

UK-Albania Joint Communiqué:
Enhancing bilateral Cooperation in areas of common interest

1. The Prime Minister of the UK, Mr Rishi Sunak, and the Prime Minister of Albania, Mr Edi Rama, today agreed to enhance cooperation in three main areas of common interest: a) security issues and home affairs (with the main focus on the fight against organised crime and illegal immigration); b) economic growth and investment; c) innovation, youth and education.

2. This statement comes in the context of the commitment by both Prime Ministers to widening and deepening our already strong bilateral relationship. The UK and Albania have just celebrated the centenary of diplomatic relations and the vibrant Albanian diaspora in the UK makes a significant contribution to the culture, economy and society of both countries.

3. Security issues and home affairs:

- The UK and Albania are staunch allies in NATO and are currently cooperating closely in the UN Security Council to promote international peace and security, in particular by holding Russia to account for its brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine.
- Albania is a negotiating country for EU membership and a trusted partner in international organisations. Recognising the progress of Albania in strengthening democratic institutions, rule of law through the implementation of the deep and comprehensive judiciary reform, the UK recognises Albania as a safe country of origin under UK law.
- The UK and Albania are both parties to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT) and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto (Palermo Convention 2000). As members of the Council of Europe, we work together to improve human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout Europe.
- We are committed to strengthening further the implementation of our shared international commitments especially in the areas of border control, the fight against organised crime, including human trafficking and exploitation in all its forms, and illegal migration.
- In addition to the broader multilateral framework, the UK and Albania have a solid bilateral legal basis to address adequately illegal migration and human trafficking, which shall serve as the basis to address adequately and swiftly illegal migration and human trafficking. Please see Annex for the full list of existing agreements.

3.1 The UK and Albania will strengthen further our excellent operational collaboration on law enforcement, with the objective of deterring and disrupting illegal migration and penetrating criminal networks. With this objective, our two governments will form a Joint Task Force at the level of Ministry of Interior/Home Office.

3.2. In the framework of this Task Force:

- We will strengthen UK/Albania cooperation at the operational level, including but not limited to, effective data-sharing and more joint operational teams. This Joint Task Force may be supported by a committee of experts, selected by the Ministry of Interior/Home Office;
- Both parties commit to maintain regular dialogue on the next practical steps;
- The UK will provide additional support to the Government of Albania and organisations with regards to protection and reintegration services to support returnees.

3.3. The UK and Albania, as signatories of ECAT and ECHR and in recognition of a common effort to tackle illegal migration and human trafficking, in line with and in order to maximise implementation of the UK-Albanian readmissions agreement, will increase returns to Albania including those over the age of 18, who, have been identified by UK competent authorities as victims of modern slavery (as defined in the UK legislation) and as victims of human trafficking (as defined in the Albanian legislation). In the spirit of ECHR, such returns shall be done with due regard for the rights, safety and dignity of that person and for the status of any legal proceedings related to the fact that the person is a victim and shall preferably be voluntary. With regards to the return of illegal migrants, both sides stress the importance of speedy and effective implementation of the bilateral re-admission agreement between the two countries. On return to Albania, any support needs arising for that individual and protection from re-trafficking, will be available as set out in ECAT.

3.4. Expressing the will of the two Prime Ministers to fulfill obligations arising from both international and bilateral law, with the aim to reduce illegal migration and fight human trafficking, both parties commit to more effectively share information in a secure manner, including personal information, for the purposes of being able to accurately identify a returnee and take decisions about that individual for the purpose of ensuring compliance with international law, and for the purpose of monitoring performance, including compliance with relevant international legal obligations.

3.5. In order that both Albania and UK continue to meet their international and bilateral obligations, the UK commits to:

- support the relevant Albanian structures to bolster mechanisms used to refer victims for appropriate support and increase the existing Albanian Responsible Authority and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) capacity to reinforce processes and decision-making in line with ECAT.
- provide investment in additional protection services, taking into consideration the specific gender aspects of those migrating illegally to United Kingdom.
- provide support to Albania on investigating trafficking in accordance with the obligation under Article 4 ECHR.
- provide support for bolstering cyber and communications security to reinforce Albanian GDPR compliance;

3.6. The Albanian Government, in return assures that it will continue to implement effectively the joint commitments in the framework of ECAT and ECHR with regard to the treatment of the returnees, the prevention and future identification of trafficking of victims, and taking into consideration the gender specifics of the returnees.

3.7. The two governments will keep the impact of these measures and their implementation under close review and will first report on the implementation of the above through a Joint Oversight Committee, at the level of Ministries of Interior/Home Office by the end of January 2023.

3.8. To further enhance monitoring and oversight, the two governments agree to engage with the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) in order to provide independent reporting on the implementation of the measures.

4. Economic growth and prosperity

- We will continue to build on our Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement, signed in February 2021, to promote bilateral trade and investment. United Kingdom will continue to support the Government of Albania with the aim of promoting socio-economic development and creating skills and good jobs for the young people.
- The government of the UK reaffirmed its interest for direct investment in Albania in strategic sectors, such as: energy, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture and agro-industry, transport and logistics, IT services, etc.
- Both governments expressed enhanced interest in deepening cooperation in the field of tourism (through the exchange of information on this field, best practices in the development of tourism products, in promoting tourist destinations in both countries, etc) and environment, with particular focus on renewables and smart transport.
- Both governments underlined the common interest in developing projects which have a regional impact, in areas of transport infrastructure and energy.

5. Youth, culture, education.

- The UK will assist the Albanian government to build skills for the future through the British Council and the Albanian Education Ministry. Through the British Chevening scholarships and Cyber Security Fellowships for Albania (and the wider Western Balkans), the United Kingdom will continue to provide opportunities for students to pursue postgraduate studies in the UK.
- 21st Century Schools is an ambitious education programme implemented by the British Council and funded by the UK Government aiming at developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- The Albanian government expressed its appreciation for the support given as well as pledges made by the British Government to Albanian civil society organizations with a view to create opportunities for young people to stay in Albania.

Relevant Bilateral Agreements and Official Exchange

Our enhanced cooperation is underpinned by the following bilateral agreements:

1. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland represented by the Home Office and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania represented by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Albania on the Exchange of Information for Migration-related Purposes, signed in Tirana 16 May 2022.
2. Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Albania on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons, signed in London, 26 July 2021;
3. Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania on the Readmission of Persons, signed Tirana, 8 July 2021;
4. Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Albania, signed in Tirana, 5 February 2021;
5. Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Albania Supplementing the European Convention on Extradition 1957, signed in Tirana 5 April 2017;
6. Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Albania and Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Albania of the one part and the Home Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland of the other part for the exchange of criminal record information. (6 July 2018);
7. Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Albania Supplementing the European Convention on Extradition 1957, signed in Tirana 5 April 2017;
8. Memorandum of Understanding Between The Secretary of State for the Home Department Acting through the Home Office And The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Albania on intensifying cooperation in the fight against trafficking in human beings and on the enhanced identification, notification, referral and voluntary assisted return of victims/potential victims of trafficking in human beings, signed in London, 4 December 2014;

Signed:

For the Government of Albania

Edi Rama, Prime Minister

For the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Rishi Sunak, Prime Minister

ENDS