



Liaison Committee

Oral evidence: [Evidence from the Prime Minister](#), HC 1254

Tuesday 13 May 2014

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Members present: Sir Alan Beith (Chair); Mr Adrian Bailey; Sir Malcolm Bruce; Mr William Cash; David T. C. Davies; Dr Hywel Francis; Mr Bernard Jenkin; Andrew Miller; Sir Richard Ottaway; Keith Vaz

Questions 1-66

Witness: **Rt Hon David Cameron MP**, Prime Minister, gave evidence.

Chair: Welcome back to the Liaison Committee, Prime Minister. In this afternoon's session, we have two themes. One is migration, which we will deal with first. The second is current and foreign affairs issues, which really means Ukraine and Syria. I will start with migration, and it will be no surprise to hear that Mr Vaz is going to begin.

Q1 Keith Vaz: Prime Minister, good afternoon. Were you comfortable with the Immigration Minister's description of the metropolitan elite—those who employ people born abroad who are fuelling the unemployment and migration figures—or have you persuaded him that that was wrong?

Mr Cameron: Look, what matters is the substance of the policy. Migration into the UK has been far too high for far too long. It needed a Government to come along and change the rules to get it properly under control, and that is what we have done. I am sure we will come on to talk about the figures. I do not differentiate between any particular groups on this basis. I think it is just important that we get the policy right.

Q2 Keith Vaz: Let's talk about the figures. Yesterday you were in multicultural Harrow meeting the community there, and possibly even saving lives.

Mr Cameron: Don't believe everything you read in the newspapers. I would like to thank my protection team for their very swift action. Reports of Boris Johnson's and my activity were slightly oversold in some of the newspapers.

Q3 Keith Vaz: But what is clear is that it is a multicultural borough, and the last set of net migration figures was 212,000. That means we are adding the population of Harrow almost every

year. You gave a cast-iron guarantee to have an in/out referendum after the next election. Can you give us a cast-iron guarantee today that your net migration figures will be below 100,000 by 7 May next year?

Mr Cameron: The point about an in/out referendum is that it is absolutely within my gift, if I am Prime Minister, to pass legislation and to hold that referendum by the end of 2017. It is an absolutely yes-or-no issue. It can be done. It is totally within my gift. Getting migration figures down is much harder work, because there are a lot of different elements to migration, but if I look at the situation over the decade prior to 2010, net migration was running at well over 200,000 every year—2 million across the decade—which is the difference between the number of people coming in and going out. My view is that that is much too high and I want to get it down to the tens of thousands, under 100,000, which it was in the 1980s. We were an open economy in the 1980s—a successful economy. I think it is perfectly feasible.

Keith Vaz: But are you—

Mr Cameron: Let me explain where we are today. Net migration into the UK is down by a fifth under this Government—not as much as I would like. When I look at the two elements—EU migration and non-EU migration—non-EU migration is down by over a third. It is down to its lowest level since 1998, so we made real progress on that level. The figures have been altered by the fact that, in the last couple of years, because our economy has been growing more rapidly than the other European economies, we have seen an increase in the number of people coming from EU countries to the United Kingdom. Interestingly—I checked the figures before coming to the Committee—some of the biggest increases are from countries like Spain, Italy and France, some of the original early EU members. The target remains; the commitment remains. I want net migration to be down to the tens of thousands. I think it is absolutely achievable.

If we look at the different parts of the picture, you have got to deal with bogus colleges and make sure the students are coming to study. You have got to deal with family visas and reunion, where there was a lot of abuse in the past, and we have radically dealt with that. You have got to look at migration for people coming to work. We have got rid of whole tiers of migration. For instance, there was, under the last Labour Government, a tier of unskilled labour. As Peter Mandelson put it, we were sending out search parties to look for people to come to the UK. There has been a radical change in policy since then. We have put in some long-term changes, but I am absolutely committed to delivering the tens of thousands.

Q4 Keith Vaz: Yes, you are committed to it, but the figures are not indicating you are going to get there. We know your commitment. You feel this very passionately. You know the British public feel very passionately about the issue of immigration. But are you going to get there by 7 May? As Mark Field—one of your Back Benchers—said, you simply cannot control the number of people who leave the country unless you lock them all up and put them in prison. That bit you cannot control, can you? So you are not going to make that target.

Mr Cameron: The figures will be what the figures are. My commitment is to do everything I can to make progress towards that target. That is what we should do. We have closed down 700 bogus colleges. That has had an impact. I was looking at some figures recently. The National Audit Office estimates that 50,000 students came to work and not study in 2009-10. That can make a real difference. If you are asking, “Is it right to target net migration when inevitably you don’t have control on the number of people who decide to leave your

country?” I would argue that, yes, net migration is the right thing to look at for a couple of reasons. First, the British public care about migration not because of issues of race or culture or those issues, but because of the pressures put on a country if you have unsustainably large net migration into your country. So I think it goes to the heart of the concern, which is, “Can we cope with large levels of migration?” As I say, I think it has been too high.

Keith Vaz: Let me—

Mr Cameron: Really, I want to get this point out. Secondly, if you take a decent period of time, what you have tended to see is EU migration—people leaving Britain to go and live in Spain or France and people coming to work here—in broad balance. So the way that you get net migration down is by reducing migration from outside the EU, which is very much under our control. As I said, it has come down by a third.

Q5 Keith Vaz: And you have emphasised that. Let us move to EU migration. You are a one nation Conservative in my view. You didn’t jump on the bandwagon when people were telling the Romanians and Bulgarians not to come. On “The Andrew Marr Show” on Sunday you made it clear that if people from the EU want to come and work, they are entitled to come and work. You are not going to stop them; you are going to stop those who come for different reasons, perhaps to get unemployment benefits, child benefit or other issues of that kind. But you were very clear that there is nothing you can do about stopping someone from Portugal or Spain or Poland coming here. What is the clear blue water between yourselves and Nigel Farage on the issue of EU migration?

Mr Cameron: Well, I am not entirely sure what his view is—it is a sort of “Just put the barricades up and pretend that these organisations do not work and do not exist.” Britain is a modern economy. People come and work here and British people go and work abroad. I don’t really measure this in relation to UKIP. My view is that net migration has been too high. It needs to come down. You’ve got to tackle all the abuses in the system, whether that is students or family visas or economic migration. On the EU issue, the point is no EU national has unrestricted access to the UK—they’ve got to be working, they’ve got to be studying, or they’ve got to be self-sufficient—so we need to get back to what that so-called freedom of movement was about in the first place, which is the freedom to move and take a job in another EU country.

Q6 Keith Vaz: Do you think they should have a job offer before they come here?

Mr Cameron: Obviously that is one of the reasons why we say, “You don’t get instant access to the benefits system when you come to the UK.” We have made some very important changes. You don’t get instant access to the benefits system. You don’t get housing benefit. If you haven’t found a job in six months then there is the possibility that you can be deported. If you cannot support yourself you can be deported. That has happened to people in our country.

I would argue that we have a fully worked out policy on EU migration and benefit tourism, which we are cracking down on, and on controlling properly migration from outside the EU. Finally, an immigration policy on its own is no good. You have to have an education policy and a welfare policy as well. The good news there is that something like 90% of the jobs

created in the last year have gone to UK nationals—a very different picture from what we saw a few years ago.

Q7 Keith Vaz: Finally, tomorrow the figures on Romanians and Bulgarians are likely to come out. They are likely to show, we are told, that 30,000 have come since 1 January. Obviously on 1 January there was not a huge flood of people who arrived. Since then we are told it is 30,000. Will that be a disappointment to you or within your expectations?

Mr Cameron: I don't want to make any comment on this because obviously the figures are out tomorrow. People can see the figures and we can have a debate tomorrow about what the figures will show. What I can comment on is what happened over the last year for which figures are available. It is quite noticeable how much migration within the EU has come from other countries—I am now trying to find the figures, but it is really quite remarkable how many have come from, for instance, Spain and Italy rather than the accession countries. I may dig out the figures as we go along.

Chair: Now that we are on to statistics, I will turn to Mr Jenkin.

Q8 Mr Jenkin: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. As you know, last summer we did an inquiry into the quality of migration statistics. The first and perhaps most startling thing we found was how these very large immigration numbers are merely estimates based on the international passenger survey, which was originally initiated to help the tourist industry in this country plan tourism facilities, yet has now become the basis for estimating, for example, our immigration and net migration target. Given the importance of that, we attach great importance to the e-Borders programme, which we were advised could provide much better supplementary, detailed, granular information about, for example, the number of Afghans or Iranians or Russians coming to this country, which we simply do not have at the moment. Yet the Home Affairs Committee was told in response that the e-Borders system is being “terminated” and will be replaced with the Border Systems Programme. It has been made explicitly clear that the ambition for e-Borders to be able to count foreign nationals in and out has been downgraded. Do you share my disappointment, however much we may have inherited this legacy from previous Administrations?

Mr Cameron: There are two issues here. One is: are the migration statistics good enough and are we happy with them? As you said, they are mostly based on this survey information. As a practical politician rather than a statistician, it does seem that they have got their inadequacies, because they are from a survey. But the experts, including the independent Office for National Statistics, clearly tell us that that is the best way to measure immigration, because when you are trying to measure immigration, you are trying to find out whether people will stay for a year or more.

They have their inadequacies. The experts say that they are better than other statistics. Can we improve them by adding in information from the Border Systems Programme? Yes we can, and we will, and I think that that will help, but I think there was a misunderstanding—I do not know whether it was in your Committee or the response given. To understand e-Borders, you have got to go back—this was how not to do Government procurement. It was commissioned early in the 2000s, it was enormously expensive and it was trying to do everything apart from, actually, as far as I can see, the one thing that really needed to be done: to count people in and out.

What we have done in “terminating” it—one person’s termination is another person’s radical reform—is develop a Border Systems Programme where we will be able to have proper exit checks. That will inform the immigration statistics, but it does not actually provide a totally belted down system of immigration. The reason is—I was asking about this because I was looking through your report—even by counting someone in and counting someone out, you cannot always tell whether they are a migrant or not, because they could be living somewhere else, or they could be living in the UK but travelling a lot. The border system is really about security, people of interest, guns, drugs, criminals and the rest of it, and the migration statistics do need to have this survey element.

Q9 Mr Jenkin: But it comes as a surprise to a great many members of the public that, when their passport is checked, they are not being counted in and out.

Mr Cameron: Increasingly they are. I think that now four out of five people are going out through areas with this advanced passenger information system and being counted out and in. So we have got 80% API coverage and the Home Secretary has said that we will have the full exit checks by April 2015.

Q10 Mr Jenkin: I do not think that that administrative data is being used to inform the immigration figures at this stage. It may after 2017 or 2018, but it will take that long to get to that point. In the meantime—

Mr Cameron: My understanding is that increasingly we will be using that information and giving it to the Office for National Statistics to see how best we can improve the immigration data.

Q11 Mr Jenkin: I am very encouraged by what you are saying. The UK Statistics Authority told us that in the meantime—and this is interpolation—with the margin for error you could be achieving your net migration target by tens of thousands, but you do not know, because the margin for error is so big, which is the irony of the situation. You could improve the quality of the data from the international passenger survey by spending relatively little extra money on it, we were advised by UKSA. An extra £15 million would significantly improve the accuracy of these figures. Why do you not commit to that extra expenditure to increase the survey’s size and therefore increase the accuracy?

Mr Cameron: I am very happy to look at that. My understanding is that the Office for National Statistics does not necessarily agree with that point. I am happy to write to them to look at the issue. Your basic point is that you have this survey data. People will think, how do we possibly measure immigration simply by survey data and how can we improve it with our real-time data? Can we get the two to work together better to give us better statistics? I agree with the thinking behind that and will certainly ask the ONS. If £15 million would make a difference in really getting the figures right, that would be interesting, but I am told that is not the case.

Q12 Mr Jenkin: The problem is that of the 800,000 or 900,000 people interviewed in the international passenger survey only about 5,000 of those are migrants. All the immigration

figures are derived from that sample of 5,000 people. If you are then segmenting it into different nationalities you are into very small samples.

Mr Cameron: I accept that is true but, likewise, if you take the total number of people travelling into and out of the UK—that is, using the successors to e-Borders—something like only 0.5% of them are immigrants. I think we are both trying to grapple with this problem. What you want is a survey informed by real-time data.

Q13 Mr Jenkin: So can you give me any assurance about how you are using visa national data, that is, counting people who have actually got visas so that they have documents to check when they come in and out? Why are we not counting that?

Mr Cameron: My understanding is that we are increasingly counting with this advanced passenger information, counting in and out, 80% of people at the relevant ports. With the exit checks in April 2015 we will do the whole thing.

Q14 Mr Jenkin: This sounds like progress from the response that we have got. While 80% or 90% of visas are scanned on entry or exit, those data, we were told, were not used for counting in and out visa nationals. If you are saying that we are moving towards that, that is—

Mr Cameron: I will check. I do not wish to misinform the Committee. This is a very technical area. My understanding is that where the advanced passenger information system is operating it is now 80% of coverage. If I have misled you in any way, I will correct it.

Q15 Mr Jenkin: And if you share the concern of local authorities that find it very difficult to plan public services because there is very little data that can be used to estimate where migrants are going to go and live and where they are going to use an increased amount of public services, what are we going to do about that? We were told that it was said in the response that it may not be legal under EU law to stop to interview EU nationals entering this country, to find out where they are going, what they are going to do and whether they are going to have a job. Do you accept that legal advice?

Mr Cameron: I haven't seen that specific legal advice. Obviously, the question is really if you get a particular concentration of migrants living in particular areas, how do we ensure that local authorities can cope?

Q16 Chair: And how do they know that is what is going to happen?

Mr Cameron: I am not sure you would be able to get that.

Q17 Mr Jenkin: At the moment the only thing we have is the decennial census. That is the only way we can cross-check what has been estimated. There are many authorities that were tens of thousands out in their total population. Unless we can interview people when they are coming in to find out where they are going and what they are going to do and use that data, then it is impossible for local authorities to plan their public services. If you could look at that in more detail and come back to us.

Mr Cameron: I will have a look at that. I have not seen that specific legal advice. I am happy to look at that.

Q18 Mr Bailey: Earlier, Prime Minister, you commented on a third reduction in non-EU migration, and you spoke of that in the context of the elimination of bogus colleges. I do not think anybody would dispute the importance of getting rid of bogus colleges. What you did not mention, of course, is the impact it has had on legitimate student migration, and the impact that has had on the public perception of those countries on which we draw for foreign students. Five Select Committees have recommended to you that excluding overseas student numbers from your figures designed to drive down net migration would actually send a positive message to those countries. Would you agree that, by making that administrative change, you sent out the wrong message and that, by changing it back again, you could reverse that?

Mr Cameron: I don't agree, for a good reason. We have a very clear policy, and I think it is a policy we have perhaps not got as clearly as we should have, but let me repeat it for the benefit of the Committee. There is no limit on the number of people who can come from overseas and study at a British university, as long as they have an English language qualification and a legitimate place at a legitimate college. That is, I think, an amazing offer for Britain to make to the world's students. We want them to come here to study at our great universities. We want them to contribute to our economy. We want them to build a relationship with Britain. I find when I go to China or India that this is something we can really market in terms of Britain in the world. We do not need to make a change to our immigration policy or the way we measure statistics in order to have an incredibly positive offer to students around the world.

The second reason is that immigration is people coming to your country for longer than a year. If students are coming for longer than a year—I am all for publishing the statistics so that everyone can see how many people are coming and how many of them are students. If the media and others want to report migration excluding students, then fine, but I think it would be slightly playing with the numbers to say, "Let's exclude the students," because we have a very positive story to tell here. My argument—I have had this discussion with Universities UK—is that they should get out around the world and market this. It is a fantastic offer and, just to make it even better, if you get a graduate job on leaving university, there is no reason why you cannot stay and work and contribute to the British economy. That, I think, is a very positive offer and means that Britain should be able to compete with America, with France and with Germany. We have the best universities, or many of the best universities, so we have a very, very positive offer to make. I do not think we need to change our statistics; we just need to make sure we are getting out there and selling Britain.

Q19 Mr Bailey: I think you have glossed over a number of issues, not least the earnings threshold for postgraduate workers, which puts off a lot of potential undergraduates.

Mr Cameron: I haven't. I feel really strongly about this—

Q20 Mr Bailey: Let me finish. There were also the problems accessing visas in some of the countries, which combined to convey to those countries that Britain was not open for business. You only have to read the press report and the student perceptions of England to understand the impact that these policies have had on an £8 billion export industry.

Mr Cameron: We should be dealing in realities, not perception. The reality is that there is no limit on the number of people who can study at a British university. You mentioned postgraduate salaries, and I will be very frank about this. Yes, I think that if people come and study in Britain and they can get a graduate paid job, they should be able to stay in Britain and contribute to our economy. In a global marketplace for students, do we actually want to say, “Yes, you can come to a British university, study and then do a non-graduate job”? We have plenty of British people who need those non-graduate jobs and who are getting the training and the education but might not make it to university. We want people with real get up and go to come here to study and then to get a graduate job. I have had this argument with lots of universities and colleges. I actually think that if you have a really good offer, no limit—you can come to Britain, you have to have an English language qualification and you can work here in a graduate job—then sell that offer rather than saying, “There’s a problem of perception. We have to change the policy,” in a way that I think would be completely wrong.

Q21 Chair: Is that perception a reality in this area?

Mr Cameron: If you have a good offer, which we have, get out and market it and do not change a policy that—I will come on to argue that it is working—is working because some people are chewing their pencil and saying, “Isn’t it terrible that, because people can’t come and study at a British university and then work in a low-skilled job afterwards, that is somehow sending a negative message.” I do not accept that.

Q22 Mr Bailey: The old public relations adage is that, in certain cases, perception is reality. Certainly that perception is there abroad. I think it is wrong to delegate the responsibility for that to the universities.

Mr Cameron: I take it personally myself.

Mr Bailey: The fact is, there is that perception and it is, in part, due to the changes in the visa regime and the administrative procedure for granting them. I would say, Prime Minister, that this is an £8 billion export industry. There have been medium and long-term benefits. The brightest and the best come here to be educated, go back to their home countries and take positions of responsibility in industry, government or wherever. Benefits accrue from the improved communication and engagement from such people.

The fact is that, according to the latest statistics, there is a drop in the number of students coming here, particularly in the much needed STEM subjects, which are vital for our own successful industry. Are you not prepared to change the current regulations, which simply take the students out of those statistics?

Mr Cameron: We have dealt with the perception; now let’s deal with the reality. I don’t accept your version of the reality. The fact is that visa applications for university-sponsored students went up by 7% in the year ending December 2013. So last year, the number of foreign students hearing my message about Britain being open for business, the number of foreign students applying to British universities, has gone up. What has happened is that the overall number of students has come down, because we have closed down 700 bogus colleges and because we are prioritising, as I said, people coming to quality universities and studying.

Q23 Mr Bailey: This is higher education, not bogus colleges.

Mr Cameron: I am giving you the figures for university-sponsored students.

Q24 Mr Bailey: There is a 10% drop in higher education.

Mr Cameron: The figures I have is that it is a 7% increase in applications. Obviously, applications then have to go through and make sure that they are legitimate applications, but the numbers going to university from overseas have gone up from basically about 142,000 in December 2010 to about 162,000 in December 2013. They have gone up over this Parliament. Those are the facts.

Q25 Mr Bailey: The Higher Education Statistics Agency says otherwise.

Mr Cameron: What you are seeing is fewer people applying to colleges, not least because we have closed down 700 bogus colleges, but the number of study-related sponsored visa applications to universities has gone up and I think that is very important to realise. It is worth recognising, with these bogus colleges, we have found examples, such as the London School of Commerce and IT. When UK Visas and Immigration visited, there wasn't a single student on the premises. These were not colleges. They were basically ways of people coming to the UK and then working—

Chair: I don't think there is an argument about that.

Mr Cameron: But that is why, Mr Bailey, what has happened is that the overall number of students has come down, because what we managed to achieve is exactly what we ought to be achieving, which is the number going to university going up, the number going to bogus colleges eradicated and the numbers going to colleges as a whole coming down somewhat. If we want to make sure we are getting the best and the brightest from around the world that is exactly what our offer is delivering.

Q26 Mr Bailey: Prime Minister, this has nothing to do with bogus colleges. It is about the Higher Education Statistics Agency. The number of non-EU international students beginning courses of higher education in the UK, not bogus colleges.

Mr Cameron: Right, and I have given you the figures, which is visa applications for university.

Q27 Mr Bailey: Their statistics are a 10% drop

Mr Cameron: And I am giving you the figures for the whole period from December 2010 to December 2013, which is the study-related sponsored visa applications by sector, and for universities, they have gone from around 142,000 to around 166,000, and there was a modest increase over the last year. I am very happy to write to the Committee with the figures.

Q28 Mr Bailey: Are you saying that the Higher Education Statistics Agency is wrong?

Mr Cameron: I am saying that the figures I am giving you are right. My figures are Home Office figures for how many people got visas to go to universities.

Q29 Chair: Prime Minister, I think we will await your further letter and it may lead to some correspondence between us.

Mr Cameron: The reason why I get so heated about this is that I actually believe we've completely got the right policy, which is, as I say, no limit on the numbers that can come, you need the English language and you have to have a place at the university. That is so important and then when you look at the figures, you can actually see that the numbers for university are going up and the college number is coming down somewhat. That is partly because we don't want people to come saying they are studying when predominantly they are coming to work. It links to what I have said about education and welfare in this country, to make sure that people here are able to do those jobs.

Chair: We can look at the figures if you write to us again. Mr Davies has a supplementary point in this area.

Q30 David T. C. Davies: Prime Minister, you will not be surprised to hear that I am almost 100% in favour of the policy. I wonder whether we could look at another issue: a very small percentage of people coming to the UK who do not speak English but speak fluent Welsh—I was privileged to meet some recently. Such people occasionally have had problems when coming to study. It is a very small number of people, but is it something we can look at?

Mr Cameron: I will certainly have a look at it. My understanding is that, obviously, if you are coming to the UK as a tourist, you get a visa if you need one—many countries don't need a visa. If you are coming to study, it is an English language qualification that you require. The basis of the argument is that in order to have full access to public services—we cannot guarantee that people will stay in Wales or wherever—you need to have that English language qualification. It is only for students.

Q31 David T. C. Davies: I must say that I am almost utterly in favour of this. In principle, it is absolutely right, but there is a small number of people who have come here from Welsh communities in Argentina who speak Welsh almost as a first language but have hit problems when they have come to study at Aberystwyth university, for example. They would, of course, be able to access public services completely through the medium of Welsh. It is a very small number of people, and I do not want to delay the Committee too much.

Mr Cameron: I will go and have a look at it, but it seems to me that there is a rule for a reason: we want students who come to be able to study, and also to access services throughout the UK, and that is where the English language qualification makes sense. As I say, if they are coming as tourists for holidays or whatever, obviously the language qualification isn't an issue.

Chair: I think you should have a further look at it.

Q32 Andrew Miller: Just developing this a little further and specifically looking at the science community, the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, which is the first ever all-party group, recently looked at this closely with a number of experts, including Home Office officials. Is the Prime Minister content with the current situation impacting on scientists?

Mr Cameron: Is that impacting on those coming to study science in the UK, or British science?

Andrew Miller: I am going one step beyond Adrian's question, so I am looking at the postgraduate studies onward and moving into work.

Mr Cameron: My view is that we have the right system. Further to what Mr Bailey asked, if you look at what is happening to STEM enrolments in universities from key markets, we have seen some increases, so STEM enrolments from China are up 7%; Malaysia is up; Hong Kong is up 20% between 2011-12 and 2012-13—

Q33 Mr Bailey: India?

Mr Cameron: I don't have the figures for India. There are some markets where insisting on English language qualifications and the end of the bogus colleges have affected numbers. I want people to come from India to study science here in the UK, and as many can come as they like, as long as they have—to repeat again—the English language qualification and the university place. And they can stay afterwards—all they have to do is to get a graduate job. But I would ask the Committee and all these learned Committees that have looked into this: do we want a system where we say, “You can come and study and do your degree, and then stay in a non-graduate job”? Does that make sense?

Q34 Andrew Miller: We have been there and done that. Can we now return to what is happening? It is a very complex system. As a consequence of that complex system, the Government have undertaken a pilot at Portsmouth university, which involved embedding a Home Office official into the university to help to manage what is a very complex process. I understand that that pilot has been evaluated and that there is an intention to roll it out. Could the Prime Minister tell us what that programme will entail? How many universities will be involved in the next phase? How many other workplaces will be involved?

Mr Cameron: I cannot give you those figures. All I know is that it sounds as if this particular scheme was successful. Making sure that our universities are working very closely with the Home Office over this issue makes good sense because you get a better quality of decision making, which is all to the good.

Q35 Andrew Miller: I understand it is intended to be a national roll-out, so I am surprised, Prime Minister, that you are not aware of it.

Mr Cameron: As I say, I am very happy to look at it. It is quite a specific case. This is at Portsmouth university.

Q36 Andrew Miller: Indeed. And the follow-up to that is that there are people, especially in postgraduate areas, and especially studying masters courses, who will, by definition, be required as part of their coursework to undertake work. I want to know whether that scheme will encompass that kind of student.

Mr Cameron: I think the same probably applies, in that it is possible for people to work as long as they are in graduate employment after they have finished their course. In terms of the figures, international entrants to full-time postgraduate courses increased last year and the numbers going into postgraduate research courses increased by 5% last year as well. Again, this idea that negative messages are being sent when we have such an open, successful university sector I just simply do not accept, which is why I am being so robust about it.

Q37 Andrew Miller: You and I agree that we need to strengthen our science base. This is a hugely important area and, unfortunately, we are all in the dark on the details. I think it would be helpful, Chairman, if the Prime Minister were to write to the Liaison Committee in some detail about this.

Chair: I am sure you would be ready to do so.

Mr Cameron: I am very happy to do that, but on the key detail of are more people coming internationally to study postgraduate in Britain, yes they are. Are more coming to do postgraduate research? Yes they are, rather in contrast to the impression that some Committees have been wanting to put around that somehow we have sent a negative impression about coming to Britain.

Why all this matters is that I profoundly believe that you can have immigration control and get the net migration numbers down at the same time as getting the best international students to come to Britain. The evidence shows that that is exactly what is happening, so we must not throw out the success in getting net migration numbers down by pretending it is injuring our higher education system, when it isn't.

Q38 Mr Cash: Prime Minister, the European charter of fundamental rights goes into every nook and cranny, but it also has profound implications for the Government's migration and counter-terrorism policies, and national security procedures relating to immigration control. All became clear in the *ZZ v. Home Secretary* case a short time ago. The position is that the UK Supreme Court very recently refused to allow the Government to appeal against this case because section 3 of the European Communities Act requires our UK Supreme Court to follow decisions of the European Court.

When Tony Blair was Prime Minister, he stated unequivocally in June 2007 in the House of Commons: "It is absolutely clear that we have an opt-out from...the charter" in the Lisbon treaty. A former Attorney-General, Lord Goldsmith, negotiated a protocol, but this has not been effective. The European Court ruled in the *Saeedi* case that the charter does apply to the United Kingdom. It is clear, in the light of the Supreme Court ruling in the *ZZ* case, that further appeals to the Supreme Court will be fruitless.

The European Scrutiny Committee recently recommended that the charter should be disappplied to the UK by amending the European Communities Act 1972. Therefore, the Government have a clear choice: accept the charter, as would be clear from the rulings of the European Court and

the obligations of the Supreme Court, both of which are contrary to the policies of not only the present Government, but the former Government, as understood by Parliament at that time; or, alternatively, amend the 1972 Act, which is really the only effective route of dealing with this problem. Now, which are the Government going to do? You have a choice: are you going to accept the charter or amend the 1972 Act?

Mr Cameron: Let me try and work my way through this one because it is a complicated area. You are absolutely right—it is not an opt-out. That is correct. It is not an opt-out, but it was clearly said at the time that the charter creates no new rights in national law. Because I was coming to see you, Bill, I brought with me my copy of the consolidated treaties.

Mr Cash: Only the consolidated ones?

Mr Cameron: It was the best I could do.

The court case is very frustrating because the treaty is very frank. The treaty says, in article 1, clause 2, on page 314:

“In particular, and for the avoidance of doubt, nothing in Title IV of the Charter creates justiciable rights applicable to Poland or the United Kingdom except in so far as Poland or the United Kingdom has provided for such rights in its national law.”

That is, for a European treaty, I would say, pretty clear. It is not saying an opt-out. We did not have an opt-out—Tony Blair got that wrong; we did not have an opt-out. It says here, “No new rights, except as provided in your own law.”

Q39 Mr Cash: But nobody believes that anymore.

Mr Cameron: Well, anyway, that is what it says, so it is not an opt-out. It should not create new rights in our law, except as we have legislated. The legal decision that you quote is frustrating, and we will look at an opportunity to challenge that.

Q40 Mr Cash: But that won't work.

Mr Cameron: Well, let's see.

Mr Cash: You have already been told. The Supreme Court will not allow—

Chair: I think the question has been asked; the Prime Minister can answer it.

Mr Cameron: We need an opportunity to challenge it, and we are looking for that. The problem with the specific suggestion you make is that if you amend the 1972 Act to say, “We are simply going to disapply from the UK this bit of EU law,” you will have other countries doing the same thing, perhaps with something to do with the single market, and we want countries to implement the single market. So, I think we have the right approach: be clear it is not an opt-out, be clear it should not create new rights and challenge it where possible; but not proceed with your recommendation, and let's see how we get on.

Chair: I think this argument will continue, but not necessarily today.

Q41 Dr Francis: Prime Minister, good afternoon. I want to ask you some questions about the withdrawal of citizenship and making people stateless. I am sure that you share with me a pride in the role of this country in opposing this development since the last war and in the role that this country, with others, played in rebuilding Europe in the '40s and '50s. I am conscious of the fact that the Government currently have the power to deprive a British citizen of their citizenship when they are dual citizens, but we are now moving into uncharted territory with your proposals on the Immigration Bill, under which you wish to extend that power to naturalised British citizens, who will, if it is exercised, be rendered stateless. We will be in strange territory. We would be having the same powers as a small group of countries, such as Zimbabwe, Burma, Russia and Serbia, which exercise such powers. Is the recent increase in the number of dual nationals who have been deprived of their citizenship explained by the use of the current power, which the Home Secretary has, in respect of people who have gone to Syria? If the Government get their new power in the Immigration Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, is every naturalised citizen who goes to Syria therefore threatened with the possibility that their British citizenship will be taken away and that they will, therefore, be rendered stateless?

Mr Cameron: First, the Immigration Bill has now completed its Commons and Lords stages, and I am delighted with that, because it was a year ago that I said we needed to tighten up our immigration system across a whole range of areas. Within a year, we have set out plans, consulted on them, taken them through Parliament and quite concretely toughened our immigration system.

In terms of the deprivation of citizenship, I think we need to take one step back and ask ourselves why we are doing this in the first place. To me, the first priority of a Prime Minister is to help to keep the country safe, particularly from terrorists, terrorism and people who threaten our country and our way of life. The fact is that, deeply regrettably, there are people in our country, who might be British citizens or dual nationals, who mean to visit on us extreme harm. If taking away their citizenship and excluding them from returning to our country can help to keep us safe, we should absolutely do that. That is why this power is important.

The Home Secretary listened during the passage of the Bill to concerns in the House of Lords, and she has said that this will be used only in circumstances when the Home Secretary reasonably believes that a person is able, under the law of another country, to become a national of that country. An independent review will take place after 12 months, and it will be laid in front of both Houses—that was agreed in the House of Lords. But the principle of being able to say, “You are conducting yourself in a way that is seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of this country; we are taking away your British citizenship; you are not welcome back in this country,” is absolutely vital as one of the many tools that we need.

In answer to your question of whether people travelling from the UK to Syria and being radicalised and potentially trained as terrorists who could come back and do harm here or in other countries in Europe is a problem, yes it is. Hundreds of our British citizens or dual nationals have travelled to Syria, or have attempted to travel to Syria, and we need to use everything in our power to stop them from going, to stop them being radicalised, to deal with them if they are, and to keep our country safe. This is a very serious problem.

Q42 Dr Francis: Do you consider that this country is unique then? Other countries that we measure ourselves against—for example, Commonwealth countries, the United States and western European countries—are not contemplating this. There is a danger that we could damage international relations. There is well-respected legal opinion; for example, Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill believes this. This is the background to my next question.

Mr Cameron: The answer to that—

Chair: I don't think he has asked it.

Mr Cameron: You are saying: can it damage us in terms of international relations? The first priority is to keep us safe. The clear advice I have is that this is one of the things we should do in order to keep our country safe.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: Dr Francis was just about to ask a very short question when you proceeded to answer before he had asked it.

Mr Cameron: Sorry.

Q43 Dr Francis: Thank you, Chair.

Prime Minister, what would the Government do if other states made their nationals stateless while they were in the UK? Would you seek to deport them back to the country on whose passport they entered this country?

Mr Cameron: I think you would have to treat each case on its individual merits. We have had this issue sometimes with the Bidoons in Kuwait. So it is not a new issue; it is something that we have had to deal with in the past.

Q44 Keith Vaz: Foreign national prisoners have dogged successive Governments. Ten thousand are in prison, costing £300 million. They are 13% of the prison population and 4,000 are in the community. We do not seem to be getting them out. Even though the Home Office had 6,000 travel documents to get them removed, they were not used. Do you think that one way of dealing with this is to find out people's nationality at the time of sentence so that, when they are before the courts, they produce their passport and we know which country they come from so that we can get them out as soon as possible?

Mr Cameron: I am willing to look at anything. This is one of my bugbears. We are grappling with this problem. We have made some progress: the number is lower than the one I inherited. Since 2010, 19,000 foreign national offenders have been removed, but it is really difficult to get this fixed and I find it immensely frustrating, because having all these people in our prisons when they should be elsewhere is an enormous waste of money.

I am very happy to look at the idea of finding out nationality at the point of sentence. I have assigned seven Ministers to the various countries to sort out prisoner transfer agreements with Nigeria, Vietnam and China. So that is one avenue that we are taking. We have got the European prisoner transfer agreement that has not kicked in with some of the key countries, such as Poland, and we need to get that fixed.

I have had National Security Council meetings on it; I have a team based in Downing street driving the progress on it. We are making progress. It is extremely hard work, but we will get there.

Chair: We must turn to Ukraine.

Q45 Sir Richard Ottaway: Prime Minister, foreign affairs and Ukraine: there seems to be quite a lot of evidence that the published results of the referendum in Crimea were actually bogus and that turnout was substantially less than officially claimed. How much support do you think that the Russians have actually got? What do you think that the Russians' motive is in Ukraine and the Crimea? Do they have a long-term plan, or is Mr Putin behaving impulsively?

Mr Cameron: It is a very difficult question. I think that they—Putin particularly—have a basic desire to see countries that were once part of the Soviet Union being in a sphere of Russian influence. If you talk to Putin, as I do, he believes profoundly in mother Russia. He believes that the break-up of the Soviet Union was a tragedy for his country. He feels that Ukraine includes cities that are absolutely vital to Russian identity. This is what you get when you talk to him and he feels very strongly about it.

Do they have a plan? I am not sure that it is a plan as in, “We are going to this in this country and then that in that country.” I think that they have reacted quite opportunistically to what has happened. In terms of Crimea and your question, our argument has been that you cannot unilaterally change the borders of a country; you have to have a proper process for dealing with that. That should be something that Ukraine itself has to have a process for.

But where does all this lead? I think that we need to be very clear, predictable and firm about our view that these countries are sovereign states and should have the ability to determine their own future.

Q46 Sir Richard Ottaway: So the consequence of this is that you believe that they should have their own future and, if they don't, you are going to apply sanctions. On 10 March, you said that the EU was considering a “far-reaching” set of consequences in “a broad range of economic areas”, yet, to be honest, the sanctions to date have been fairly limited. Equally, to be fair, the mere threat of sanctions has seen the markets do a lot of the work for us and the economic consequences for Russia must be quite profound.

Where are we going on sanctions? If the Russians do nothing further, will we just leave things where they are and acquiesce?

Mr Cameron: No. It is not easy agreeing things across 28 countries in the EU and trying to co-ordinate the EU and the US together, but I would argue that, by and large, that is what has happened. We said that there would be consequences if the Crimean referendum went ahead and there were. We said that there would be consequences if there was further destabilisation

of Ukraine and there have been further consequences. We said that there would be economic sanctions across a range of areas if, for instance, Russian troops were to invade southern or eastern Ukraine. We have strengthened that now by saying—most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council yesterday—that the way the Russians behave towards these elections will have an important determination as to whether there are further sanctions.

So, we have taken a range of steps. Yesterday, some further steps were agreed in terms of naming individuals and businesses and the like, and we stand ready to do more if Ukraine's territorial integrity is not respected. We have tried to be clear, predictable and tough. I think this has had an effect. I also agree with you about the economic impact on Russia. You have seen a downgrade of their economy. Instead of 2.5% growth, it is getting 0.2% growth this year. There has been a big flood of money out of international markets. Their bonds have been relegated to very low status. It is having an impact on them. We have to keep up this pressure, but offer a very clear, negotiated path to how these problems can be dealt with.

On your first question about what is Russian trying to do and what is Putin's motivation, I think there is a misunderstanding at the heart of this. The aim we should have is not to try and grab Ukraine like a piece on the chessboard and yank it towards Europe. Ukraine should be a bridge between Europe and Russia. Ukraine needs to have a proper relationship with Russia, as well as a good relationship with Europe. It is not a zero-sum game. I am not sure that the Russians have perhaps understood that that is the intention.

Q47 Sir Richard Ottaway: You say that you are prepared to do more if the situation deteriorates. Are we being held back by our European partners?

Mr Cameron: It makes sense if we can agree, across the 28, a common set of steps. So far, we have been able to. Whether it was cancelling EU-Russia summits, changing the G8 to the G7, or nominating individuals for travel bans and asset freezes, we have agreed that across the 28. Are there different views around the table in the EU? Yes, of course there are. Britain has tended to be fairly forceful in wanting to see clear, predictable and tough action. We have worked very closely with the major European countries, and also with Poland in particular, to try to deliver that. So far, I think we have delivered a pretty clear set of actions, in line with what the Americans have been doing as well. But you do get different views.

My reflection on the last month or so in dealing with this is that we have got to recognise that, if this continues, we have to prepare for a very different long-term relationship with Russia. I have tried to build a good relationship with Putin to enhance Anglo-Russian relations. I would like to see that happen, but if Russia continues to behave like this, that is not going to be possible. We need to make that clear to Russia, and I have done in conversations with Putin. We need to recognise that at the heart of this, Europe needs to think about its energy dependence on Russia. We in the United Kingdom are not dependent in any real regard on Russian energy, but some European countries are. Some receive 80% or 90% of their gas from Russia, so we need to make some long-term changes to our energy systems, both within the EU and within the G7, to demonstrate that this sort of behaviour cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely.

Q48 Sir Richard Ottaway: There are reports that DFID has given aid to Ukraine. Can you confirm that? If so, what is it for?

Mr Cameron: From memory, I think that DFID has been contributing to some of the capacity building that is needed in Ukraine. The main part of the programme is an IMF programme and there is some EU assistance, but I think DFID has got some technical advisers in financial management and things like that that are helpful, because the Ukraine Government is under enormous economic and financial pressure and it needs some help.

Q49 Chair: Prime Minister, you have had a number of conversations with President Putin, one as recently as 1 May. Do you think he has a firm understanding of what NATO would do if he were to behave towards other countries that have Russian-speaking minorities in the way that he has towards Ukraine?

Mr Cameron: Yes, I would say he probably does. The Baltic states are obviously—their politicians and leaders are very worried about what has happened. They have Russian minorities in their countries. They have experience, sometimes from some pretty aggressive Russian trade and other measures that have been taken against them. Their advice to us on the European Council has universally been: “Be tough, be predictable, be clear in your dealings with Russia.” But NATO is very clear. NATO has a collective security guarantee. All members of NATO have that guarantee. The Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians know that they have that cloak of security around them, and I think Russia knows that, too.

Q50 Chair: It was described by the Secretary-General of NATO recently as a “game changer” for NATO. Do you accept that it has very significant implications for how combat-ready NATO has to be, and will it mean that we need to send more UK forces or assets to Baltic states, some of which want to see some NATO basing in their countries?

Mr Cameron: I don’t know whether it’s a game changer. It is a changer for NATO, because it has reminded people, I think, of how important this defensive alliance is, that we provide guarantees of security to each other. I think it is a time for stepping up joint exercises, working together. As President Obama put it at the G7, it’s quite important that the Russians see that there are French soldiers partnering with Estonian soldiers, that there are British soldiers going on exercise with Polish soldiers and airmen, that we should be doing those things; these are important. We’ve got the NATO conference, the NATO summit, coming to Wales in September. We discussed it at the National Security Council today. I think it’s very important that NATO sends a clear and unambiguous message that it believes in collective security; it’s a defensive alliance; it reassures all its eastern members. But at the same time, we mustn’t give up on the other things that NATO is doing—getting right the draw-down in Afghanistan and also looking at the future of NATO, where we actually could be doing more to help countries that need assistance.

Q51 Chair: Neither the national security strategy nor the strategic defence review seemed to have envisaged the situation that we now see on Russia’s border with Ukraine. Do they need adjustment?

Mr Cameron: I think there are two things to say to that. One is that you can never, in your horizon scanning or security planning, predict where the next problem will come from. Ukraine, Georgia and other countries have been discussing partnership agreements with the EU for many, many years without these sorts of problems occurring. Does what has

happened fundamentally change the strategic defence review and what we're doing with Britain's armed forces? I wouldn't say that it does, because our programme has been about modernising our capabilities, making sure they're as good as they possibly could be, making sure our armed forces are well equipped. We're not talking about deploying armed forces to Ukraine or anything like that, so it's about making sure we can fulfil our NATO obligations and making sure we have the most modern equipment as we do so, and I think that's very much what we're doing.

Just to confirm what it is we're doing with our NATO allies, we've already, as you know, deployed four Typhoon aircraft to bolster the Baltic air policing mission over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We are going to be offering an additional two Typhoons to that deployment. We'll be extending, if it's required, our Sentinel aircraft deployment until the end of the year. We'll look at air-to-air refuelling support. UK personnel will participate in enhanced NATO exercises scheduled over the coming months in the Baltic states. And we're developing a range of packages to help to give planning, support and other advice to NATO allies. I think it's very important to give reassurance to our eastern members at this time and to step up to the plate and make sure Britain plays its part, and we will.

Chair: A final point about Crimea from Mr Cash.

Q52 Mr Cash: Prime Minister, the political chapters of the EU association agreement with Ukraine are already being provisionally applied, and the conclusions at the last Brussels summit, which you attended, agreed that those articles which must be extremely sensitive to Russia, regarding questions relating to common security and defence policy and common foreign and security policy, are to be signed by all 28 member states if satisfactory elections in Ukraine are held this month. In this context, do the Government continue to take the view that in that EU association agreement—with all those common foreign and security elements in it, military technology and what have you—the word “Ukraine” actually includes the word “Crimea” for this purpose, and will continue, as far as the Government are concerned, to do so indefinitely, whatever the consequences?

Mr Cameron: The short answer to that is yes. As far as we are concerned, we should respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine and that includes Crimea. We cannot change the nature of Ukraine unilaterally—on our own, or with others. That would be completely wrong. It is for the people and the Government of Ukraine to, if they want to, go through some process, but as far as we are concerned, Crimea is part of Ukraine. One of the things that the EU has done is put in place some sanctions for businesses operating in the Crimea in terms of their exports to the rest of the EU, because they should be treated, as it were, as businesses operating from an occupied territory.

Q53 Mr Cash: Has Mr Putin actually ever raised this matter with you or with anybody else that you are aware of?

Mr Cameron: Which matter specifically?

Mr Cash: The fact that Ukraine is regarded as including Crimea as far as the western Governments are concerned.

Mr Cameron: He absolutely knows. I think he understands the nature of our disagreement, which is that our view is that Ukraine's territorial integrity should be respected, that Crimea forms part of Ukraine, and that Crimea should not be taken from Ukraine in some sort of bogus referendum at the point of a Kalashnikov. The only way a country should have its borders changed is through a proper, democratic, legitimate, accountable process. We are having a referendum in Scotland. Scotland can choose to be independent or choose to stay with the United Kingdom. There was no such process like that with Crimea, so as far as we are concerned, it remains part of Ukraine and should be treated as such by international organisations.

There is then further huge disagreement between us and Russia. It views the Ukrainian authorities as illegitimate because it says it was a coup. Our view is that Yanukovich left his country after appalling acts of brutality on the people in the Maidan, in which over 70 were shot, and we should properly respect the legitimate authorities running Ukraine. This only highlights the importance of these elections. Once the elections have taken place, it will be much harder for Russia to say that somehow there is not a legitimate authority in Ukraine. So we should be putting a lot of effort into helping make sure these elections go ahead, making sure they are robust, which is why we have got so many OSCE observers and election observers in the country at the moment.

Chair: We move on to Syria.

Q54 Sir Richard Ottaway: While we have all been focusing on Ukraine, the spotlight has somewhat come off Syria. In the intervening period, the military advantage seems to have swung towards the regime. What does this mean for UK policy? Is it still our position that Assad should go before we can make any progress there?

Mr Cameron: Our view is very clear: Assad cannot be part of Syria's future. The bloodshed, the things that he has visited on to his own people, make it impossible to envisage a united, democratic, free Syria in which he plays a part. So our view remains that the right thing for the British Government to do is, with our allies and friends, support the legitimate Syrian opposition. We are not arming them, but we have given them non-lethal support. We should continue to work with them, keep delivering our humanitarian aid effort and we should do everything we can to persuade both the opposition and the Syrian Government into a diplomatic process, which is what Geneva I and Geneva II were all about. Tragically, they have not been successful, but we should not change our approach. I think that that is the right approach, it is just immensely frustrating that this bloodshed is going on for so long. As you say, I think Assad has had some tactical successes, but it is hard really to go further than that when you see the extent of the bloodshed in the country, the extent the division, the fact that he is not in control of most of it. I think it is hard to say more than that.

Q55 Sir Richard Ottaway: You reiterated that you do not intend to arm the rebels and that repeats the position that you had in the past. In the intervening period there is strong evidence that the regime has, contrary to agreement—retained undeclared stocks of chemical weapons. Iran is continuing to arm Hezbollah and the regime. As you just said, the Geneva II talks have collapsed. Is it not time to reassess whether, to quote the Foreign Secretary, the small amounts of non-lethal aid are an appropriate response to a worsening situation?

Mr Cameron: Obviously, we have had lots of debate in Parliament on this issue, and it is right to listen to those views. I think our current approach is the right one—of supporting the opposition, helping them, giving them that non-lethal equipment, and supporting diplomatic efforts. On the chemical weapons front, we should be working very closely with the office of chemical weapons. They have got rid of 90%, as I understand it, of their stocks, but they are behind on their deadlines, and we need to pursue them very vigorously. We should also be checking out whether the latest reports of chemical weapons usage are genuine, and if they are, we need to think of what further steps we can take, because it is completely unacceptable to use chemical weapons in the world we live in today.

We are not taking our eye off it. We should be absolutely on it with our partners. The Foreign Secretary has the key other 10 countries coming to London this Thursday to discuss this, but it is difficult and painful, because we are not making progress, but I do not think we should change our approach.

Q56 Sir Richard Ottaway: So we seem to be parting company with the United States on the issue. As you are well aware, it has been reported that they have now supplied anti-tank weapons to the rebels. Is that not a road we could go down? All the evidence suggests that even if they fall into the wrong hands, you can immobilise the weapons and stop them being used against us.

Mr Cameron: We work closely in partnership with the Americans. We see our role as mentoring, assisting, providing non-lethal assistance to the opposition, and helping to shape and form them in various ways, but I think the UK Parliament has been pretty clear that arming is a separate issue, and we should respect that and play our part.

Q57 Sir Richard Ottaway: But if it is confirmed that chlorine has been used, might not you go back to Parliament and say, “Look, this is getting very serious now. Can we have another go at working out our position on this?”

Mr Cameron: I think chemical weapons are a separate issue. We have a separate track on that. As I say, they have got rid of a lot of their chemical weapons. The reports about whether they are being used are extremely disturbing. We want those checked out, and then we should be working with our allies to determine what would be the appropriate action to take.

Q58 Sir Richard Ottaway: So you wouldn’t go back to the Opposition and say, “Can we sit down and agree something here?”

Mr Cameron: First, I think we have to get straight what has happened on the chemical weapons front. I have been very clear. Obviously, we were not able to take the steps that I was contemplating taking, but I was very clear that we needed clear evidence before taking any steps, and we should always deal with these things on the basis of evidence.

Q59 Sir Richard Ottaway: In that vote in August, nearly 80% of Parliament voted for intervention in one form or another; they just could not agree the terms of it. If the situation is getting to a state whereby chlorine is being used, contrary to international conventions, is it not time to revisit the issue?

Mr Cameron: Although, as you say, in Parliament there was a slightly confusing vote on two motions, the mood of Parliament was pretty clear: it did not want to take part in any military action in respect of chemical weapons use. So I think the right thing to do is to gather evidence of any use, be absolutely clear about what has happened, and then work out with our allies what the right response is, and if anything changes, to come back to Parliament and explain it.

Q60 Chair: I think Parliament would need to know more precisely than it did last August what the limits of potential action might be.

Mr Cameron: Well, we can go back over the history of it, but one of my reflections is that at the end of the day, the motion that the official Opposition refused to back was going to give Parliament a second vote before any action was taken. That is why, in the end, I read Parliament's view in the way that I expressed, because I think the Leader of the Opposition was absolutely clear that, even though I was prepared to put down a motion that took into account 99% of what he said, he could not feel able to back it.

Q61 Sir Malcolm Bruce: The humanitarian cost of the Syrian crisis is very high indeed; I think it has been described as the biggest single humanitarian call since the Rwandan genocide. The UK is currently committing £300 million a year. Indeed, to date, we have pledged, delivered or committed \$900 million. Do you expect spending at that level to continue for the foreseeable future, given the situation on the ground in Syria?

Mr Cameron: I think it is hard to put precise figures on it, but the sort of commitment that we have made, as one of the largest bilateral donors, I would assume will continue for the time being because the humanitarian situation is not getting any better; in many ways, it is getting worse. We have the capability to do that. I think the British public back that sort of humanitarian aid action, where you are saving lives, providing food and shelter, preventing people from dying of exposure or diseases. I think they back it, and so we should keep it up. We should use our leadership to leverage in money and resources from others, but, yes, I would expect us to continue.

Q62 Sir Malcolm Bruce: I am going to come to that. The level of the commitment is such that the World Food Programme says that a third of its entire budget is going there. If there was a food crisis anywhere else in the world, they would not be able to respond with the current resources.

Can I pick up that point? The UK is the second largest bilateral donor; second only to the United States. If you look at the list of other donors in Europe, it is fair to say that Germany has made a contribution, and proportionate to their capacity, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden have made substantial contributions, but France and Italy have not. Indeed, Italy has given slightly more than France. There was \$75 million from France and \$900 million from the UK. Given the scale of the crisis and the possibility that pressures might arise elsewhere in the world, is it not time we said very explicitly that France should step up to the plate? It is after all an area of the world where they have an historical sphere of influence?

Mr Cameron: I think we should; we have before and we will again. There is an opportunity at the G7 coming up in Brussels before the commemoration of the D-day landings. These figures speak for themselves. As you say, Britain has a very proud record. If you look at what Kuwait is giving or the United Arab Emirates, they are making significant contributions. The Germans have so far given about \$560 million. That is a big contrast to the French figure of \$75 million or the Italian figure at \$91 million. They are members of the G7. We always have a session at the G7 on aid and assistance. We will make sure we stress the importance of this urgent humanitarian aid, when Britain has given more than \$900 million and they are so far behind. That is a fair point to make, and I will certainly make it.

Q63 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Obviously, there is a recognition that we have responded and most people in the UK, from what we can tell, do support that. There is a concern, which I hope you understand, that it may detract from our spending and our commitments elsewhere. Before you comment on that, specifically in Jordan, there has been some discussion that Jordan's response has been fantastic, but the pressure on Jordan is huge. Do you think we should establish a bilateral programme of some form in Jordan—indeed, set up an office for DFID? I would repeat that the Jordan ambassador said that when people talk about who is the biggest donor to the crisis in Jordan, his prompt answer is that Jordan is. That is a perfectly fair answer, too.

Mr Cameron: We are continuing to expand the UK support to Jordan and Lebanon. We are helping refugees in those countries, and we are also doing what we can with stability programmes to help host communities deal with refugees over the longer term. Our programme is not simply refugee camps in neighbouring countries; it is some assistance to those countries as well. I discuss this regularly with Justine Greening, the Development Secretary, and I am happy to take this point up with her and ensure that we are doing everything that we can. I met the King probably two or three times in the past year and discussed this. If there are specific things that we could help with then obviously we would be happy to look at that. The stability of the neighbours is very important.

Q64 Sir Malcolm Bruce: That is the final point. My Committee will produce a report shortly following our visit. But relating to both Jordan and Lebanon, do you recognise that in both countries the majority of refugees are living in the community and putting pressure on their health and education services? Contrary to what we would normally do, given that we concentrate on poor rather than middle-income countries, a case is being made that we should have a development programme just to get them through this crisis—maybe not one for the long term but for the short term, until there is a settlement and the refugees go back. Is that something that is being considered?

Mr Cameron: I am very happy to look at that for two reasons. First of all, it is worth thinking of the figures. The population of Lebanon was 4 million. Because of this crisis, it has gone up to 5 million—it has gone up by a fifth. If you imagine, in Britain, that is the equivalent of 10 million or 12 million people coming to Britain. Imagine the effect on the country in terms of the scale of people suddenly turning up in schools and hospitals and staying with neighbours. We should really put on record that Jordan and Lebanon have done an amazing job in supporting Syrian refugees.

You make a very good point about whether we should do more for these countries. One of the issues, always, with the aid budget is that it is quite strictly policed to make sure we are

spending it on the poorest people in the poorest countries, and sometimes there are, quite rightly, rules to make sure we focus on that. Under this Government, we have tried to make sure our aid budget is part of our National Security Council, where we look at how we can help development through building security. Making sure we help those countries that have those sorts of needs and might not be low-income countries but are under severe pressure is something we should do. This is a rather long, woolly answer, but you can see where I am going. This is a legitimate use for aid, but, frankly, it will help if your Committee can look at this issue and make sure the NGOs—who, quite rightly, want to pressure us in spending the majority of the money in sub-Saharan Africa and the poorest countries in the world—understand the needs of the Lebanons and the Jordans and, indeed, I would argue, the Libyas: a country that could one day be really quite wealthy, but needs help with its security, capacity and Government. Some of these things are absolutely essential for development to take place. If you do not have the rule of law and if you do not have the Government capacity, you cannot get anything done. I think some helpful prods from your Select Committee might help.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: We have not written the report yet, so your evidence will be helpful.

Chair: With a final point relating to the Syrian situation, Mr Vaz.

Q65 Keith Vaz: Prime Minister, 400 British citizens have gone to Syria to fight as foreign fighters. We can take away their passports. They are clearly not asking their mums and dads whether they can go. We need to engage with them. We need to stop this radicalisation. In our last report, we felt that peer pressure and community pressure was the best way of doing it. What do you think the solution is to stop them going in the first place?

Mr Cameron: I think you've got to take action at every level. You are absolutely right that peer pressure can make a difference—we do fund programmes that try to help to steer people away from this radicalisation—and saying to mums and dads and friends that they can help by encouraging people not to go. I think that some people think, “Even if I go with a legitimate or semi-legitimate aid convoy, that is okay,” but some of those are effectively being run by people who then get radicalised. The best advice is to contribute to a legitimate charity, rather than to travel there yourself. We need mums and dads to help; we need schools to help; and we need communities to recognise the importance of this. The Government fund programmes that help with steering people away from radicalisation.

Then there is the harder end of things. We do need to make sure that our police and the security services are all over people thinking of travelling to Syria and are stopping them, taking away their passports, taking away their nationality if necessary, preventing them from going, perhaps preventing them from coming back if they have gone and making sure we do everything within our power to keep us safe. There is no doubt that, along with the federally administered tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Syria is now as big a problem—if not a bigger problem—in terms of counter-terrorism and in terms of the threat to our country. It is as simple as that. I have made sure, as Prime Minister, that I have got together security services and experts to look at everything we can do to try to reduce this problem. I know your Committee sometimes talks to those involved in this area, and this is their major concern.

Q66 Keith Vaz: I meant to say this earlier: if you meet your immigration target, I will send you a box of mangoes.

Mr Cameron: Hopefully, legal mangoes, which I know we are working together to—I've got a bit of paper about it here somewhere. Owen Paterson will meet—oh, no, he's met him already. He has met the Indian high commissioner already. But you know what is happening; we are trying to help.

Chair: I am impressed that you had mangoes in your brief, but it was not part of my planned questioning.

Thank you very much, Prime Minister. We look forward to seeing you just a little later in the year, and probably again later still, towards the end of the year. We will have a range of further subjects we will need to explore with you.

Mr Cameron: Thank you very much.