Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

PM Bulgaria visit 3 December 2015: press conference

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Introduction

Well thank you very much Prime Minister, thank you Boyko.

It's very good to be here in Sofia today on my first visit as Prime Minister.

And, as you say, the first bilateral visit to Bulgaria by a serving British Prime Minister for 16 years.

The relationship between our countries matters – both for our security and our prosperity.

And let me say what a pleasure it is to be here today, not least because of the track record you have of economic reform and fiscal discipline, because of the action you've taken as a strong ally and member of NATO to boost your defence budget, and because all the co-operation we have and the action you've taken to deal with issues such as smuggling.

So for all these reasons, it's good to be here and good to pay tribute to the record you have as the Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

As I said, the issues of prosperity and security matter.

We are both members of NATO and our armed forces train together – with 2 multinational exercises this year and the visit of HMS Duncan last month.

And our trade relationship is strong and growing – up 10 per cent last year.

And today we have discussed how we can further strengthen our relationship how we can reform the EU to make it more competitive and how we can address the concerns of the British people about our membership.

And we have discussed how we can work together to tackle the challenges we both face from migration and terrorism.

And I want to say a few words on each.

EU reform

First on EU reform.

I want the EU to be more competitive – a source of growth and jobs.

That means completing the single market, cutting red tape and signing free trade deals with fast-growing markets like the EU-Vietnam free trade deal concluded yesterday.

And I want Britain to stay in a reformed European Union.

That's why I am working to renegotiate the UK's relationship and to address concerns about the status quo – issues concerning sovereignty, economic governance and migration.

We are making good progress and later this month we will have a substantive discussion on the UK's renegotiation at the December European Council.

There are significant reforms that we are seeking.

We need fundamental, legally binding and irreversible changes.

The scale of what we are asking for means we will not resolve this easily.

We need time to ensure each issue is properly addressed because what matters most is getting the substance right.

And this is a large, bold and wide ranging agenda. It is difficult.

We are not going to agree it in one go.

So I do not expect to reach agreement at this December summit.

But we won't take our foot off the pedal.

We will keep up the pace on negotiations and we will use the summit to focus minds and to work on solutions in the toughest areas – because we do need reform in each and every area I've set out.

Migration

Turning to migration, we have discussed today how we can work together to reduce the numbers coming to Europe and to strengthen the EU's external border.

We will be agreeing I'm sure, that we must continue to pursue a comprehensive approach - helping Syrian refugees to stay in neighbouring countries and strengthening the EU's ability to detect and return illegal migrants.

The United Kingdom is playing its part on both agendas.

We are by far the largest European donor to the humanitarian crisis in Syria – providing £1.1 billion.

And we are providing practical assistance to European countries on the frontline – with UK border officers deployed to Greece, Italy and elsewhere to help with the screening and registering of migrants.

And I look forward to our visit tomorrow to your border, where you've spoken so clearly about the action that needs to be taken – not just by yourself but right across Europe to help to deal with this crisis.

And you always speak very clearly at European Councils on this vital issue.

Threat of terrorism

And finally, we will be talking about the terrorist threat facing our countries and what we can do to tackle it.

We've agreed that we need stronger co-operation across Europe – on information-sharing, on passenger name records, and on the illegal trade in firearms.

And we've discussed the importance of going after Daesh in its heartlands – in Iraq and in Syria where British fighter jets struck 6 targets overnight.

So, these have been good discussions and I very much look forward to continuing them this evening.

Prime Minister, Boyko, thank you.

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