



## DEBATE PACK

CDP 2018-0065 | 9 March 2018

# Diplomatic service and resources

**Westminster Hall**

**13 March 2018**

**9.30am – 11.00am**

**Debate nominated by the  
Backbench Business Committee**

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# 1. Background

Over recent years concerns have been expressed by parliamentarians and experts about whether the UK's diplomatic service has the capacity to deliver on the country's foreign policy objectives. Brexit has led to calls for a 'global Britain'. Some critics argue that such a goal could be unrealistic unless the resources available to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are increased significantly.

The Foreign Affairs Committee held an [evidence session](#) with senior FCO officials in November 2017 at which these issues were explored in some depth.

Permanent Secretary Sir Simon McDonald said then that the department expected to receive some of the £250 million allocated by the Treasury for additional Brexit-related work. He informed the Committee that 50 members of staff had been reassigned to posts in Europe but that additional posts were also planned. Members of the Committee expressed alarm that the initial response to Brexit had required the FCO to reduce its representation in non-European locations, rather than increase it. Sir Simon indicated that this would be the case in the short-term only. At that time, the talk was of the need to save £4.2 million from the FCO's budget in order to create 50 new Brexit-related jobs and stay within the department's 2015 spending review settlement.

Members of the Committee were also worried about the growing proportion of the FCO's core budget that is counted as Overseas Development Assistance, which has risen from 6% in 2010 to over 40%. Sir Simon acknowledged that the result has been that the FCO's "effort is being skewed towards ODA-eligible countries", potentially limiting what it does in other parts of the world.

In January 2018, Sir Simon updated the Committee by [letter](#) on subsequent developments:

[...] we have been strengthening our diplomatic network in Europe to support a successful EU Exit. We have upgraded seven Ambassador jobs and created 50 new diplomatic positions in Embassies in Europe. But it is not a question of simply reducing the number of staff outside Europe by the same number. The money to fund these changes comes from changing the way we work and adjusting some of our processes, as well as from some staff savings and re-prioritisation in Asia, the Americas and Africa.

This is a dynamic process. The £4.2m figure quoted previously was based on the cost of the EU uplift (now estimated at £4.1m) and therefore represented the saving required to create, initially,

50 new jobs and live within our 2015 Spending Review settlement. Since then we have received some additional resources from HM Treasury. In total, this has allowed the FCO to create 150 jobs to support EU Exit in London and overseas.

On 1 February, Tom Tugendhat began a Commons [debate](#) about UK diplomacy in Europe by saying:

The Committee was given mixed messages about the FCO's role in the Brexit process and beyond and, to clarify the position, the Committee calls on the FCO to publish a paper outlining the overall goals and the specific priorities of UK foreign policy in Europe after Brexit. This would allow the House to debate the priorities set out and to discuss the resources available to meet the objective.

Although we welcome the Minister for Europe's success in securing additional resources, the Committee is concerned that they are being drawn from the wider network, possibly weakening the Government's stated policy that we are to become a genuinely global Britain. That would be a grave mistake. Since Lord Hague, the Foreign Office has been opening missions around the world to extend the influence that the UK seeks in foreign affairs. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and now with a vital national interest in extending our diplomatic influence, it would be an error to reduce the resources available to achieve that. If leaving the EU meant that the UK were to reduce its international outreach, that would be a reversal of the aim stated by Ministers in recent months and would cause great concern to the whole Committee, and no doubt to the whole House.

A few days later, the Government published its [2017/18 Supplementary Estimates](#) - the changes the government proposes to current year departmental budgets. The FCO proposed a net increase to its resource DEL budget of £79.5 million (4%). Most of this (£96.7 million) is to be funded through additional resources from the Treasury Reserve. The additional funds included £3.9 million for preparations for exiting the EU. The Supplementary Estimates have since received Commons approval.

## 2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

### [Cash-strapped Foreign Office sells Bangkok embassy for £420m](#)

The Guardian  
Patrick Wintour  
31 January 2018

### [Johnson is right, Foreign Office oversight of the aid budget would be wise](#)

Conservative Home  
Henry Hill  
1 January 2018

### [Foreign aid to be shifted to support UK policy, Johnson says](#)

BBC News Online  
31 December 2017

### [Boris Johnson's 'global Britain' claims mocked as UK cuts back embassies around world to fund more EU diplomats](#)

The Independent  
Lizzy Buchan  
30 December 2017

### [Britain has a delusional view of itself on the global stage – and stupid remarks by our politicians prove this](#)

The independent  
Patrick Cockburn  
22 December 2018

### [Britain's voice in global affairs under threat, warn experts](#)

Financial times  
James Blitz  
8 December 2017

### [The Foreign Office has taken a massive cut in Philip Hammond's Budget – bad news for Boris Johnson](#)

The independent  
Denis McShane  
23 November 2017

### [The Limits of Budget Diplomacy](#)

British Foreign Policy Group  
Tom Cargill  
22 November 2017

**No Foreign Office takeover of international aid budget, says Priti Patel**

The Guardian  
Karen McVeigh  
24 October 2017

**France moves above US and Britain to become the world's top 'soft power' with more non-military global influence than any other country following Macron election win**

Mail Online  
Julian Robinson  
18 July 2017

### 3. PQs

#### [EU Countries: Diplomatic Service](#)

26 Feb 2018 | HL5881

##### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 20 February (HL5413), what are the 50 new diplomatic posts being created in Europe, broken down by (1) country, (2) diplomatic post, (3) grade of post holder, and (4) whether the post is currently filled or vacant.

#### [Diplomatic Service](#)

26 Feb 2018 | HL5880

##### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 20 February (HL5413), whether the proposals being developed to generate £4.2 million of savings from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget to fund the creation of 50 new diplomatic posts in Europe includes the sale of any properties in the UK diplomatic network overseas; and if so, in which countries any such property sales are being considered.

#### [EU Countries: Diplomatic Service](#)

26 Feb 2018 | HL5879

##### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 20 February (HL5413), whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will receive additional funds from HM Treasury to offset the £4.2 million cost of creating 50 new diplomatic posts in Europe.

#### [Diplomatic Service](#)

26 Feb 2018 | HL5878

##### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 20 February (HL5413), whether the staff savings being made in Asia, the Americas and Africa include (1) the planned closure of any UK diplomatic posts, and (2) the localisation of positions previously held by UK-based staff; and what is the breakdown of any such changes.

#### [Diplomatic Service](#)

26 Feb 2018 | HL5877

##### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 20 February (HL5413), how many UK-based staff there were at UK diplomatic posts in (1) Asia, (2) the Americas, and (3) Africa, (a) before the staff savings made to fund the creation of 50 new posts in Europe, and (b) after those staff savings.

## **Diplomatic Service**

**26 Feb 2018 | HL5876**

### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 20 February (HL5413), what are the staff savings made in (1) Asia, (2) the Americas, and (3) Africa, broken down by (a) country, (b) diplomatic post, and (c) nature of staff saving.

## **EU Countries: Embassies**

**20 Feb 2018 | HL5413**

### **Asked by Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to increase the number of (1) UK national, and (2) local, staff at British embassies in EU member states; and whether those plans will have implications for staffing levels of UK diplomatic posts in other countries.

### **Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

Since the vote to leave the EU we have strengthened our diplomatic network in Europe by creating 50 new Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) diplomatic positions in our Embassies in Europe. The FCO is developing proposals to make £4.2 million of savings to fund the 50 new jobs in Europe and balance the FCO budget during this Spending Round. Savings will come from changing the way we work in some locations, for example how we provide security and facilities management, getting better value from our estate, and using better IT to support more flexible operating models, as well as from some staff savings in Asia, the Americas and Africa.

## **Topical Questions**

**20 Feb 2018 | 636 c19**

### **Asked by: Julia Lopez**

If Britain is to assume a more ambitious global trading role as we leave the EU, we shall surely need to expand the depth and reach of our network of high commissions and embassies in regions such as North America. What assurances can my right hon. Friend offer the House that critical diplomatic missions in countries such as Canada are being expanded, not cut back?

### **Answered by: Boris Johnson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that to the best of my knowledge we have, just in the past 18 months, opened three new trade missions in North America. I cannot comment about Canada specifically, but we are certainly beefing up our presence in the United States in advance of doing a great free trade deal.

**Diplomatic Service: Recruitment**

**07 Nov 2017 | 111109**

**Asked by: Jon Trickett**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many diplomatic positions have been established since June 2016; and what the cost of their salaries is to the public purse.

**Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The FCO keeps its staff numbers under regular review in response to Ministerial priorities. Since June 2016, in response to the EU referendum, we have added 50 diplomatic positions to our Europe network and a further 6 positions at multilateral posts. The cost of posting these staff – including salary, overseas compensation and accommodation – is £4.2 million. Some of these posts have been funded through resource efficiencies and re-prioritisation identified by the Diplomacy 20:20 transformation programme.

**Topical Questions**

**21 Feb 2017 | 621 c866**

**Asked by: Sir Hugo Swire**

Brexit provides an opportunity to review the role of the FCO, which has been woefully under-resourced for far too long. Does my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary agree that there should be a moratorium on any asset disposals until such a review is complete, and that such a review should also examine how finally to bring other Departments with overseas representatives under the control of the respective heads of mission?

**Answered by: Boris Johnson | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

I am delighted for the support from my right hon. Friend in campaigning for proper funding for our diplomatic missions overseas. It is true that we have an absolutely unparalleled network around the world, and it is also true that the missions will be needed more than ever as we forge a new global future. That point will be heard loud and clear by the current occupant of the Treasury, who was, after all, the previous Foreign Secretary.

**Diplomatic Service**

**16 Jan 2017 | 59321**

**Asked by: Stephen Gethins**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 22 December 2016 to Question 57858, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in the European Council about continuing to share diplomatic premises with EU institutions.

**Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office regularly reviews the suitability of its premises overseas, including those it shares with other countries and international organisations.

**[EU Countries: Diplomatic Service](#)****30 Nov 2016 | 53941****Asked by: Jim Cunningham**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what plans his Department has to increase its overseas diplomatic representation after the vote to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member: Sir Alan Duncan | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are strengthening our European network of posts including by increasing the number of UK based staff posted, upgrading the seniority of a number of Heads of Mission jobs and increasing our representation in Geneva. We will continue to review staffing in the wider network as appropriate.

**[Topical Questions](#)****12 Jul 2016 | 613 c161****Asked by: Alex Chalk**

Britain is a global trading nation. What steps have been taken to ensure that our embassies and high commissions around the world are in the best possible position to forge excellent trading deals for the United Kingdom?

**Answered by: Philip Hammond | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

As one of my colleagues said earlier, last week we had all our senior people in London for the annual leadership conference, and I clearly set out to them the challenge to the Foreign Office and its network as we move into this new phase where we will seek to redouble our efforts to build trade relationships around the world beyond the European Union. I can tell my hon. Friend, and the House, that I got the resounding response that they are up for that challenge.

**[Embassies](#)****12 Jul 2016 | 613 c148****Asked by: Geoffrey Clifton-Brown**

Does my hon. Friend agree that not enough small and medium-sized businesses export around the world, and that, because our balance of trade is widening, we must constantly review our trade policy? In particular, does he agree that British embassies around the world could help with digital linking between consumers around the world and potential exporting companies in this country?

**Answered by: Tobias Ellwood | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point, which covers a specific interest that we can espouse. The Foreign Secretary had an opportunity to brief ambassadors and high commissioners when they returned to the UK last week. Given the new environment in which we find ourselves, the role that embassies and high commissions can play throughout the world in establishing new markets and exploring new opportunities—as well as revisiting old ones—is now critical.

## 4. Debates

**[UK Diplomacy in Europe](#)**

01 February 2018 | 635 cc1005-1011

**[Brexit: Peace and Stability](#)**

18 October 2016 | 774 cc2299-2314

**[Soft Power and the UK's Influence \(Select Committee Report\)](#)**

10 March 2015 | Debates | House of Lords | 760 cc548-620

## 5. Further reading

**[Representations: Backbench Debates, Tuesday 20 February 2018](#)**

HC 9999 | Published 20 Feb 2018

**[Revised Government spending plans for 2017-18](#)**, House of Commons Library, CBP-8320, 23 February 2018

**[The future of UK diplomacy in Europe](#)**, Second Report of Session 2017–19, Foreign Affairs Committee, HC 514, 30 January 2018

**[Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget evidence session](#)**, Foreign Affairs Committee, 15 November 2017

**[Persuasion and Power in the Modern World](#)**, Report of Session 2013–14, Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, HL Paper 150, 28 March 2014

**[The Soft Power Report: a global ranking of soft power 2017](#)**, Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, July 2017

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