are supporting the inspectorate regime. From talking to RSPCA inspectors on the ground, I know that their ability is restricted by falling donations to their organisation. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that RSPCA inspectors are resourced sufficiently to carry out their statutory inspections and, likewise, that the police are resourced sufficiently in supporting those operations?

Next, I want to ask about breaking the culture. We have heard evidence about that. What steps have the Government taken to deter illegal dog breeding and fighting and what is their analysis of the effectiveness of those steps? What have the Government done to raise awareness of the whole issue of dog fighting, particularly among those most likely to participate in the activity? There may be good learning to pool from Scotland and Northern Ireland. The League Against Cruel Sports is calling for a national dog fighting action plan. Labour would support that plan, which would evolve around prevention, understanding and prosecution. What are the Government doing to address that, and are they willing to set up a national taskforce to address dog fighting? Will they keep a national register of those who have been found to be involved in dog fighting?

One issue that has not been raised today is cybercrime associated with dog fighting, whether the selling of dogs, which has been mentioned, online participation in

[*Rachael Maskell*]

dog fighting or the videoing or recording of fights. What steps are the Government taking on cyber to track participants in this activity and to break into those heavily coded sites?

As I have said, dog fighting has far wider implications. It is a crime that is linked to other forms of criminality; many speakers have alluded to that. We particularly recognise the work in the US on that agenda. Dog fighting can be linked to domestic crime, drug dealing, firearms sales, physical and emotional harm, robbery and other illegal practices. How are the Government working across agencies, especially with the police, to ensure a co-ordinated strategy to address dog fighting and its links to wider criminality?

There is also an impact on public safety, as has been mentioned. Some dogs have gone on to bite people in their communities. How comprehensively have dog fights been followed up to assess the source of potentially dangerous animals? In the past 10 years, the number of dog bites has increased by 76%. The source of those surely needs closer analysis.

Finally, the Labour party condemns dog fighting, as do other parties. We are grateful for the ongoing work of organisations, particularly the RSPCA, the League Against Cruel Sports, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and many others, in their development of evidence against this. The House has a moral duty to ensure that it does all it can to uphold the welfare of animals. The onus now sits with the Minister to set out further steps that must be taken to ensure that this form of animal cruelty and criminality is more comprehensively addressed.

10.51 am

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate on what is obviously an important issue that the House cares deeply about, which is why we have had so many Members here. Dog fighting is an absolutely repugnant activity. As the hon. Lady made clear in her opening remarks, it has been banned in this country since 1835. It is certainly depressing to think that it persists to this day. The cruelty is not limited to the dogs directly involved in the fighting; the animals are sometimes used as bait, as various hon. Members have pointed out. One hears distressing anecdotes sometimes about older dogs that end up being used as bait after being advertised for rehoming by elderly owners. That is utterly appalling.

I pay tribute to the League Against Cruel Sports for its work in highlighting the issue and for its work in helping with enforcement to bring prosecutions against the evil people who engage in dog fighting.

Around five years ago, when I served on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I read a detailed academic study into the phenomenon of dog fighting, and other more recent reports suggest that the practice of dog fighting takes place at different levels, as various hon. Members have pointed out. They can range from one-off, one-on-one dog fights in urban parks and housing estates—sometimes called “street rolling” or “chain rolling”—to more organised events

behind closed doors, often involving illegal gambling. As other hon. Members have pointed out, that is often linked to other crime. There is also the continued desire for certain individuals to acquire so-called status dogs, which has a link to this problem. They have no concern for the dog’s welfare or the safety of other people, including their own family members.

I want to touch briefly, however, on some good-news stories on dogs. In general, the trend for stray dogs is decreasing, and the latest figures published in September last year showed 102,500 stray dogs in 2015, down from 110,000 the year before and 126,000 five years ago, so we have made some progress. The successful roll-out of compulsory dog microchipping in April will help to reduce that further. We have now got 91% of dogs microchipped as of the end of April. Also, the number of stray dogs being euthanised is down to 5%, which is the lowest figure ever, down from a high of 16% around 20 years ago.

In addition, we have achieved a lot of success in our work with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group. Six of the main pet advertising websites have signed up to the PAAG minimum standards for adverts, which has led to a huge number being removed and no longer appearing, including adverts involving prohibited breeds. Gumtree reported to me that the number of pets being advertised on its website following its signing up to the code has gone down by more than 70%. PAAG members put filters on their websites to identify potentially problematic adverts, which are then tracked and removed. Information is also supplied to authorities such as the police and local authorities to assist them with enforcement action. Key words can range from obvious terms such as “pit bull” to less obvious references to “gameness”, “red-nosed dogs” and “Staffie cross”, which is often code for “pit bull”. Those are all now terms that flag alarms with the websites, and that is an important step forward.

In addition to this work, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 was strengthened to make it far easier to bring prosecutions for dog fighting. There is now a long list of things that make it an offence to cause an animal fight, receive money for admission to an animal fight, publicise an animal fight, provide information about an animal fight, make or accept a bet on an animal fight, take part in an animal fight, possess anything designed or adapted to be used in an animal fight, keep or train an animal for use in an animal fight, keep any premises used in an animal fight and be present at an animal fight. So a wide range of criteria make it easier to bring prosecutions. The maximum penalty for any of those offences is six months’ imprisonment or an unlimited fine, or both.

Before the Animal Welfare Act came into force in 2007, the maximum penalty for causing or assisting in an animal fight was reserved for the people arranging the fights and the fine for other related offences was capped at £2,500. A year ago, we removed the upper cap and there can now be an unlimited fine for animal cruelty. We changed that just a year ago.

I am told there are around 20 prosecutions a year and several custodial sentences, but I understand the calls for the maximum penalty for dog fighting to be increased. Several hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), made that point. I can say that in the closing stages of the previous Parliament we looked at this issue and considered the case for increasing the maximum sentence for animal

fighters, but we did not have a legislative vehicle to do so at that point. The view now—this is a Ministry of Justice lead—is that we should look at all animal cruelty because there may be a case for changing the sentences for other types of animal cruelty as well. The Government keep the issue under review, and my colleagues in the MOJ—

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

George Eustice: I will not give way; we are tight on time.

A second issue is equally important. As the hon. Member for Mansfield (Sir Alan Meale) pointed out, we need not only to have the maximum sentences set at the right level, but to give the right guidance to magistrates when sentencing, because we still only have a handful of custodial sentences. Such decisions are set by the independent Sentencing Council, and the guidelines on animal welfare offences, including those on dog fighting, are available on its website. I can tell hon. Members today that a review is ongoing. A consultation on sentencing guidelines for animal cruelty offences is now open and will close on 11 August.

I want to say a brief word on enforcement, which is carried out by the police, working with the RSPCA. The RSPCA has been tackling animal cruelty, particularly dog fighting, for years. It has a great track record. The threshold on puppies, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), is an issue we are looking at in an animal establishment consultation that has closed. We will respond to that shortly. On the register of people convicted of animal offences and banned from owning animals, the police are looking into that to see whether it will be possible, without publishing information, to give certain agencies greater access to it.

In conclusion, we have had a good debate and many important points have been raised. I am sure my colleagues in the MOJ and in the Sentencing Council will take on board some of the points raised today.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Dr Cameron, you have 60 seconds to wind up.

10.58 am

Dr Cameron: I thank everyone who took part in the debate, and I thank the agencies here today. I also thank the Minister for his comments. However, I think action is needed. If it is so easy to bring prosecutions, why are they not happening? We do not want the issue to be lost within other issues. There must be a timeline and a clear deterrent. Like many other Members in this House, I will not rest until dogs are protected.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered dog fighting.

UK Security and Entry Clearance Procedures

10.59 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK security and entry clearance procedures.

With extremism on the rise and threats to our national security increasing, tightening up UK entry clearance procedures should be our top priority, but sadly we have increasingly taken it for granted that our borders are policed and secure from non-UK threats. I sought to bring this issue before Parliament following the brutal murder of Glasgow shopkeeper Mr Asad Shah in March this year. Mr Shah was murdered by an Islamic extremist who violently hated his peaceful Ahmadi Muslim views. His killer, Tanveer Ahmed, declared that he killed Mr Shah to

“protect the honour of Islam”.

Mr Shah’s brutal murder, the first of its kind on UK soil, has terrible implications for this country. The radical extremist Islamist views that inspired the killing have been fanned by extremist preachers from outside the UK being allowed to come into this country and spread their hate. Our entry clearance regulations have failed to prevent their entry.

Anti-Ahmadi hate preachers are being let into the UK as we speak, and are calling for Ahmadi Muslims to be killed on account of their faith. For instance, just a month after Mr Shah’s murder, a prominent anti-Ahmadi preacher from Pakistan was touring UK mosques with his message of hate. After I found out, I requested an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary and senior representatives from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. I was grateful to have met the Home Secretary, but I was extremely disappointed by the fact that reforming entry clearance policies did not seem to be a priority. The Home Secretary did not seem to be aware of this particular radical extremist preacher having been allowed into the UK. It is no exaggeration to say that I left the meeting with a genuine fear for UK security and a grim feeling of surprise that we have not seen even more anti-Ahmadi terrorism on UK soil.

I have no reservations in saying that inadequate Home Office entry clearance procedures are allowing the entry into this country of individuals who pose a direct threat to our democracy and our social cohesion. I shall highlight in my speech why it is so urgent that the Home Office tackles this urgent problem now. As a side point, it is extremely ironic that although individuals who spread hate are allowed into the UK, every MP will be aware that a large number of completely law-abiding Pakistani citizens are refused entry clearance to attend weddings, funerals and other important family events. That, too, is the result of problems with Home Office entry clearance.

I turn to a case study that highlights the gravity of the situation. Mufti Muhammad Hanif Qureshi is a radical Islamist cleric from Pakistan who has repeatedly been allowed into the UK to spread the sort of anti-Ahmadi hate that led to the murder of the peaceful Mr Asad Shah. To be clear, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, to which Mr Shah belonged, is a persecuted religious

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

group in Pakistan. The Ahmadis live by their message of “love for all, hatred for none”, and they categorically reject terrorism in any form. But despite how well-established and peaceful the community is, Ahmadi Muslims are victims of terrible injustice. As they do not believe that Mohammed was the final prophet sent to guide mankind, they face accusations of heresy among orthodox Muslims. At worst, they face extreme violence in Pakistan—and now, sadly, in the UK, too. Anti-blasphemy and anti-terror laws are wrongly used against them in Pakistan, and they are murdered on the grounds of their faith. To this day, they are branded worse than apostates by hard-liners and forbidden by the state to call themselves Muslims.

The intolerance and hatefulness has made its way to the UK. The Muslim Council of Britain has long been criticised for not acting to counter anti-Ahmadi hatred, partly because it, too, does not recognise the Ahmadis as Muslims. Mr Asad Shah in Glasgow was the first Ahmadi Muslim to be murdered on UK soil on the grounds of his faith. Mufti Hanif Qureshi is an individual who is greatly responsible for spreading messages of hate. He is the founder of *Shabab e Islami*, and is well known in Pakistan for his virulent anti-Ahmadi preaching, of the sort that inspired the murder of Mr Shah. For instance, in a recording of a sermon Qureshi delivered in 2014, which is freely available on YouTube, he said with regard to Ahmadi Muslims:

“Let them know those who consider Sunnis as cowards that Allah has honoured us with the courage and power to strangulate those involved in blasphemy, to cut out their tongues, and to riddle their bodies with bullets. For this, nobody can arrest us under any law”.

Such highly inflammatory and hateful sermons have indeed incited others to commit violence and murder. In 2011, Pakistani politician Salmaan Taseer, who opposed Pakistan’s anti-Ahmadi laws, was shot dead by his bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri. After his arrest, Qadri said he had been inspired to act by a 2010 sermon delivered by Qureshi in Rawalpindi, in which the cleric branded the likes of Taseer as “deserving to be killed” under Islamic law. Qureshi was arrested after Taseer’s murder, but later released, and continued to defend the murder in public sermons before Qadri was executed in January this year.

The same hateful preacher who inspired the murder of a prominent Pakistani politician just a few years ago was last month allowed to enter this country without any problem, despite the murder of Mr Asad Shah in Glasgow just months before. Could the Home Office not make the connection between the incitement of anti-Ahmadi hatred and the committing of murder? Just last month, on 4 May, Qureshi spoke at a Luton mosque where, according to the mosque’s spokesperson, he made a “very impressive” speech to an audience of hundreds. The event doubled up as the 36th annual *Khatm-e-Nubuwwat* meeting at the Luton mosque. The *Khatm-e-Nubuwwat*—translated as the “finality of the Prophet”—movement has been implicated in the violent persecution of members of the Ahmadi religious sect in the UK and Pakistan. Despite that, it is a registered charity in the UK and is listed on the Charity Commission website.

Members may well be aware that *Khatm-e-Nubuwwat* is well known for its anti-Ahmadi views and regularly invites preachers from Pakistan to visit the UK on

speaking tours to spread the message of hate. Qureshi is just one example. His words have incited violence in Pakistan and they will incite violence in this country, too. He should be banned from ever travelling to Britain. Given the context of anti-Ahmadi sentiment in the UK and growing religious violence throughout Europe, his message of hate has no place here. How on earth could he have been granted entry clearance? A quick Google search brings up hundreds of English-language news stories about his preaching, yet such a basic level of research was apparently beyond the Home Office.

At my meeting with the Home Secretary, I was stunned to be informed that the high commission in Pakistan had only recently hired a specialist Urdu section for its intelligence office. It seems that until recently there was no one at the high commission in Islamabad who could actually understand some of the watch lists unless they were translated into English. How can our anti-extremism measures be so weak that such terrible oversights occur? Despite the fact that the UK authorities seem to lack the basic linguistic resources needed to identify extremist threats, we know that extremist rhetoric can be changed to moderate for the English-speaking media, and then revert to extremist for Urdu speakers. It is much easier for radicals like Qureshi to switch between the two.

The case study of Qureshi is important because we tend to take it for granted that our borders are policed and protected from individuals who might cause harm to our country. We all lead our lives in the hopeful confidence that the Home Office and immigration officials are able to refuse entry clearance to any person deemed undesirable. We put our faith in Government Departments and agencies to protect our democracy and peace. As far as I know, there is no exhaustive list of reasons why someone’s visa application can be rejected by UK authorities, but there is a list of unacceptable behaviours that would lead to a person being refused entry to, or excluded from, the UK. Qureshi seems to me to fulfil all the criteria, including

“using any means...to express views which”

seek to

“justify or glorify terrorist violence”

or incite or

“provoke others to terrorist acts...or foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK”.

Exclusion is not targeted against any specific group. Those excluded can include, and have included, far-right extremists, homophobic extremists and Christian, Jewish and Islamic extremists. In November 2014, the Home Secretary said that she had excluded “hundreds of people” from the UK—suggesting that those powers are sometimes enforced—including 61 people on national security grounds, 72 who

“would not have been conducive to the public good”

and 84 hate preachers. So why was Qureshi able to enter this country just a month after his brand of anti-Ahmadi hatred had inspired the murder of a peaceful Glasgow shopkeeper?

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for securing this debate. The murder of Mr Shah in Glasgow absolutely shocked all of us in the city. Does she agree that while hate preachers such as those she has described can come into the

country, the Ahmadiyya community in Glasgow and the rest of the UK cannot really have confidence that the UK is keeping them safe?

Siobhain McDonagh: I completely agree with the hon. Lady's comments. The expressions of hatred across the country, particularly since the referendum result was announced last week, show us the importance of preventing extremism by all means. Simply, it threatens the fabric of our democracy and our social cohesion. Mr Shah's murder demonstrates how high the stakes are.

Back in 2005, in the wake of the London bombings, the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, said that Departments and intelligence agencies were working together to

"establish a full database of individuals around the world".—[*Official Report*, 20 July 2005; Vol. 436, c. 1255.]

He said that such information about dangerous people would be available to visa and immigration staff and added to the UK's warning index. We cannot know the details of Home Office and intelligence workings, but given the admission of Qureshi to the UK just last month, we can assume that they may not be working.

History teaches us what the consequences are when the Home Office does not do its job properly. For example, the Pakistani cleric Masood Azhar delivered extreme messages across the UK in more than 40 mosques in the early 1990s. At the time of his tour, he was chief organiser of the prominent Pakistani jihadist group Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. We now know that Azhar, who was close to Osama bin Laden, planted the seeds of extremism on his 1993 UK tour that later inspired at least two Britons to go on to plan the 2005 London bombings and the beheading of US journalist Daniel Pearl. One would hope that the UK authorities had learned their lesson, but the admission of Qureshi suggests that not much has changed.

The Henry Jackson Society published a short report earlier this year as part of its "Student Rights: Tackling extremism on campuses" project, which detailed the range of individuals expressing extremist and hateful views who were given a platform at UK universities, mainly in London, in the last year. It includes South African politician Mr Julius Malema, who was convicted of a hate crime just a few years ago, Mr Asim Khan, who has compared

"homosexuality to incest and 'burglary, theft and sexual abuse'" and Mr Suliman Ghani, who

"has expressed sectarian attitudes towards Ahmadiyya, claiming they are not Muslims".

The UK Ahmadi community and the very fabric of our democracy is under threat, now more than ever. In April, leaflets calling for members of the Ahmadi Muslim community to be killed were allegedly distributed in universities, mosques and shopping centres in London. One leaflet distributed widely in Stockwell, for example, entitled "Qadianis"—a pejorative name for Ahmadis—describes Ahmadis as "dualist infidels" and "worse than apostate". It prescribed the same punishment doled out for apostates—those who have renounced their own religion—giving Ahmadis three days to denounce their faith or else "be awarded capital punishment".

Scottish mosques are becoming increasingly radicalised in the wake of Mr Shah's murder, and anti-Ahmadi conferences took place in Slough just a few months ago.

The threat posed to our society is real and imminent, and now inept Home Office entry clearance procedures have allowed hate preachers such as Qureshi, who has called for death penalties for Ahmadi Muslims, into our UK Muslim communities. These are dangerous times for our democracy and the precedent for racial and religious hatred is huge. The British Government's double standards are terrifying. At one end, they seek to crush all extremism—we know from the recent terrible atrocities that that goal is more important than ever—and yet they still give visas to people such as Qureshi, who incite intolerance and even violence in our society.

There should have been an absolute storm of anger following Mr Shah's death. Just hours before he was murdered, he posted a message of peace and love on Facebook to his Christian friends, on the occasion of Good Friday. Hours later, he was brutally murdered outside his shop by a religious extremist. Why have we not called out Mr Shah's murder for what it is—a religious hate crime? Is it because we cannot be bothered to understand that victims of Islamist extremism include other Muslims, as well as non-Muslims? I shudder at the thought that we do not take Mr Shah's death seriously.

Developing stronger Home Office entry clearance structures to screen out individuals such as Qureshi from being able to come to this country are just part of the problem—internet and social media communication means that pan-national extremist and terrorist threats can spread beyond borders in seconds—but allowing such hatred to cross our borders is almost legitimising or endorsing their hate. Qureshi, and all those who express his hateful views, have no place in our country. Today more than ever, we have to ensure that such individuals are not able to come here and spread their hateful messages under the banner of free speech.

I ask the Minister the following questions. To what extent can the Home Office check if a person has promoted hate and extremism when a visa application is made? How do the Government monitor hate speech in Pakistan and elsewhere to help inform their visa decisions? Do the UK Government give equal weight to hate speech whether committed online, on TV or in any media, including social media? How can individuals or organisations in Pakistan or the UK provide information on such matters that would be of use? What procedures will the Government put in place to make that easier?

I sincerely hope that the Home Office takes seriously the deep flaws that are jeopardising security and social cohesion as we speak. Only then can we claim to have a society that promotes love for all and hatred for none—the Ahmadi ideal that we should all seek to live by.

11.16 am

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing the debate and highlighting this extremely important issue.

Hatred and extremism in our society must be challenged in all their different forms. The hon. Lady highlighted the appalling murder of Mr Asad Shah for the faith that he professed. The Government utterly condemn that act. We take with the greatest of seriousness our responsibility to combat those who sow hatred in our country and our communities, which might inspire others to take action against our own citizens for their faith.

[James Brokenshire]

I have had extensive contact with the Ahmadi community over a number of years. I have visited the mosque in Morden, and I have had the privilege of sitting down with His Holiness to talk through a number of issues, including how we combat extremism and terrorism. I am clear that the Ahmadi community makes an enormous contribution to our society and culture in the UK. I, for one, stand up and defend the right of members of that community to profess and practise their faith without fear of intimidation or violence. I assure the hon. Lady of my personal commitment on that issue, of the steps I have taken over a number of years to work with the Ahmadi community, and of the respect that I have for that community and the work that it does.

The hon. Lady made a number of points about confronting extremism and about how our visa processes operate. I want to reassure her about the importance that we attach to the issue and the steps that we have taken to prevent preachers of hate from coming into this country. I am unable to comment on individual cases, some of which are subject to orders, but I would like to take her through some of the processes and procedures that we adopt. I also underline that the current Home Secretary has banned more hate speakers than any preceding Home Secretary and is committed to this issue.

The debate gives me the opportunity to clarify that we have robust policies and procedures in place to ensure that foreign nationals who seek to undermine the national security and values of the UK through violence and hatred can be prevented from coming here to do so. Visas—entry clearances—are important tools to reduce illegal immigration, tackle organised crime and protect national security. They allow us to intervene before someone arrives in the UK. The information provided in the application process enables us to identify links that we would otherwise not have known about and, where appropriate, prevent someone from coming to the UK by refusing a visa. It is of paramount importance that immigration processes ensure that individuals who have come to notice as a threat to the UK's security and society, or who may present such a threat, are prevented from coming here to spread their messages and incite violence.

Visas are an important part of our immigration system, which is fair to legitimate migrants and tough on those who flout the rules. We have strong processes in place at all stages—visa application, leave to enter and extension of stay—to provide assurance that appropriate checks are made before any leave is granted. UK Visas and Immigration staff play a critical role in distinguishing between those who are entitled to come to the UK and stay here and those who are not. That requires appropriate application of the immigration rules and a series of checks on individuals, so that accurate decisions can be made to help keep the UK safe and secure.

The operating mandates of the Border Force and UKVI require specific checks to be made, with referral to experts where necessary. Entry clearance officers receive a range of training to support them in identifying individuals who may pose a threat to the UK. For those who need a visa to come to the UK, the application process requires the applicant to declare any criminality or immigration offence and to provide their facial image and fingerprints as biometrics.

Entry clearance officers are required to check a range of databases, including biometric, Home Office and police databases, for any traces of the applicant's history. The biometrics fix the identity of the applicant so that entry clearance officers can identify the same individual in the future, and so that important information about the applicant's immigration history, including any travel ban or exclusion order, is available even if, for instance, they change their name or seek to conceal their identity. In addition, applicants must qualify for entry under the immigration rules and will normally be refused a visa or leave to enter or remain if they do not.

The authority to carry scheme, operated by the national border targeting centre, means that carriers, including airlines, require authority to carry individuals to the UK. That authority may be refused for any individual who has been excluded from the UK, whom the Home Secretary is in the process of making the subject of an exclusion order or who is the subject of United Nations or EU travel restrictions. If authority to carry a specific individual is refused and that individual is carried to the UK, the carrier is liable to a financial penalty of up to £50,000. Our processes on arrival at the border also include full checks against Home Office databases, providing further assurance.

Siobhain McDonagh: This is a dialogue of the deaf. I have explained to the Minister a case in which an individual who has been cited as the cause of a murder in Pakistan and a murder in the UK was granted entry clearance. Can we address that issue?

James Brokenshire: As I have already stated, I am unable to comment on those who are or are not subject to exclusion orders or on individual cases, for sound legal reasons. I am trying to explain the steps that are taken, and I will come on to the process for exclusion orders, which is at the heart of what the hon. Lady is talking about. Our special unit within the Home Office analyses information and is a core part of the activities that the Home Office undertakes.

We are clear that the threat the UK currently faces from extremism is unprecedented. The Government are taking a stronger stance to ensure that extremist ideas do not gain a foothold here and challenge this country's values of tolerance, respect and democracy. We have acted to protect our communities by publishing our counter-extremism strategy, which is based on four pillars: countering extremist ideology; building a partnership with all who are opposed to extremism; disrupting extremists; and building more cohesive communities. The strategy will challenge all forms of extremism. The Government, however, can only do that in partnership with all those who want to defeat extremism and build a stronger Britain.

As Her Majesty the Queen recently announced to Parliament, the Government intend to introduce a counter-extremism and safeguarding Bill to provide stronger powers for the Government and law enforcement agencies to protect the public from extremists. The Government will consult on new powers for disrupting extremists before they are introduced.

On the specific issue of exclusion, the Home Secretary has the power to exclude from the UK foreign nationals whose presence she considers would not be conducive to the public good, or whose exclusion is justified on grounds of public policy or public security. A person

may be excluded for a range of reasons, including national security, criminality and unacceptable behaviour. There is no time limit on exclusion, and a person who is excluded remains so until the Home Secretary lifts the exclusion. Anyone excluded by the Home Secretary who applies for entry clearance or leave to enter must be refused so long as the exclusion remains in force. That power is very serious, and no decision is taken lightly or as a means of stopping open debate. All decisions must be based on sound evidence and must be proportionate, reasonable and consistent.

Although I cannot comment on particular cases, the current Home Secretary has excluded more than 100 hate preachers from the UK since May 2010, which is more than any previous Home Secretary. Our special cases unit works with language and other experts to look at social media and other media to identify those who may pose a threat and therefore may need to be considered for such action. The Home Office has a sense of purpose and seriousness in addressing those who could pose a threat.

Siobhain McDonagh: How many Urdu speakers are there in the specialist unit?

James Brokenshire: Given the time available, I will write to the hon. Lady with details on the work, including those who are involved and the steps being taken. She and I have had previous exchanges on these issues, and obviously I am happy to provide further detail and information and, equally, to reflect on some of her questions to which I have not responded specifically.

I underline the unprecedented threat that the UK faces from extremism, with extremists using the internet to spread their ideologies quickly and on a scale that we have not previously seen. That is why we have introduced new approaches for combating and confronting extremism. We recognise the challenge we face in our communities where extremism takes root. The hon. Lady is right to highlight the appalling murder of Mr Shah and its impact on the community in Glasgow, and I recognise that in the firm and clear way in which I am underlining our utter condemnation of any acts of violence. Equally, the Government have resolved to confront all forms of extremism, including by identifying those who may wish to travel to the UK to peddle their hate and ideology. To safeguard our communities and confront extremism in all its forms, we will continue to take action to prevent such people from travelling to the UK.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Football Hooliganism

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered football hooliganism.

It is a pleasure, as normal, Mr Rosindell, to serve under chairmanship. I bring this debate to Westminster Hall not claiming in any way to be a football expert—a lot of people in England might be claiming that right now, but I do in particular. In many respects, I am not a huge football fan, but I am proud to be English, and over the past few weeks I have been sickened, frankly, at the all-too-familiar sight of English football hooliganism on the television. It is not something new, unfortunately; it is something we have had to endure over a long time.

I wanted to secure this debate simply because I am sick and tired of watching scenes of disorder and violence following the English football team around, in particular during the recent Euro football finals. The scenes were depressingly familiar and, frankly, embarrassing for anyone English. Time and again, England has witnessed its name dragged through the mud by a group of people who want to use football as a vehicle for their love of violence. We do not tolerate drunken behaviour on the high street or anywhere around the rest of the country, so we should not tolerate it when it follows football either.

The strange thing about football hooliganism is that a mob mentality often seems to take over. The crowd encourages intolerance of, and turns on, anyone not in their group, whether a member of another fan club, a local resident or someone in some way different from them. Such disorder simply puts decent people off attending games.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the converse is the impeccable behaviour we witnessed at the Euro 2016 championships of, for example, the Welsh and Northern Ireland fans? Their behaviour was exemplary and outstanding. I assume he will go on to say that we need to encourage the vast majority of fans throughout the United Kingdom who are decent and well behaved to ensure that such behaviour is the standard by which everyone else is judged. Those who fall short of that standard ought to be penalised very heavily indeed.

Gareth Johnson: I am happy to congratulate the fans from Ulster and Wales on their behaviour, generally speaking. Some incidents were reported that involved those groups of fans, but it is right to say that, generally, they were a credit to Northern Ireland and to Wales. The majority of English fans were also well behaved—I do not think anyone disputes that—but there were those actions by a tiny, selfish group of people.

Northern Ireland can be very proud of reaching those finals. It is a shame in many ways that England did not face Northern Ireland, because it would have ensured one further UK team—[*Interruption.*] I am not claiming that England would have won the game; if we could not beat a team from a country with 300,000

[Gareth Johnson]

people, we might have struggled to beat Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, that might have enabled another UK team to go further forward.

Northern Ireland can hold its head high and be proud of the fans who followed its team and who, without doubt, helped the team. Another aspect of the problem is that the hooliganism cannot help the England team to play well. Wayne Rooney being forced to condemn the behaviour of some of his own fans on television must have an effect on the team's morale and performance. I am not for one minute claiming that football hooliganism caused England to play as badly as they did, but it cannot have helped the overall atmosphere in the England camp if they had to deal with hooliganism issues.

People see the incidents that we all witness on the television and simply will not risk getting involved in the inevitable problems. There is no way that I would take my wife and children to follow England in a football tournament, because I would not want to run the risk of my family getting caught up in those problems. It is incredibly sad that a proud English person who takes an interest in football might not be willing to take the family abroad to follow the England team. Some families, of course, do so without any problem, but I would not run the risk with my family, and that is sad.

Many of the hardened football hooligans have been kept away from international tournaments by banning orders. A drunken yobbishness, however, has taken over from that hard-core hooliganism, with some people still being generally aggressive and unpleasant, leading, inevitably, to antisocial behaviour. We saw many such instances in France in the recent tournament. It is right to say that other fans also behaved badly in Marseille, with problems emanating from various different countries, and the irresponsible comments by Vladimir Putin certainly did not help the situation in France.

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): I am conscious that I am interrupting a detailed and passionate speech, but we must not imply that the whole of Russia supported the violence we saw by so-called Russian fans, particularly in Marseille. Incidentally, following that situation, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport spoke to the Russian Sports Minister, who then made statements that we would respect. I will speak later about how some of the England fans were not England fans; they had stolen England paraphernalia and merchandise on them, but were Russian. Also, not all Russians agreed with President Putin.

Gareth Johnson: That is welcome news. I concur that most Russian people would be as appalled as most English people at the behaviour of some of the so-called fans who had followed their team to France.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are problems from other countries, it is probably fair to say that England has a worse reputation than any other country. The problem is self-perpetuating: we get the bad reputation, and hooligans from other countries, such as Russia, want to take on the England fans, and some England fans get caught up in that. We saw some entirely innocent England football fans in the stadium in France getting involved in problems that they were simply not there to

get involved with. It is fair to say that some England fans were easily provoked, but, without doubt, completely innocent England football fans were caught up in some of the behaviour. However, it is not necessary for England fans to become easily provoked or to deal with a situation by responding with disorder as well or by ending up throwing bottles at the police or making racist chants at local residents.

We now have an opportunity to do something. It is essential that we act to prevent violent scenes at the World Cup in Russia, should England qualify for that tournament. Football banning orders can be an effective tool to prevent hooligans from travelling abroad to England games, only to take part in violent activities that drag this country's name through the mud.

There is a lot of video evidence of the fans who took part in disorder and of the violence in Marseilles and Lille, and that should be used widely to identify those responsible, so that banning orders can be imposed on them. Banning orders should be imposed on anyone who took part in or encouraged disorderly behaviour, whether or not they were apprehended or arrested in France.

The UK football policing unit published pictures initially of 20 fans it wanted to identify and then of 73 additional fans. That has happened since I secured this debate, and it is a very welcome step. We need that kind of proactive response from that policing unit to ensure that the problem is tackled, but I would like to see it go far further and act on a far wider scale. Hundreds of people took part in that disorderly behaviour, and we should therefore be aiming to identify hundreds of people who should be given banning orders.

Mike Penning: Although those numbers are correct, the police often will not release video evidence while investigations are ongoing, because that sometimes alerts the culprits. In many cases, we have passed on video evidence to the French authorities to assist them in their prosecutions, which we are still awaiting in some cases.

Gareth Johnson: That is good news. I pay tribute to that unit, which is working its socks off at the moment to try to tackle this problem. Many of its officers were out in France assisting their French colleagues in dealing with the problem, and they worked hard for months, but this is frankly a problem that the police cannot solve on their own.

In many ways, we should not be surprised that there were problems in Marseille. A depressing amount of football hooliganism has taken place in the domestic English football leagues this season. Arrests are down, but I think it is fair to say that significant problems endure. A culture seems to have grown up that allows antisocial behaviour to occur at football matches. We saw last month the pictures of the Manchester United coach being attacked by some West Ham fans. It is correct to say that only a few dozen people took part in smashing the windows of that coach, yet there were hundreds of people present who supported and did not condemn that action. Many people there actually encouraged it. That culture enables problems to build and build.

Football hooliganism will never be stopped until football fans themselves universally condemn and turn their backs on it. The police can do only so much to

prevent such activities from taking place. Banning orders in themselves cannot change the culture among football hooligans, but football fans can. Those who take part in violent behaviour or encourage others to take part should expect to be banned from following England abroad. It is entirely proportionate to restrict someone's movements abroad if they have behaved in a violent or disorderly manner when following the England football team. Millions of people in this country love sport, which enriches society and helps to bring us all together, but we should do more to stop those who seek to undermine that and spoil it for everyone else.

2.43 pm

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on securing the debate.

It is appropriate that we are having this debate now given the recent incidents of football hooliganism, which raise fears that an ugly stain on our game that was definitely on the down is now on the rise. We must make sure that that is not the case. The police, legislators and society at large must work together to stand up to this scourge. If we are realistically to challenge unacceptable behaviour, we must take a dispassionate view and look at what will make a positive difference.

Mr Gregory Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is talking about football in general having to take a stand. Does he agree that that is all the more important looking ahead to the World cup in two years' time, given that there will be more countries and that, as the Minister has pointed out, a minority of Russian and English fans have already indicated that they are involved in violence? We must prepare for that tournament in Russia to ensure that a very serious situation does not occur.

Steven Paterson: That is an important point. The world of football must take a collective view that such behaviour is not acceptable, and it must work together. It is undoubtedly true that the recent headlines have been predominantly about Russian and English fans, but those are not the only incidents. Incredibly, flares have been set off during many games at the current tournament, and that is just not acceptable. Some of the things we have seen during the tournament in the media and on social media, particularly from fans of England and Russia but from others too, are violent and unacceptable, and we must stand together and oppose them.

Closer to home, we have recently seen hooliganism in my country, Scotland. There were unsavoury and unacceptable scenes at the Scottish cup final at Hampden Park. I do not stand here to say that we do not have any problems in Scotland, because we do. We share this problem, and we must stamp it out.

My wish to take part in the debate was based on my experience of following Scotland abroad since the 1990s. I have been to the majority of European countries and capitals. The team has not always been successful on the pitch, I must admit, but the supporters' behaviour off

the pitch has been impeccable. One point that I want to make, based on my observations across Europe and as far afield as Japan, is about effective policing and organisation—or the lack of it. That is a huge determinant of whether events are peaceful and successful. If the policing and organisation are found wanting when it comes to dealing with well-behaved supporters on the international scene, such as the Scottish, that flags up the possibility that real problems may arise with supporters among whom there is trouble and a more unacceptable side.

Well planned matches, where fans are told clearly where they should go and there is ample room for ticket checks and searches of bags—or sporrans—are the successful ones that go without a hitch. It beggars belief that so many fans have managed to get fireworks into the grounds during the tournament that is going on in France. That can only represent a serious failure on the part of the organisers and the police, and we should say so.

Mike Penning: Colleagues are being generous in giving way. I would like to raise two points. First, everyone seems to think that flares are fun, but they are enormously dangerous. They burn at some 2,000° C, and as a former firefighter I have seen the damage that flares can cause to human flesh. That is why they are banned across Europe, and particularly in our stadiums. We saw some flares at Glastonbury, and I hope that they will soon be banned at music festivals as well.

Secondly, I refer the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) to the fact that although arrests have been predominantly of English fans, of the 65 UK supporters who have been arrested, 11 are from Northern Ireland. Two have been arrested for criminal damage, two for public order offences, one for drunkenness, four for assault, one for ticket touting and one for pitch invasion. That is probably nowhere near representative of what actually went on, but I thought that it should be put on the record that although some English fans were really bad, there was sadly Northern Irish involvement as well.

Steven Paterson: On fireworks, I am sure that we all remember the Croatia game, when a flare came on to the pitch and nearly exploded in the face of a steward—it could have blinded that gentleman. That is unacceptable. Flares are not fun, they are not toys, and we must clamp down on them. The Minister's second point goes back to my overriding point that this is not a problem that one country has and another does not; it is a problem that football has, and we must work together to be rid of it.

I have had good and bad experiences of organisation at Scotland games. I remember trying to get into a game at Kaunas in Lithuania and being shouted at by a policeman with a machine gun for being in the wrong place when I was actually in the place that another policeman with a machine gun had sent me to. That demonstrates a lack of organisation—it is simple stuff that we take for granted, but it can cause real problems, as it nearly did that night. Doing the right thing and attempting to get into a ground with a ticket can be problematic, and it goes back to the issue of searches and how fireworks get into grounds.

[Steven Paterson]

In certain stadiums, including in my last experience in France, people cannot even get into the stadium with a bottle of water, which is as it should be. That means the job is being done properly, so I cannot understand how fireworks are getting in. The last time I was in Macedonia, the police seemed overwhelmed by a few thousand Scottish fans coming to the stadium with 20 minutes to go to get in. There was one turnstile and no plan whatever. I actually had to balance my way along a ledge and under a railing to get into that game, which I had a ticket for. It was just not well organised, which can cause real problems.

I move on to the more serious and insidious problem that we are talking about today: those who follow a football team in order to wilfully engage in hooliganism and violence. In the modern age, the internet and social media make that much easier to organise than ever before, including when hooliganism was at its height a few decades ago. We face a different challenge now, because hooliganism can be organised differently and much more effectively. We have to take that seriously. My understanding is that banning orders are currently used for those convicted of football-related offences, as the hon. Member for Dartford said. That happens under legislation in Scotland, England and elsewhere. I certainly support that as far as it goes, but I wonder whether it is adequate to deal with what we have seen in recent weeks.

Many incidents take place abroad, which, as has been said, poses different challenges. It is perhaps unfortunate that we are talking about the issue after last week's referendum result, but surely we should work on a pan-European basis to deal with it by sharing police expertise, information and intelligence and by making sure that what we know about the thugs is shared so that action can be taken.

We should think about the problem in a similar way to how we consider gang culture, because it is not all that different. After all, we are talking about violence and disorder that is clearly well organised, territorial and tribal, so maybe we should deal with it in a similar way. I also want careful consideration to be given to how, as has been mentioned, evidence from social media can be used to identify and prosecute thugs for offences committed abroad and to ensure that lifetime bans can be implemented.

It seems to me there is a widespread feeling that loutish and criminal offensive behaviour committed abroad somehow does not count—that it is okay for someone to do it abroad, because it does not come back to bite them. That may explain why so many of these imbeciles seem happy to be filmed on mobile phones and have their appalling and offensive behaviour put up on social media for the world to see. For our measures to be effective in stamping out that type of behaviour across Europe, we need the co-operation of our colleagues across Europe and other in football-loving nations of the world, backed up by effective sanctions for anyone who engages in hooligan behaviour associated with football. Otherwise, I fear that we will see regular repeats of the wanton thuggery that has been in the news and all over social media. That would be to the serious detriment of the beautiful game and to the real supporters, who want to see games, enjoy them and see the best team win.

2.53 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, and to speak in this interesting and timely debate on football hooliganism. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on securing it. Had the debate been at another time and had there not been a lot of other things going on within parties and so on, I think we would have had a better attendance.

Before I discuss the topic at hand, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Scottish sport, I add my congratulations to the home nations that managed to qualify for this year's European championship. It was a sore point to see Scotland left out of another major championship again, but, thankfully, there are Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Iceland—sorry, that was a Freudian slip; of course I meant Ireland—to support at this year's tournament.

Some 18 years ago, I sat in a pub in Paisley four months after turning 18—I know that is hard to believe—where I watched Scotland open the World cup against Brazil in Paris, and my friend and I made a pact that we would go to the next tournament that Scotland qualified for, regardless of where it was. Little did I know that I would be creeping up on middle age without Scotland having qualified for a tournament since. That is something I am sure Gordon Strachan can turn around in the upcoming World cup qualifying campaign, in which we have a slightly easier qualifying group than we have had in recent years, as the top seed is England. I digress.

When we debate hooliganism we must be careful that we do not speak in sweeping generalisations that, in effect, tar every football supporter of whatever club or country with the same brush. The vast majority of football fans support and follow their team week in, week out, without contemplating violence of any sort. Most football fans, whether supporting their club or national team, just want to go along and support their team in a peaceful manner. Many fans, like myself, treat going to the football as a family day out, though I am not entirely sure that my daughters agree that being dragged to a St Johnstone game constitutes a family day out. Many fans enjoy relaxing at the football after a long week at work and other fans will go to the football to catch up with friends and fellow supporters.

Before I develop my arguments further, it is only fair to reiterate what others have said thus far. The hon. Member for Dartford admitted to not being a big football fan when opening the debate. He spoke of his embarrassment for his country and said that its good name had been dragged through the mud. He mentioned some England fans being intolerant of anyone else and the possible effect that that behaviour may have had on the performance of his team, or on any team that suffers from such behaviour. He also spoke of the powerful role of sport in bringing people together being undermined by those violent thugs. I could not agree more with those sentiments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) said that everyone must stand together to address this scourge. He spoke of the large incidence of flares at the tournament and that poor or intimidating policing can cause or exacerbate situations. He also spoke of using evidence from social media to secure

prosecutions of the “imbeciles”—I think that was the word he used—involved. Crucially, he spoke of his own experience as a regular tartan army conscript at away matches.

I had forgotten this memory, but back in 1986, I went to a Scotland-England game at Hampden Park with my father. I think that it was the Rous cup and I believe that England won 2-0 that day; we will gloss over that. On my way to the game, we were walking up a fairly famous hill with burger vans on either side. We were halfway up the hill when we heard a commotion from the bottom. It was a group of England fans who were chanting and all of a sudden they charged up the hill towards us. I was six years old, so I only vaguely remember it, though I remember being frightened. My dad was extremely worried, given that his six-year-old son was with him, and a policeman had to usher us behind a burger van and keep guard over us as the England fans went past, so I have had a small brush with this myself, albeit 30 or so years ago.

The violent and thuggish scenes we have witnessed on our TV screens have brought the Euro 2016 tournament, and football itself, into disrepute. Those thugs—they are thugs, not football supporters—have attempted to shame their team and their nation by engaging in reckless and violent acts. We must ask ourselves why those people would be willing to spend significant sums of money to travel to the European championships to engage in hooliganism, rather than to watch and support their team. Let us be clear: those hooligans do not represent their fellow supporters; they shame football and they disgrace their nation.

Thankfully, that violence seems to have largely dissolved, but it is only right to mention the trouble before and after the Russia-England match in Marseille, which has already been mentioned. The scenes were sickening and the most disturbing element of all was that innocent people were being attacked purely because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. There were a significant number of arrests following the match between England and Russia, and it is only right that the UK Government and Parliament support the respective authorities in taking action against those who were arrested. The Scottish National party strongly supports efforts by the French and UK authorities to hold those responsible to account and welcomes the efforts of the police and the French authorities.

During an urgent question following that violence, I was troubled by the language used by some English Members—only some—in describing the Russian fans as “thugs” and the English fans as “supporters”. We have to be honest with ourselves; we have been honest in the debate so far. Yes, the charge by Russian thugs after the game was horrific and many genuine English fans were caught up in that incident. However, some English thugs had disgraced their country before the Russians had turned up, so let us not hide behind the Russians and fail to address the issues that elements of the travelling England national team supporters have had for a long time, just as we have to be honest and learn the lessons and take action after trouble following the Scottish cup final, which has already been mentioned.

As well as considering why people choose to use football as an excuse to engage in violence, we must discuss what kind of punishment we can mete out that might discourage football hooliganism. The trouble

caused in Marseille led to England and Russia receiving warnings from UEFA that they faced disqualification from the tournament if there was any repeat of violence inside a stadium. UEFA is right to say that it has no jurisdiction over violence in city streets, but that is where we have witnessed the majority of incidents; that must be addressed, or fewer fans will want to travel to tournaments and there will be less appetite to host the tournaments. The football governing bodies, UEFA and FIFA, must now look at disqualifying teams if their supporters engage in violence inside or outside stadiums. I can appreciate the difficulties of implementing such a policy, but we must consider all options and have zero tolerance on football violence.

Scotland fans—the tartan army—have a fantastic reputation all over the world and are welcomed with open arms by the cities and countries they visit. However, the cup final aftermath shows that we cannot be complacent in Scotland about fan behaviour. The Scottish Government will continue to work with a range of bodies, including the Scottish Football Association, to tackle violence and offensive behaviour in general.

I am aware that those who engage in football-related violence are now using technology to plan and organise the violence. An *Independent* article mentions the online tool Hooligan 2.0 as a means of co-ordinating violence. I mentioned working in partnership with a range of bodies to help tackle this problem; with that in mind, the Government should engage in conversation with internet service providers to ensure we can take action to prevent access to tools like Hooligan 2.0. I would like the Minister to confirm, in his summing up, whether that is something they have done or will consider in the future.

Following the match between Russia and England, I was heartened to see Roy Hodgson and Wayne Rooney appear on television urging England fans to walk the other way if they saw violence. We must underline how important football figures are in helping to shape and influence the behaviour of supporters. Footballers are role models—whether we like it or not sometimes—and we should use their influence to tackle the problem of football-related violence.

We also need action from central Government on this matter, as there is a strong chance that someone who engages in violence at football may also engage in some other form of violent and criminal behaviour when away from a football ground. As such, it is important that we do not view this as just a football problem. We need to take action against this violence in whatever form it takes and wherever it is committed.

I would like to see more action on the domestic violence that is committed after football games. In 2014, the University of Lancaster reported that cases of domestic abuse in the Lancashire area increased by 38% when the English national side exited the World cup. This is not only a problem that affects England; similar research has been conducted in Scotland that suggests cases of domestic violence almost double after old firm games.

The point that I am trying to make is that we need to take action against those who engage in violent behaviour inside and outside football stadiums. By working with a range of bodies, we need to eliminate the thought process that so many people have: that they can use football as a means of engaging in violent behaviour. In doing

[Gavin Newlands]

so, we also want to take action against those who extend their violent behaviour from the football stadium to their homes and communities. We cannot allow hooligans to use football as an excuse to lift their hands to others. Despite the chaos and disunity among Government and main Opposition Members, I trust that tackling and eliminating this behaviour will unite all parts of the House.

3.3 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on securing such an interesting debate. I concur that under normal circumstances this would have been a much better attended debate, but everybody's contributions have made it very interesting and thought provoking.

It has been a mixed few months for football. We finally received justice for the 96 Liverpool fans killed in the Hillsborough tragedy. The record finally states, once and for all, what we all knew: that on that fateful day football fans were the victims of unlawful killing and were let down by a catalogue of failings by the police that undoubtedly contributed to their deaths. It was a verdict that was long overdue.

At the European football championships in France, Northern Ireland fans have, on the whole, been a credit to themselves and to the United Kingdom. The green and white army, like their neighbouring fans from the Republic of Ireland, have carried themselves with charm and dignity, making a lot of friends along the way. Unfortunately for Northern Ireland, their fire was finally extinguished on Saturday night by the mighty Welsh—of which I am one.

The Welsh fans, like the majority of English fans, have also behaved wonderfully and have brought colour and joy to a festival of football in France. England have now sadly left the tournament, which has caused heartbreak right across the nation and right across the House. I feel your pain; however, Wales are carrying the torch for the United Kingdom now. I am sure all colleagues will join me in congratulating Wales on that and in offering their full support, in the hope that Wales will carry the flag through to the final.

The other side of the story is that we have seen scenes of violence and disorder from mostly Russian, but some English, fans in Marseille and Lille. Although it appears that the vast majority of the violence was instigated by Russian ultras who travelled to France with the sole intent of causing violence, it would be remiss of us to pretend that there was not a very small minority of English fans who were complicit in that disorder.

Domestically, over recent years, there has been disorder in Tyne and Wear in 2013, and there were ugly scenes in May this year at the Scottish FA cup final involving Hibernian fans. The violence both abroad and at home evoked images that I had hoped were long gone from our screens in connection with football. Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, football hooliganism is back in the news. It is our responsibility to make sure that we do not return to the culture of football hooliganism that characterised British football throughout the '80s

and '90s. There was a five-year ban from European club tournaments for English teams, and 584 arrests of British citizens at Euro 2000 after trouble in Brussels and Charleroi. Going to a football match became a risky endeavour.

Tackling football hooliganism has always required both an effective legislative approach—to target stopping those guilty of participating in hooliganism from attending games—and working with fans and fan groups to create a positive culture in football. I pay tribute to the work of the Football Supporters Federation; through its England football fans embassy, it has provided travel advice and an emergency contact to fans travelling to watch England games across the world. That important resource helps to create a safe environment when our national teams travel to major overseas international tournaments.

Steven Paterson: Does the hon. Lady agree that the important thing to think about when we go to watch international teams, in terms of the culture of the support, is that the competition is on the park? It should be a privilege to visit countries, get to meet the people there and celebrate our different countries, rather than having the attitude, which seems to prevail in some quarters, that people must go to other countries to show that they are better than them. The competition should remain on the pitch.

Carolyn Harris: I totally agree. When we have visitors to this country we expect them to show us courtesy, and I think it is our duty to show the same courtesy when we travel abroad.

Football hooliganism at home is far less common than it was 30 years ago. Incidents such as those at Hampden Park in May, or at the Tyne-Wear derby in 2013, hit the headlines precisely because they are now uncommon, but we must not be complacent. We must not take the successes that we have had for granted. Initiatives such as Kick It Out and Show Racism the Red Card have been influential in making football and football stadiums in the UK more inclusive environments for people wishing to attend games. By going into schools and spreading a message of anti-racism and anti-homophobia, those campaigns have played a tremendous role in encouraging young people to get involved in sport. Sadly, however, as a result of Government cuts, funding for those schemes has been cut both by local authorities and by the Department for Communities and Local Government. I urge the Minister to consider restoring that funding. Educating our children is the best way to make lasting changes to football culture.

The Labour Government introduced legislation to tackle football hooliganism. Football banning orders were introduced to help ensure that those convicted of football-related violence could not attend football games. In 2010, 3,174 football banning orders were in place; currently, there are 2,181 banning orders. There is an unclear picture about why that number has reduced and about how the banning orders are being implemented across the country.

Figures on football banning orders obtained through a freedom of information request show that 43 FBOs were issued to under-18s in Tyne and Wear, while Greater Manchester and more than a dozen other forces had not issued any to under-18-year-olds. In the light of the incidents in France, I urge the Minister to commit to

publishing more clear information about how banning orders are being implemented. The Football (Disorder) Act 2000 introduced the power to introduce an FBO based on a complaint made by the relevant chief officer of police. An FBO can be imposed if the court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds to believe that making a banning order would help to prevent violence or disorder at football matches. It is important to ensure chief officers know that they have that power and that they use it to help prevent football-related violence both at home and abroad. I urge the Minister to make it clear how extensively this power has been used by chief officers, and will he tell us what funding is provided to investigate potential FBOs?

Labour's Football (Disorder) Act allows courts to impose FBOs, placing domestic restrictions on football-related activity among those arrested for football-related violence while abroad. Will the Government update us on the current situation and on the small number of football fans who were arrested while at the Euros in France?

Steven Paterson: The bans apply only to domestic matches. I understand that is where the jurisdiction is, but I look forward to some clarification from the Minister on how we can internationalise that and stop these people going to matches abroad as well as here in the UK.

Carolyn Harris: I am sure the Minister will enlighten us when he gets the opportunity.

In conclusion, we have come a long way. The vast majority of our football fans have behaved fantastically at the Euros. We have made considerable changes in the culture of football right across the country. Premier League and Football League grounds have become inclusive places where men, women and children, ethnic and religious minorities and people of different sexual orientations can all come together and enjoy world-class sport. This is profoundly different from the culture that prevailed for much of the past 40 years, so we can be very proud of what we have achieved. However, as I have said, we cannot become complacent. I urge the Government to restore funding for educational programmes in our schools and to provide clear information to make sure that football banning orders are used properly as steps towards ensuring that the rare scenes of violence that we have seen recently do not start to become a trend.

3.12 pm

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. Although we might have had more Members here this afternoon, the debate has been well mannered and factual. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) secured this debate because of what we have seen at the Euros and because of what has been happening in the UK and Northern Ireland.

I am an ardent Tottenham Hotspur fan who was born in Edmonton. I have no choice about the matter. I must say how disappointed I was with the five Tottenham players in the England side that played—I think they played—not particularly well against Iceland. I wish

Wales well in their next game. I hope that they will go further and do better than they did against New Zealand in the rugby tour.

It is fair to put the record straight for the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). Perhaps she never thought she would be standing opposite me as a shadow spokesman talking about this, but she has done really well. We are good friends and I wish her well in whatever role she takes on. She stepped into the breach today and she has done really well.

On the Euros, 65 UK supporters were arrested: 45 English, and 11 from Northern Ireland and nine from Wales. The offences by England supporters were six for assault, 14 for public order, 13 for drunkenness, nine for criminal damage, two for drugs and one for ticket touting. For Northern Ireland, the figures are two for criminal damage, two for public order, one for drunkenness, four for assault, one for ticket touting and one for pitch encroachment, which used to be called an invasion. For Wales, the number is limited to the nine who let the country down: five for drunkenness, two for assault and two for possession of a flare. How on earth did they get flares through the grounds? Flares come in large and small sizes; some are actually pyrotechnics and have explosive content and some are very small.

I want to talk about what happened in the Euros and how let down I felt as the Policing Minister, but our officers did brilliantly in liaising with the French, who police events slightly differently. I will talk about the preventive measures that we took and about what is happening here in the United Kingdom, without dwelling too much on individual sad events around the country.

In the run-up to the Euros, we had extensive liaison with the excellent football police unit, which I have the honour of funding from my budget, and with the French authorities and other countries in Europe to try to prevent what we saw outside the grounds and, sadly, inside the grounds. We gave the French whatever assistance they asked for and proactively offered more, particularly with spotters. We tend to know some of the characters that were involved. In fact, we prevented an awful lot of them from travelling; 99% of the passports that were requested to be submitted under the banning orders were submitted, so those people could not travel. Subsequently, we arrested or stopped at the borders a further 35 individuals who were attempting to travel. They were known to us and should have submitted their passports. Although that was a significant success, we saw on our TV screens some serious disorder.

In Marseille, we had officers helping the French authorities. We traditionally police football matches by keeping the fans apart, but the French police did not make much of an attempt to do that. They police in a different way because they are armed and do not like getting too close up when they have their weapons with them in case things start to happen. They police very differently. We would have been much closer to the fans. We said to the French in no uncertain terms, "If you arrest and prosecute them, we will keep them out," and to a large extent that has been done. We continued to send officers to games, including the Wales and Northern Ireland games as well.

It is enormously disappointing that the vast majority of football fans who went to support their country, no matter which part of the United Kingdom they came from, were tarnished by a small minority of people

[Mike Penning]

whose behaviour ended up in the most abhorrent violence we have seen for many years. There is no condoning that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, and we must come down on them with the full force of the law. Those who were arrested do not have to be prosecuted for a banning order to be imposed. I will write to the hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) with full details to clarify the position.

Gareth Johnson: Will the Minister consider one step further than the banning orders? Will he consider prosecutions in the UK for offences connected to football hooliganism that are committed abroad? There are offences already that are tried in this country when they are committed abroad. Will he consider bringing football hooliganism offences within the scope of current legislation?

Mike Penning: I have spoken to my hon. Friend outside the debate and I will look at that matter. It opens up a really difficult area of other types of prosecution. At the moment, we prosecute people for committing very serious offences abroad. I will look into it, but it might have consequences way beyond what we are trying to do.

I noticed that the shadow Minister—for today, but I hope she gets the job full-time, as we get on so well—alluded in her speech to young people. However, the video footage and the banning orders that are in place suggest that the people in question tend not to be young. Sadly, many of them are my age. They came up through the ranks of a violent, gang-type culture many years ago. Inside the grounds, UEFA has a policy that the police do not carry out segregation. It is a UEFA rule, and it is necessary to apply to move from that. I think that there was a request for that for the subsequent games, but certainly after the Russia-England game. Hon. Members will have noticed that there were very few police in the ground, and the French police were criticised for that, but it is a UEFA rule. It is completely different here in the UK, where we use stewarding extensively to keep people apart, as well as outside the game, and we also use traffic management orders; but in the ground, police are available to carry out segregation, and they often do so.

Let us not say that it is all doom and gloom. More than a third of a million people go to watch premieriership games every weekend, and football is still a safe environment where people can go to support their clubs, whether at a Spurs-Arsenal match or a Celtic-Rangers match, which will happen this year for the first time in many years—or Hemel Hempstead Town versus St. Albans, which is where I end up most weekends. We are not in the territory of the way things were, and we are not going to get back there. We will use the full force of the law to make sure that people can go with their young children to enjoy a football game in the same way as many of us enjoy a rugby or basketball match, or a match of any other type.

To return to the point about youth, we must of course educate young people. I will not make a spending commitment, such as the shadow Minister has possibly just made on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, but I understand where she is coming from. When I went, two or three months ago, to the Spurs-Arsenal game at White Hart Lane, I was with the Metropolitan police

throughout the game and for nearly two hours before and well over two hours afterwards. It was obvious while we were outside, waiting for the Arsenal fans to be escorted, with a significant police escort, towards the ground, that there were people—predominantly middle-aged men, but not only men—who did not have tickets and had no intention of going to the football match. They were waiting at a corner close to the ground to antagonise the fans and create a serious situation. There was disorder; but those people were not kids. They were grown men and some women who should know better. Arrests were made. There were horses, and the mounted police did a fantastic job of keeping apart people who frankly wanted a punch-up. Although the vast majority of what goes on is perfectly okay, there are still difficult situations, as we saw in the cup final.

The point has been made that the police can do more. We will help them in doing that, and perhaps even, if we need to, give them more powers; but actually, the football fans need to say that enough is enough. There is so much money in football today; the clubs themselves have a responsibility as well. There is an issue—it comes up with the police football unit—about getting clubs to pay the police bills after matches, although the sums involved would probably be just loose change to one of the forwards or defenders who let my country down by the way they played in the Euros. It is a question of trying to get clubs to pay their bills and to take responsibility. I have had numerous meetings in the past couple of months with the premiership to say, “Come around the table and try to talk to us about this.” Initially they say, “Of course you want more money from us”—but actually it is their event that we are policing. It is sometimes enormously difficult to get the limited amount of money from them that they are responsible for paying back.

I want to talk about where things are going. There is some evidence—I have asked the unit to come back to me on this—that violence is to some extent moving down to the lower leagues, where not many police are expected to be around and there is not as much stewarding. There is always stewarding, but the question is whether there will be enough stewards and whether they are professionally trained. Violence happens because people think they can get away with it. The people responsible are not fans. They are just out to cause other people harm, and they get some kind of kick from that. As soon as the relevant information becomes available I will share it. It is important to look not just at the top—England fans abroad—but at what appears to be happening much further down.

We will do all we can to make sure that people can go abroad. We will, in particular, support other countries when they have events. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport spoke to the Russian Sports Minister and has offered help in the context of the World cup, as we go forward with that. UEFA and FIFA need to take a careful look at how policing is carried out in their grounds; they do not have to wait for an event. Different countries police differently, but it is crucial that we come down with all the force of the law on those who create disturbances, ruin football matches for everyone else and assault people. At the same time, everyone in the football family needs to take responsibility.

Gavin Newlands: I made a point in my speech about governing bodies perhaps punishing the teams for fans' behaviour. Does the Minister agree that for the forthcoming

World cup FIFA should consider disqualifying teams for fans' behaviour inside or outside grounds, if investigations prove that they have taken part?

Mike Penning: There is much to consider in what the hon. Gentleman says. This is not the debate or place at which to make such a commitment, although I have never sat on a fence in my life, on any issue. The principle of those in the football family taking responsibility for their club and their country is crucial, whether in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales or England.

This has been a useful debate. We do not want to treat all football fans as bad people, but they must put their hands up and say, "Enough is enough; we want to go to football in peace." In our case, together with my Scottish friends, we may also need to enjoy losing occasionally, although we will cheer Wales on. I wish them every success.

3.28 pm

Gareth Johnson: We would all agree that football, at its best, unites communities, people and countries. It can be thrilling and is undoubtedly entertaining, and it should not be undermined by the selfish actions of relatively few people. We have an opportunity now, and should do all that we can to prevent a repetition in Russia of the scenes that happened in France, should the home nations qualify, as we all hope they will. The Minister and I agree, as I am sure the rest of the House does, that we want the police to do their work, but that they can do only so much. Ultimately, it will be down to football fans themselves to help to change the culture to bring an end to the problems.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered football hooliganism.

3.29 pm

Sitting suspended.

Automatic Registration: UK Elections

[MR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

[*Relevant document: Sixth Report from the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Session 2014-15, Voter engagement in the UK: follow up, HC 938.*]

4.30 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered automatic registration in UK elections.

This issue came to my attention during the run-up to the EU referendum, when an appalling situation left many voters unregistered when the Government's registration website failed. However, that is not the only source of my frustration. The introduction of individual electoral registration saw hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland wiped off the electoral register without their knowledge. The UK Government failed to properly engage with the public to explain the transition, which led to the EU referendum voter registration deadline becoming a total shambles.

In light of that chaos and the consequences of the transition to IER, the UK Government should consider introducing automatic registration for voters. I intend to show not only that automatic registration is a worthwhile consideration with many benefits, but that it is supported by key organisations from across the country. The system is widely used in various parts of the world; some of the best examples come from our very good friends in Europe and beyond, and they are far richer for it.

Following our most recent referendum, the EU and Europe might be a useful starting point. Although this debate is not about the result as such, one point is perhaps bittersweet in its relevance. If the EU referendum has taught us anything, it is that people's votes matter. Voting and engaging in elections and referendums can have radical consequences that alter the policies and direction of Governments both at home and abroad. There are many lessons to be learned from the recent referendum, most notably that we should be careful what we vote for.

There are many reasons for people to be disappointed, and not just by the vote to leave the EU. For election geeks like me, the demographics make for interesting reading. It was clear throughout the referendum campaign that different societal groups had different opinions, with a particularly notable variation in voting intentions between different age groups. It was in a similar vein to the Scottish independence referendum—the 16 to 24-year-old bracket, at least on average, is pro-European and pro-independence. Voters in older age groups are more likely to be pro-Brexit and pro-UK, which has led to disappointment and frustration among young people, at least for the 26% who turned up to vote in the EU referendum.

It is disappointing that young people did not turn out in the EU referendum, with many being bombarded with negative messages and others feeling disfranchised by out-of-touch politicians. For many, registering to vote was a barrier in itself. There will be many vigorous debates about engaging young people to vote, and organisations such as the National Union of Students

[Owen Thompson]

have been pursuing the issue with a view to understanding it. The NUS is campaigning heavily to ensure that its members are informed of why they should vote.

The NUS, among many others organisations, has led a number of fantastic campaigns to encourage young people to vote. However, according to Ipsos MORI, only 43% of 18 to 24-year-olds turned out at the 2015 general election, compared with 78% of over-65s. The issue of young people and students not turning out can be attributed to their mobile lifestyles, with many moving home every year. The challenges for transient young people in particular present a strong case for voter registration to be integrated into the university and college academic enrolment process. Such a system was successfully developed by Sheffield University for the 2015 general election and has been used by a number of other institutions. The model could easily be further developed and rolled out across other institutions.

Additionally, the change to individual electoral registration has had dramatic effects on young people's ability to vote. Groups such as Bite the Ballot raised concern about that at the time, rightly warning that there would be a decline in voter registration among young people. The change to the system led to a reduction of nearly 190,000 14 to 17-year-olds who will reach voting age during the time in which the register is used. That equates to a 40% reduction in the number of young people registered to vote. Given the implications of referendums, it is critical that everyone's say is heard, particularly that of young people. They are the future of our countries, and we must make sure they have a voice.

It is quite a conundrum that Government policies often affect the people who are least likely to vote. Although a number of organisations are leading the charge to encourage engagement, we as parliamentarians must take the lead and be bold where we need to be.

There is a similar story to tell about other marginalised groups. Women continue to turn out to vote in lesser numbers than men. Between 1992 and 2010, there was an 18% shortfall of women voters. The inclusion of women in politics has been proven to enhance the turnout of women in general—interestingly, in constituencies where women are elected as MPs, the average turnout of women tends to be about 4% higher than the average turnout of men.

That shows the importance of encouraging women to participate in politics and become engaged with the political system, which begins with women being registered to vote. We need only look outside today to see just how much women care about politics. Political decisions can have huge implications for women and their families, and I applaud and support the actions of the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign outside Parliament this afternoon.

The views of people with disabilities are also not represented sufficiently. Scope, the disability rights charity, found that 67% of disabled voters who attempted to vote encountered one or more barriers when they tried to exercise their democratic right. That is simply unacceptable and demonstrates the barriers that thousands of people could experience in simply registering to vote in the first place.

Mencap, another charity dedicated to promoting the rights of people with disabilities, established a helpline for people with learning disabilities for the 2015 general election, which was a fantastic move to help those who were already registered to vote. I am most grateful to Mencap, but we need to do more.

Voting turnout among black and minority ethnic people in 2015 was just 56%, in contrast to the 68% of people identifying themselves as white who voted. Just 56% of men from socially and economically deprived social classes turned out to vote, with the figure for women from that group only slightly higher at 57%. Automatic voter registration would cut many of the bureaucratic ties that hold back the participation of all those people, whose voices are much needed in our House, which is too white, too male, too old, too non-disabled and too exclusive.

In Scotland, we do elections well. In the Scottish independence referendum, turnout and registration reached unprecedented levels; more voters than ever before registered to have their say. However, the UK Government's implementation of the individual electoral registration system undermined the Scottish Government's efforts to ensure that there was maximum voter registration. There was a period of transition to the new system, beginning in June 2014. It was due to end in December 2016, but instead the UK Government brought the end date forward by a year to December 2015. That move was condemned by the Electoral Commission, which said there was

“a risk to the completeness of the register and to participation”.

The Scottish Government were absolutely opposed to shortening the transition period, which left electoral registration officers trying to minimise the loss of franchise.

A similar problem ensued across the UK. Essentially, a situation was created in which voters were effectively disfranchised. Combined with widespread voter disillusionment with politics in general, that was a disaster for democratic mobilisation and political engagement. The Government failed to engage properly with the public to explain the transition. They must start to mend the damage that has been done by the mistakes that have been made, and more than ever we need to re-engage people.

It will be incredibly difficult for voters to feel enthusiastic about politics again, having endured a remain campaign characterised by “Project Fear” scaremongering and a Leave campaign that used xenophobic rhetoric, such as the UK Independence party's despicable “Breaking Point” advert.

In Scotland, the SNP ran a measured and positive campaign on the EU and focused on encouraging turnout. I am incredibly proud of my colleagues and of my own constituency of Midlothian, which overwhelmingly voted to remain in the EU; I hope that it will indeed do so.

In short, there is much to learn from Scotland's politics. With registration at 98% and an 85% turnout in the independence referendum, it is fair to assume that higher registration and higher turnout have at least some correlation. Our friends in Europe and beyond seem to be on the same page. Most European countries have ensured that their citizens are automatically able to vote using various forms of automatic registration. Other countries have been able to achieve far higher and

more democratic levels of participation through such schemes. They remove a major hurdle in the election process and make elections as accessible as possible.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend makes an excellent case for improved voter registration. Does he agree that automatic registration would reduce the number of errors in the registration process, such as when multiple people are registered at a house but only one voter actually still lives there?

Owen Thompson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We could see many benefits, and the system could be greatly simplified if we introduced automatic voter registration.

Countries such as France, Sweden, Australia, Greece, Austria, Brazil and Uruguay, to name but a few, ensure that as many of their citizens as possible can exercise their free democratic right to vote without barriers. In the UK, many people think that they are already on the register because they pay their council tax and expect those running elections to know about them, but at the last election two thirds of polling stations turned voters away. People thought they were on the register, but they were not.

The last-minute rush for registration puts huge strain on devolved council registration offices, of which there are about 400 throughout the UK. The database is so fragmented that even the Electoral Commission does not know the extent of the problem. At nearly every election we see the same thing: a huge rush to register to vote in the day or two before the deadline. The day before the EU referendum deadline, 186,000 people applied to register to vote online, and at least 27,000 we still using the Government website when it crashed. On an ordinary day, the figure would have been about 10,000. Such an erratic and outdated approach to the right to vote is unique in the developed world.

If people have a passport, are registered for council tax and already have a national insurance number, surely there is enough information about them in the system to allow them to be automatically entered in a voter database. We do not have register to pay tax, so why should we have to register to vote? Many others agree. Earlier this year, the all-party group on democratic participation, of which I am a co-convenor, published the “Missing Millions” report, which presented tried and tested solutions that would keep the register up to date all year round.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the previous Parliament also agreed. On 14 November 2014, it published an interim report on voter engagement and invited the public to respond to several draft conclusions and recommendations. Following an extensive consultation, with more than 5,000 responses received, the Committee published a follow-up report based on the views of the public. That report recommended that the Government consider improvements to electoral registration, including by making registration automatic, prompting people to register to vote when they access other public services, and registering young people in schools, colleges and universities. The report also recommended that the Government introduce plans to target the groups that are currently least likely to be registered to vote, and that changes to electoral management be looked into

and piloted, such as online voting, allowing people to register closer to or on election day, and holding elections at the weekend.

I note that the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) agrees with me. I was disappointed that her ten-minute rule Bill on automatic electoral registration did not go further. I share her frustration, having also had a ten-minute rule Bill that failed to proceed further. I know that she and others are continuing to work on this issue to find out what other steps can be taken.

Whenever automatic registration has been proposed previously, the message from the Government has consistently been that it is a person’s own responsibility to register to vote, but now that we have seen catalogues of failures of the kind we saw in the run-up to a vote that will change lives forever, it is clear that we must ensure that such failures can never happen again. We must have a robust system, and we must break down barriers to voter registration. The Government must use common sense and take heed not just of my voice but those of the many expert organisations and groups that are calling for change—I hear that we are now listening to experts again.

Automatic registration would ensure that the enrolment system was more efficient and effective, while making voting easier for people and more democratic. It would remove the barriers faced by minority groups and others who are less likely to engage in the enrolment process, and it would mean that we could reach more old, young, disabled and disadvantaged people, regardless of their gender, background or race. That would promote inclusive and forward-thinking democracy for all. This is not about taking away from politicians the responsibility to engage young people. Voting is a fundamental right, and automatic voter registration would enable many disfranchised people from across our society to participate in a system that needs their voice.

Voting is a fundamental right, and automatic voter registration would enable so many disfranchised people from across our society to participate in a system that needs their voice.

4.45 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is an unexpected pleasure to serve under your chairmanship quite so soon, Mr Howarth, but I see that the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) also has speaking notes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing the debate. I will offer a few reflections that are similar to his, and emphasise some points he made.

The debate is taking place in a political scenario where everything has “changed, changed utterly”—words written by W.B. Yeats 100 years ago about a slightly different kind of political upheaval, but political upheaval none the less. That is what we are undergoing here. The debate comes at the end of, unfortunately, a shambles of a referendum process.

The Government had the opportunity throughout the passage of the European Union Referendum Bill to take on board constructive proposals made by the Scottish National party and others, not least to extend to the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds and to put in place a four-nation lock so that no part of the UK would be

[Patrick Grady]

taken out of the EU against its will. Now we face the prospect of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and London being taken out of the EU against their will.

The refusal to give ground when the Bill was passing through Parliament seemed to carry on throughout the dreadfully negative campaign—on both sides—south of the border, despite the best efforts of those of us in Scotland to raise the tone and raise the positive aspects. Perhaps that culminated in the website crash on 7 June, which led to this debate. There are lessons to be learnt from the referendum campaign in the round, but the difficulties that were faced by people trying to register to vote and to have their say gives us the opportunity to reflect on that particular *bourach*.

I will look in a little bit more detail at the problems with individual electoral registration and the case for automatic registration, and I will perhaps give some brief reflections on how that fits in with wider electoral reform to improve turnout and voter engagement.

Individual election is not necessarily a bad thing in itself. In fact, we could probably argue that a system of automatic registration is just an automated or enhanced version of that. We probably all agree that that is preferable to the household registration where everyone in a household is vouched for by one elector under the previous canvass system. The idea of individuals being registered is not necessarily at stake; it is the process by which they end up on the register.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian clearly demonstrated, the roll-out of the process has been botched massively by the Government, leading to significant confusion for many voters in the Scottish and European referendums about whether they were registered in the first place. The Minister admitted, during the emergency legislation and the statements after the website crash, that a lot of the registrations that came in at the last minute were duplicates because people were already on the electoral register but feared somehow that they were not because of the confusion and misunderstanding. That was undoubtedly compounded by the decision to bring forward the transition deadline to December 2015.

Of course, that may well have had an effect—[*Interruption.*] The Minister is asking me how. Well, not giving people enough time to consider and double check their registration status might have had the effect of making it more difficult for poorer and younger people to vote.

The Smith Institute reckons that up to 10 million people—perhaps 2.5 million dropping off the register and 7.5 million absent from any register at all—are not on the electoral register. That might have seemed like a good idea when the Conservative Government were worried about the mayoral and local government elections, but was perhaps less of a good idea when we look at the Brexit result, especially given that younger people, who will have to live with the decision much longer than any of us here, voted overwhelmingly to remain.

The Government really should have seen the website crash coming. As my hon. Friend mentioned, we had exactly the same situation in Scotland—it was just in a slightly more analogue form. On the day that voter registration closed before the European referendum,

there were queues outside local authority registration offices until midnight. In fact, there was a wonderful party atmosphere as people wanted to ensure that they could have their say in that great exercise in democracy. Sadly, that once again stands in contrast with the way in which things were handled south of the border.

That brings us on to the case for auto-registration, which means a method that is simple and consistent. That does not conflict with the idea that people have the right not to vote—of course people have that right, and they could easily opt out if they were automatically registered—but it provides a level playing field at the one moment when we are all genuinely equal: when we cast our single ballot in the ballot box. That is a great social leveller, and a level playing field should therefore be provided for registration.

My hon. Friend looked at a whole range of different pilots and options. In preparation for the debate I read about motor voting in Oregon—when someone applies for a driving licence, they register to vote. The point is well made that the vast numbers of people who are on the council tax register think that they are therefore on the register to vote, and it stands to reason that there should be no taxation without representation. That is another possibility. Of course, in Scotland in days gone by people took themselves off the electoral register in order to avoid the unjust and punitive poll tax implemented by Thatcher and her Government—another democratic deficit that Scotland had to live with for so long.

Alison Thewliss: I am sure my hon. Friend shared my experience during the independence referendum that people were afraid to go and register because they thought that that would catch up with them and tax would be found from them. That did dissuade a lot of people. We need to look at the reasons why people are declining to register as well.

Patrick Grady: That is a well-made point. Of course, the Scottish Government moved to reassure people that they would not be hounded for their poll tax because they were registering to vote in the Scottish independence referendum.

The case for auto-registration is well made. It must be placed in the context of wider and further electoral reform and the need to find a range of ways that can improve voter turnout and engagement, and younger people's engagement in particular. Voting early leads to voting often, which has been borne out in the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish experience now that the franchise has been extended to 16 and 17-year-olds. Of course, 16-year-olds who voted in the Scottish election in May were denied a vote in the European referendum, but they will have another vote in a year's time in the Scottish local authority elections. They might be 18 by the time of the next general election—who knows?

That also relates to the introduction of proportional representation, especially as it is clear that we have a five-party—at least—system here in the Houses of Parliament. We have the pro-Brexit and anti-Brexit Conservatives, the pro-Corbyn and anti-Corbyn Labour people and then the SNP as a voice of consistency, unity and leadership. We are possibly bigger than some of those groups, so we may or may not be the official Government or Opposition by the end of the week.

On the dates of elections, and the referendum in particular, one of the experiences of the Scottish independence referendum was that, because it took place in the autumn, we had the entire, glorious summer of 2014—admittedly rare in terms of the weather—with long days and good weather when people could really get out on to the streets and knock on the doors. That is something we ought to consider both north and south of the border. Rather than elections in May, which means that campaigns take place in damp, cold winter months, an autumn election cycle could help increase participation. Those are my reflections. I am trying to stick as closely as possible to voter auto-registration and the time available, so I will leave my remarks at that.

4.54 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing this important debate. I apologise to you, Mr Howarth, and to other Members in the Chamber for having to leave early to get to a constituency event, but I wanted to make a contribution to this debate.

It is our job in this House to ensure that the citizens we represent can truly exercise their democratic rights, but British citizens in this country are being marginalised and excluded from the democratic process. The problem of electoral registration is less getting people to sign up to individual elections and more maintaining their registration. I have spoken in the House before about the 100,000 Londoners who disappeared off the electoral register just months before the mayoral election. Boroughs with the biggest falls included Redbridge, which witnessed a staggering 9% drop; Kensington and Chelsea, with an 8% drop; and Hackney, which recorded a 7% drop.

The national picture is just as stark. The parliamentary register that was used in the EU referendum has seen the loss of 1.4 million names since December 2013. To put that figure into context, just 1.3 million more voters voted for Brexit than remain. In other words, those who fell off the register in the past two and a half years could have swayed the decision on the EU referendum.

There is a stark variance in who is signed up on our register. Pensioners in the shires who own their own home have a 90% chance of being on the electoral register, but a young man from an ethnic minority background in private rented accommodation in a city has a less than 10% chance of being on the register. The fact that people from ethnic minorities are far less likely to be registered to exercise their democratic rights undermines the Government's commitment.

When it comes to electoral registration, the picture is bleak across the country. Liverpool has seen a drop in its electoral register of 14,000. Birmingham has seen a drop of 17,000, and the drop in the London Borough of Lewisham was 6,000. Those are all areas that have had an increase in population. The situation is even worse in areas where the population is transient, such as university towns. Canterbury has seen a huge 13% drop in those registered to vote. Cambridge has seen a drop of 11%, meaning its electorate is now smaller than it was in 2011.

Let us look at the outcome of the EU referendum. We know that young people overwhelmingly voted to remain. Remain voters made up 73% of 18 to 24-year-old

voters and 62% of 25 to 34-year-old voters. It is clear that in areas with a high proportion of younger residents, turnout tended to be lower. We do not have any cast-iron figures, but we know that turnout among the youngest voters was around 40%. Among the over-65s, turnout was well over 80%. That all amounts to the effective disfranchisement of that younger group of voters. If the Government are serious about combating social exclusion, they urgently need to review that dire situation.

Being on the electoral register is the closest thing to having a civic contract. If someone is not on it, they cannot participate in the democratic process. Automatic electoral registration provides the opportunity to both reduce costs and improve administration, cutting down on bureaucracy and enabling everyone to exercise their right to enfranchisement. It is simple common sense, proposing a cheaper, simpler and more effective model. It places a responsibility on the state to do everything in its power to ensure that the electoral database is full and complete. It imposes a duty on the Government and public bodies to work together.

Automatic electoral registration proposes to make the system truly convenient for the citizen by integrating both national and local data sets, meaning that an individual's address details would be automatically updated according to trusted data sets. The trusted data sets would collate information at each point that a citizen interacts with the state, whether that is when they pay a tax, receive a benefit, use the NHS, claim a pension or apply for a driving licence. The walls between those data sets used to be sacrosanct, but they are falling away more and more as the Government emphasise security and anti-fraud measures.

These reforms would vastly improve registration and have been tested elsewhere. A very similar model operates in Australia with huge success. For instance, the state of Victoria has a population of 3.5 million and has 95% accuracy in its registration process. It does that at extremely low cost, employing just five members of staff who maintain the rolling register.

Rolling out this reform in the UK is timely for so many reasons. Greater Manchester has already submitted to the Cabinet Office its plans to pioneer the system of automatic electoral registration. It also has proposals for a pilot scheme. I sincerely hope that the Government support the plans and will introduce the primary legislation on data sharing necessary to ensure that the pilot can go ahead.

Voter registration should not be the responsibility of charities or NGOs, such as Bite the Ballot, despite their excellent work. It should be down to the state to do all it can and to ensure that everyone, especially the most marginalised, can access their democratic rights. The issue should be non-partisan. It is in all our interests to get more people signed up. Then we can all get on with our job, as representatives of political parties, to enthuse voters and to persuade them that we are worthy of their vote.

5 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): May I start by remarking on the fact that the Government Benches appear to be particularly denuded this afternoon? I hope that is because Government Members support the proposition under discussion. I ask the Minister to

[Tommy Sheppard]

reflect on the fact that, so far, no one has spoken other than to support the principle of automatic voter registration, and that not a single Member of the House is so exercised to the contrary as to turn up—that alone might make him consider that this is an idea whose time has come. I hope that we will get a positive response from him.

I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on bringing the debate to the Chamber today. I endorse and support pretty much everything he said in moving the motion.

I want to highlight a couple of aspects of the problem, the first of which is its scale. In 2014, the Electoral Commission estimated that as many as 7.5 million people who are entitled to vote might not be on the electoral register. To get some more up-to-date figures in preparation for the debate, I asked the House of Commons Library for a list by constituency of the estimated over-18 adult population compared with the number of people on the register. I have the figures with me, if anyone is interested, and they show that the difference between the number of over-18s in the population and the number on the register is just over 6 million. That is not a direct comparison, because many people on the register will be double-registered. The largest cohort of those will be students, but there will also be people who have moved house and so on, and some over-18s are not entitled to vote anyway.

Those figures indicate that we have a considerable problem, and we have it in all parts of the country. In my constituency, which includes the biggest part of the centre of Edinburgh, with its big transient population, I have 23,000 more over-18 adults than are on the electoral register. That is a staggering number of people. Even in the Minister's constituency of Weston-super-Mare, the figure is more than 10,000.

That is a problem for three main reasons. First, it is a democratic outrage. We cannot sit here and be content with the situation if our fellow citizens are not even eligible to vote on that scale. As the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) pointed out, not everyone is treated equally. Those suffering deprivation or oppression of one kind or another are less likely to be on the register than people who have a reasonably comfortable life, are literate and are settled in their situation. The people who face multiple indicators of deprivation are the least likely to be on the register. We have a somewhat ironic situation: the more awful someone's life is and the more problems they face, the less able they are to do anything about it through the democratic process. We cannot possibly let that lie for much longer.

Secondly, apart from the democratic argument, the situation is an administrative nightmare. That was epitomised by what happened in the run-up to the registration deadline for the European Union referendum. The computer crashed because it could not cope with the demand. Why do we create a situation in which there has to be a rush before a deadline, mostly comprised of people checking whether they are on the register in the first place? It does not have to be done that way. If we had a process of continual automatic registration of the electorate, the problem would not arise.

The other problem, which has been remarked upon, is that a lot of people think they are on the register when they are not. That is one of the contributing factors to a general disillusionment and alienation with our democratic system, which we cannot allow to continue. For all those reasons, I very much support the campaign for automatic voter registration, and I hope the Minister will say something positive today.

The all-party group's report has been referred to, and it was signed off by a Member from the Minister's own party, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith). It made 25 recommendations, some of them incredibly sensible. Which of them does the Minister think are good ideas that could be implemented? I have a copy of the report here. The final recommendation is that, because of all that has come before, we should move to a system of automatic voter registration. I think we have to do that.

I want to try to anticipate some of the arguments against automatic voter registration. The first would be, "Perhaps there is a data collection problem, and data that have been collected for one reason cannot be used for another." Well, the Government should bring forward the legislative changes required to enable that use. Provided that we specify at the point of collection that the information will be used to allow people the right to vote, I do not see any particular problem, and that could be done almost instantaneously given that so many transactions happen online. It could be done within weeks. We do not have to wait years for it to happen.

The second argument that people will probably make is, "The computer systems do not talk to each other. We will have to get a new computer system and that will take a lot of time and cost a lot of money." Don't blame the technology—the computer systems do not have to talk to each other. All that is required is that human beings involved in the process of compiling the electoral register can use the other computer systems to put together one that deals with electoral registration.

The third problem to be raised might be, "There may be a concern about people being put on the register against their will. People should have the right to not be registered." Of course they should, so the Government could automatically register them and write to them saying that that is what has been done. At that point they would have the chance to opt out.

The final problem that is raised is, "Perhaps there is a problem with security. How do we know that the person who paid this bill should be put on the electoral register?" That is a ludicrous argument. If someone applies for and gets a British passport, which is one of the main credentials a person needs to be able to take part in democracy, surely it should automatically follow that they get put on the electoral register as well. If someone buys a new house, it is a legal obligation not only to register the property but to register ownership of the property. Surely we should be able to put that person on the electoral register automatically.

Will the Minister say which of the 25 recommendations in the all-party group's report can be implemented now and which he would like to look at over a bit more time? Will he come forward with proposals to allow automatic voter registration to happen? Bring us solutions, rather than problems.

5.8 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing the debate, not least because, to my relief, his is a constituency that I can pronounce. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate and be part of moving the issue forward, as progress has been far too slow.

As has been said, this debate is incredibly timely because of the issues caused by the last-minute surge in voter registrations in the run-up to the referendum, which were discussed in the House earlier this month, and because of the general confusion about the entire registration process. Significant numbers of people simply do not know whether they are on the electoral register, whether they have to register every time or why they were not on the register for this important election. Many people just expect to be on the electoral register because they pay their council tax, because they interact with Government and because the Government know about them.

The debate is relevant today because, despite the recent surge, registration rates are still desperately low. We know the statistics from the excellent work that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) did in bringing her ten-minute rule Bill before the House earlier this year. She mentioned the stark difference between pensioners in the shires and young men from ethnic minorities. I understand that a forthcoming study from the Electoral Commission will reveal that many millions of people are still missing from the electoral register.

I know the Minister will agree that we must do everything we can to encourage as many people as humanly possible to be on the register. That is why it was so important and so right to extend the deadline for registration in the run-up to the referendum, although perhaps some of us might regret that now. It is therefore perplexing that the Government have missed so many opportunities to improve registration rates. They were far too late to encourage the registration of students in university towns, despite having an excellent model on offer from Sheffield University. As far as I am aware, no action has been taken to deliver further pilots of online voting, as recommended by the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy. We have had only a half-hearted commitment to reviewing e-balloting for trade unions, which would undoubtedly improve our industrial democracy. The Government are still proposing to use a completely out-of-date electoral register for the proposed boundary review.

I hope we can make significant progress with automatic voter registration. Significant work has already been done by organisations such as Bite the Ballot, which produced an excellent report, co-written by Oliver Sidorcuk and Dr Toby James, on the "missing millions" who have been mentioned. The Electoral Commission itself has put forward three credible options for automatic registration: automatically registering 16 and 17-year-olds, updating home movers' details and confirmation matching. I state no preference for any of those methods today, but I urge the Government to explore them all and establish which will most significantly increase registrations while guarding against electoral fraud as far as possible.

As we know, automatic registration would bring many significant benefits. The register would be more complete, obviously: we would not see the peaks and troughs of registration that we currently have, which are a problem not only for elections but for statistical purposes and for exercises such as boundary reviews. There would be less confusion about whether people are on the register; the system would be significantly cheaper than the current one, as demonstrated by the example of Victoria, which has been mentioned; it would be more convenient for citizens; it would almost certainly be more up-to-date; and it would provide high-quality data that could be used by and shared with other agencies.

On that last point, devolution provides an opportunity to drive data sharing across the public sector and to deliver experimentation and innovation in our public services. It is right to devolve power down to local authorities so that they can take decisions as close as possible to where they are delivering services. We should seize the opportunity to finally break down some of the barriers between Departments and agencies, to ensure that whenever someone interacts with Government they are viewed as a whole person, not just dealt with in one Department's silo. Automatic registration could play a major role in that. I completely support the comments of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), and I press the Government to bring forward new data-sharing protocols.

There are obviously challenges, not least electoral fraud and the need for a clear opt-out from the open register, but they can be worked through by learning from Administrations who already operate such systems successfully. The Law Commission has published a thorough interim report on electoral law and plans to publish a draft Bill for Parliament to consider next year. Will the Minister update us on progress on that, and on the Government's response to the Law Commission's report?

Will the Minister also update us on the progress of the Greater Manchester trial? It is absolutely right that devolved authorities have the control and power that they need to drive registration, and I very much hope the Sheffield city region will be given the option to trial such a scheme. Will the Minister confirm what conversations or offers have been made to other devolved areas? Will he consider requiring local authorities to put information about polling stations online? It is frankly ridiculous that that information is not digitally available to voters on polling day.

The Law Commission has said that current electoral law is an "unworkable mass" and that it is "complex, voluminous and fragmented". Devolution and the fallout from the referendum present a prime opportunity to review that situation and consider options such as automatic registration. I hope the Minister will grasp that opportunity with both hands.

The vote last Thursday revealed the deep dissatisfaction in this country with the political establishment and the status quo. Despite politicians' best attempts to be as accessible and as grounded as possible, we are seen as exactly the opposite. We are viewed variously as corrupt, immoral and sometimes merely irrelevant. Tragically, that general attitude culminated in the brutal murder of one of our finest colleagues less than a fortnight ago. We in this House have a duty to fix that, to improve the climate in which we debate ideas and to reach out to

[*Louise Haigh*]

those alienated by our political debate. The people who are excluded from the process as it currently stands are exactly those we need to prioritise and reach out to. Fundamental electoral reform is now an immediate necessity, and automatic voter registration must be a part of it.

5.14 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): It is a pleasure to have you looking after us this afternoon and to serve under your sure guidance, Mr Howarth. I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on bringing forward this extremely important issue. It is tempting in such moments, when the entire world is running around with its hair on fire, worrying about all sorts of other admittedly incredibly urgent, big problems, to forget that there are some important critical pieces of democratic plumbing that need to be attended to, no matter what else is going on. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on not losing sight of that essential, fundamental truth. I will try to make sure I leave him with a couple of minutes at the end to respond or sum up if he wishes.

A number of important points have been made. I have always promised myself that if I ever start quoting my own speeches, I will know that it is time to leave. I promise not to do that, but hon. Members might want to have a look at a speech I made at Policy Exchange about a year ago. What I said was very much along the lines of some of the criticisms that have been levelled at the voter registration system. What we have is a system that is, to put it charitably, in transition. Some good work has been done. The system of online registration is new and, by any account, an awful lot better than what went before, even though it was so popular that it fell over rather embarrassingly just before the registration deadline. There have been changes, but we are still battling with the problem that a vast proportion of our registration process is designed for an analogue age. It is based on an old-fashioned approach that is paper-based and process-driven, rather than focused on outcomes and anything that is remotely digital. Clearly, as we have heard from right across the political spectrum, a huge amount needs to be done to update it.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who speaks for the Scottish National party, pointed out that there is clearly a substantial cross-party backing for progress here. He is absolutely right. As a number of people have said, for this to work well, it will be best of all if it can be done on a cross-party, non-partisan basis. Voter registration is something that we all, as democrats, ought to be in favour of and ought to try to push forward. It works better, in combating voter disillusionment, which all hon. Members mentioned, if people can see that not just one party or the other is pushing this; otherwise, they will assume that that one party has a particular axe to grind. It is far more powerful if everybody says the same thing and sings from the same hymn sheet. I am particularly pleased that we are all on the same page.

I would like to talk a little about what we are already doing. I am delighted to tell the hon. Member for Midlothian that I think we are heading in a very similar direction. There are some definitional questions and

important points of detail that we need to bottom out, but we are heading to a very similar destination. Last month, I introduced a statutory instrument in this place that began the very early steps in that process. It contained a couple of very modest proposals, which are actually quite significant, to begin to digitise our process. One of them was simply to make it possible to use emails, rather than having to send a snail-mail, old-fashioned paper letter, when confirming whether someone is being registered. That might sound like a really basic change, but it required a legal change in this place. We had to pilot an SI, which contained a number of other measures, to take it through. It will make a very significant alteration to the speed, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of registration. I hope that it gives everybody here an idea of where we are starting from and how much further we have to travel.

I can also confirm to the hon. Gentleman that a further SI is due to come to this place on Monday that will take us a couple more steps down the road. I am not going to over-claim on this, but it is moving in the direction in which everybody has said they want to move. On Monday, we will talk about changes that will be piloted, to begin with, in three local authorities: Ryedale, Birmingham and South Lakeland. Following up on the idea that localism and devolution are important sources of ideas, many of these ideas have been proposed by local authority electoral registration officers, who are on the frontline and understand which bits of the process still work and which are, frankly, a waste of time and cause them to chew their arms off in frustration because they are so slow and inefficient. They are the ones coming up with many of the most creative and practical proposals. We are encouraging them to submit ideas and are trying to take those forward. We will look at the issue in more detail in Monday's statutory instrument debate. They are talking about changing from a household inquiry form arriving on the doorstep to check who should be registered to vote to something called a household notification letter that says, "We think the following people are in this place and should be registered; please tell us if not." That change in the process would be far more efficient, would not require the same degree of response and could be done much more electronically.

In two of the three local authority pilot areas, we will be matching data using local data sources, so that we can focus effort and not require local officers to knock on doors when they already know who lives behind those doors, which is clearly a massive waste of effort and resources. Those resources could be better targeted on places where we do not know who lives there. If we know that somebody has been living somewhere for the past 20 years, there is no point going and knocking on the door to confirm it—why not take that time and effort and go and spend it in the block of flats at the other end of the road, where there are huge gaps in the register and there is much more of a problem? That is a step in the right direction—but it is only a step. We are still only in the foothills of the transition that hon. Members have been talking about, which I completely endorse.

We do need to be careful, because the idea of automatic registration is used, understandably, quite widely and loosely. We all mean slightly different things when we talk about it. Some of those things are crashingly obvious and desirable, and we should get on and do

them tomorrow. Other things are potentially quite dangerous. Most people would agree that it is sensible to use more local data, as we are doing in a couple of the local pilots, to inform what we are doing on registration. Not only does that say an awful lot more about who is behind the door, because they are paying council tax or have a car-parking permit or a library card—there are many different forms of local data—but it allows us to focus efforts elsewhere, where we do not have data or there are significant question marks over their quality or veracity and we know there is further work to do to fill in the gaps.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East anticipated my likely objections to automatic registration, or to data-driven registration, if I can be a bit more specific about what we might collectively mean here. I am happy to say that I am not going to raise any of the issues he suggested. He ran through a sort of checklist of standard Whitehall excuses about why we cannot do things. It usually starts with, “It is too expensive.” If that is not true, people say that we are doing it already. The third is that the IT will not handle it—that is a common one. It is the equivalent, for Star Trek fans, of Scotty saying, “I cannae give you any more, Captain; the engines are going flat out already.” But those excuses will not work. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we can and jolly well should do more here.

Using local data is essential, but it is difficult to work out which bits are reliable. The principle is widely accepted, I think, but it is difficult to find out which specific fields in which database give a robust data set that confirms that we know this person lives here and is eligible to vote. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh East noted that we need to be careful not to end up registering people who are certainly living in a residence, but may not be eligible to vote, either because they are foreign nationals and are not eligible to vote in the UK, or for some other reason. That would end up switching from a problem of missing millions—false negatives in the jargon—to a problem of false positives, where we are enrolling people who should not be on the roll at all. We must be confident that we are using reliable local data. There is an awful lot of crashingly detailed but absolutely essential work to do to make that happen.

When we have reached the point where we all agree that data-driven enrolment is sensible, we come to the question of the degree of data-driven automaticity that we are willing to accept. At the moment, we have an opt-in system, where people have to exercise their right to register to vote. A fundamental principle about individual electoral registration that I think all parties sign up to is that it is essential in a democracy that people say, “I want to use my right to vote,” but if they have said it once, we do not necessarily have to ask them year in, year out for the rest of their lives. They are democratically entitled to change their minds, but if they have said, “I want to exercise my right to register to vote,” it should just be a question of tracking when they move house and ensuring that we have got the address changes correct. That is easy to say and extremely difficult to do, but there should not be a permission issue thereafter. We need to address that piece as well.

There is a difference between an opt-in system, where we say, “We know you’re living there, but do you want to register?” and an opt-out system, which is one possibility,

or a “we’re not even going to ask you” system, which is a bit more dangerous. Whether that is really acceptable in a free society is a bit more questionable; it is tricky in some respects from a civil liberties point of view.

Those are the sorts of questions that I would be delighted if we were sophisticated enough and had updated our system enough to start worrying about. At the moment, we can make huge progress just by doing the data. The 80:20 rule applies: we will get 80% of the benefit from getting the data stuff done as fast as we can. That will not be easy, because it is so detailed. I will be delighted when we have got to the point where we can say, “Well, how much of an opt-in or an opt-out system do we want to have?” because we will have made huge progress, and as has rightly been pointed out, there are so many groups in our society where the picture of registration is uneven—in many cases, from a social justice point of view, unjustly uneven.

Interestingly, the group that is both biggest and least well registered has not been mentioned by anyone: expatriates. Several million expat voters are currently legally eligible to vote. Their registration rate is something like 5%, and there are therefore several million expatriates who are legally enfranchised but are unregistered. That is the biggest single democratic outrage—in the words of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East—that we have, but there are many others. Some BME groups have very high registration rates, but others do not. Some disabled groups have very low registration rates, but others have better rates. Many people who live in short-term rental accommodation, including students, have problems, too.

There is a huge amount that we can do. I hope that I have both reassured the hon. Member for Midlothian and perhaps tempted him a little as I have shown a little bit of ankle about where we are trying to get to and where we would like to take this issue. I think that we have a degree of cross-party unanimity on the direction of travel and the amount of work that we can do. I hope that that is reassuring. I will not go into the parallel but separate problem of individual electoral registration, on which I disagree with almost everything that has been said—that is a different conversation and a much longer debate—but on this issue we can and should make common cause, and with any luck, with a degree of cross-party unanimity, we will be able to make progress.

5.28 pm

Owen Thompson: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions on this important issue. It is particularly encouraging to hear agreement, at least in general terms, about the direction in which we need to travel to ensure that participation levels in elections of whatever nature across the country are as high as they possibly can be and that we do whatever we possibly can to remove the barriers that exist for so many people.

I am encouraged by the Minister’s comments that some steps are being taken. I would like to see that happen a lot faster, but I accept that if we start talking about pace, that will at least be an entirely different argument from the one about whether change should happen in the first place. I very much look forward to seeing what other actions and proposals come forward. Many of us want to get to the point of being able to debate what type of automatic registration system we

[Owen Thompson]

have rather than whether we should have one in the first place. I welcome his comments and I hope that yet further steps forward will be taken in the weeks and months ahead and we will get to a point where we can make decisions that will benefit millions of people across the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered automatic registration in UK elections.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 29 June 2016

DEFENCE

Strategic Defence and Security Review: UK Resilience

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): The strategic defence and security review (SDSR) 2015 set out the need to strengthen the armed forces contribution to UK resilience. To maximise the size of the force available to deliver this task, the Chief of the General Staff has today announced that the Army will in future plan to use regular and reserve phase 1 trained personnel in response to crises within the UK.

This change will increase the utility and the size of force available in the event of a national emergency. It will result in Army personnel contributing more, and earlier in their careers, and therefore feeling more motivated and more valued. For the Regular Army, this will mean the potential deployment of sub-units from training establishments led by their instructors; for reserves it will mean that they are able to participate in training and UK deployments with their units at an earlier stage than previously. To prepare for this, all Regular and reserve Army personnel will now complete the military annual training tests, which qualify them to assist in UK resilience tasks, during phase 1 training.

Planning routinely to use Army phase 1 trained personnel to provide additional support to UK resilience tasks such as flood response, or to backfill for others deployed on such tasks including responding to terrorist attacks, will increase the pool of trained and disciplined manpower available by around 3,000 to 5,000 regulars and 1,800 reserves.

To reflect this, the term “trained strength” will now include all armed forces personnel trained in the core function of their service. The Army will recognise the size of its additional available force by including personnel who have completed phase 1 training within the trained strength. This, however, will not change the manifesto commitment, confirmed in the SDSR, to a Regular Army of 82,000. This will result in the addition of around 1,800 reservists to the overall trained Army Reserve: we will now also increase the target for trained Army reserves to 32,000 by 2025.

This change does not affect the progress made in developing reserves phase 2 training. Each of the phase 2 training establishments will continue to deliver reserve focused phase 2 (and phase 3) training.

Trained strength numbers for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force remain unaffected, reflecting the requirement for their personnel to complete phase 2 to be able to fulfil the core function of their respective services. This would not preclude Royal Navy or Royal Air Force phase 1 trained personnel contributing in the support of a UK resilience task in extreme circumstances.

A public consultation will be launched in due course on the inclusion of the revised trained strength figures within the monthly service personnel statistics publication.

The revised Future Reserves 2020 strength growth profiles for the Army Reserve will be published following this consultation.

[HCWS49]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Gift of Equipment (Syria Civil Defence and Free Syrian Police)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): It is the normal practice when a Government Department proposes to make a gift of a value exceeding £300,000, for the Department concerned to present to the House of Commons a minute giving particulars of the gift and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from making the gift until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has today laid a departmental minute proposing the gifting of equipment to Syria Civil Defence and Free Syria Police teams.

The situation in Syria remains extremely fragile. An estimated 250,000 people have been killed since the war began five years ago, many of them innocent civilians. The Assad regime continues to use the most barbaric military methods and tactics available, including the use of indiscriminate artillery fire, chemical weapons and barrel bombs. The UK remains committed to doing all it can to promote a political settlement to end the conflict, to alleviate the humanitarian suffering, and to protect UK national security through countering terrorist and extremist threats.

In March 2015, I laid departmental minutes before the House and issued written statements setting out our plans to gift equipment to Syria Civil Defence and the Free Syrian Police teams operating in opposition-controlled areas of Syria. No objections were received to the gifts and the UK distributed the equipment to both sets of teams along with comprehensive training packages. Civil defence teams have now saved over 50,000 lives by rescuing civilians trapped in damaged buildings, fighting fires and providing emergency first aid. The Free Syrian Police continues its valuable work to keep traffic moving, prevent looting and to support the distribution of humanitarian aid. Other international donors have also contributed to both initiatives.

The UK intends to continue its support to these programmes by increasing their communications capability and mobility of the teams, providing more targeted operational equipment—whether for search and rescue, or tracing explosives—as well as build up the capacity of these organisations to deliver on the ground. The departmental minute laid today sets out our proposal to gift £4 million in equipment to Syria Civil Defence and £4 million in equipment to those operating within the Free Syrian Police. For Syria Civil Defence, the proposed list of equipment includes cutting and rescue tools, personal protective gear including helmets, uniforms, communications equipment, medical supplies, equipment for the disposal of unexploded ordnance, office supplies, vehicles and fire-fighting equipment. For the Free Syrian

Police, the proposed list of equipment includes vehicles, communications kit, traffic signs and cones, uniforms and generators. We expect to spend £23.5 million this financial year on both programmes of support in total through the Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

The use of CSSF funds to cover the costs of the gift has been approved by members of the Middle East and North Africa strategic programme board. The gift is being scrutinised to ensure that the provision of this equipment is consistent with export controls and complies with our international obligations. Recipients have been carefully selected to prevent equipment being given to those involved in extremist activities or human rights violations. The risk of diversion is still a real possibility, but we assess that the considerable benefit this equipment would bring to the moderate opposition in Syria greatly outweigh this risk, which we have plans in place to

mitigate. There is constant monitoring of the situation on ground, and all equipment transfers are approved by Her Majesty's Government immediately before delivery. All our assistance is carefully calibrated and legal, is aimed at alleviating human suffering and supporting moderate groups and is regularly monitored and evaluated.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which the departmental minute was laid before the House of Commons, a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or a motion relating to the minute, or by otherwise raising the matter in the House, final approval of the gift will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

[HCWS48]

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