

External Affairs Matters:

Monitoring Report

September 2026



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September 2026

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This monitoring report is intended to provide Members of the Senedd and interested stakeholders with an update on key policy developments related to external affairs and trade.

The report covers the period from 7 May 2026 to 18 September 2026.





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1. International

International relations

This section provides updates on international relations activity across the Welsh Government and the Senedd.

- The First Minister, Rhun ap Iorwerth MS, **announced his ministerial team** in May. On international relations, the following responsibilities were confirmed:
 - **First Minister** (*Rhun ap Iorwerth MS*): Promoting and representing Wales at home and overseas, and international relations including overseas network and EU relations.
 - **Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Minister for Social Justice and Equality** (*Sioned Williams MS*): Wales and Africa.
 - **Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity and Energy** (*Adam Price MS*): International trade policy and promotion, including coordination of matters relating to the UK/EU Trade, freeports, and borders policy.
- Since taking office, the First Minister has made a series of international relations **announcements and comments on social media channels**, including that “this will be the most outward-looking government Wales has ever had”.
- The Welsh Government has yet to set out plans for its international priorities. In June, it stated in a **response to a written question** that it “will be setting out its vision for international relations with a new International Strategy”.
- In June, the First Minister **commented on the USA-Iran conflict**, saying he hoped the agreement between the two countries “provides a foundation for lasting peace” and that the “safe reopening of the strait of Hormuz eases some of the economic pressure being felt in Wales”.
- In July, the First Minister **put out a statement** through social media channels on the Gaza-Israel conflict, noting that 1000 days had passed from what he described as “the horrific actions of Hamas on 7 October

2023, and the genocidal actions of the Israeli Government in Gaza”. The Welsh Government has not formally set out its position on the conflict since it took office in May, but in a response to **a written question** said it “remains steadfast in our calls for a peaceful and lasting two-state solution”. A **statement of opinion** was also tabled by Gwyn Williams MS.

- In September, the First Minister signed ‘The Cardiff Agreement’ **with the First Minister of Scotland**, John Swinney MSP. The agreement identifies areas of cooperation, including international activity.
- In September, Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity, and Energy, Adam Price MS, announced a consultation on **an ethical framework** governing Welsh Government engagement with the defence sector will be published in the autumn.

International development

This section provides updates on international development activity across the Welsh Government and the Senedd.

- In June, the **Senedd debated** international spending. The debate covered international relations and international development funding. These topics have been raised through written questions, including specifically on **the Wales and Africa programme**. The Welsh Government responded that “funding allocations to the workstream and the future policy direction of this Government will be considered moving forward”.
- In July, the Welsh Government **announced a £50k donation** to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Venezuela Earthquake Appeal, following the earthquakes that occurred in the country in June.
- In July, the **Senedd debated** the Nation of Sanctuary programme. MSs also tabled written questions on the topic. In response to one written question, the **Welsh Government stated** it is “committed to protecting the Nation of Sanctuary vision and ensuring the principles underpinning this vision are embedded across government policy and practice”.

Ministerial visits

The table below provides an overview of incoming and outgoing international visits undertaken by the Welsh Government.

Minister/Visitor	Location	Date
UK Ambassador- Designate to Japan	Wales	June 2026
First Minister	Ireland	June 2026

Developments from across the UK

This section highlights developments from the UK, Scottish and NI governments and parliaments in relation to international relations and development. This includes updates on committee inquiries.

UK

- In July, Ed Miliband MP **was announced as Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs**, following Andy Burnham's appointment as Prime Minister and the subsequent cabinet reshuffle.
- On a visit to Egypt in August, the Middle East Minister, Stephen Doughty MP, **renewed calls** for more humanitarian aid to reach Gaza.
- A group of foreign ministers, including the UK, published **a joint statement** in September on the two-state solution. It confirmed "their intention to introduce national and/or support European restrictions on trade in goods with settlements which are illegal under international law". The UK Government announced it will be **putting these sanctions** in place.
- The following table provides updates on UK Parliament inquiries relating to international relations:

Committee	Inquiry title	Update
House of Commons International Development Committee	<u>UK's development partnership with Nigeria</u>	Report published in July.
House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee	<u>UK's engagement with the multilateral system</u>	Inquiry launched in June.
Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy	<u>The National Security Strategy</u>	The Chair wrote to the UK Government calling for more information on unaddressed report recommendations.
Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy	<u>UK's approach to deterring Russian aggression</u>	Inquiry launched in June.

Scotland

- Following the Scottish Parliament elections in May, the **new Scottish Government cabinet** was announced. The list below outlines ministerial responsibilities as they relate to international relations and trade.
 - **First Minister** (*John Swinney MSP*): Representing Scotland internationally;
 - **Deputy First Minister** (*Jenny Gilruth MSP*): British Irish Council;
 - **Minister for Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy** (*Stephen Gethins MSP*): External affairs, Europe and European Union including alignment, and Scotland's international network and Scottish connections;
 - **Minister for Business and Fair Work** (*Tom Arthur MSP*): Trade policy and strategy; and
 - **Minister for Equalities and International Development** (*Simita Kumar MSP*): Refugees, asylum seekers and displaced

peoples, and international development, strategy and implementation.

Northern Ireland

- The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission **launched its** Interparliamentary and International Strategy 2026–2030, which is a framework for “strengthening engagement with other legislatures”.

2. Europe

EU updates

This section outlines developments in relevant EU legislation.

- In the **State of the Union address**, the EU Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, announced proposals to consider making Canada the EU's first 'associate member'. There is currently no such status and creating it would require changes to EU treaties and the support of all member states. A European Security Council was also proposed, with the Commission President, stating that a "leaders' format" has long been discussed and could include "partners like Canada, Norway, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and others".
- In July 2025, the EU Commission presented **its proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF). This is the EU's long-term budget which will set out the budget and rules for EU funding programmes to which the UK Government has said it wishes to align. A explainer document published by the Council of the European Union said an **agreement on the MFF** "is considered necessary" by the end of 2026. This would allow for the adoption of legislative acts in 2027 and ensure EU funding "reaches beneficiaries without interruption from January 2028".
- The European Parliament and Council have already begun work to scrutinise the legislative texts that will need to be operated to implement the MFF. The table below highlights progress on the regulations likely to be of most interest to Wales and the UK:

Legislative proposal	EU Parliament	Council of the EU	Next steps
Erasmus+ programme 2028-2034	<u>Awaiting committee decision</u> (<i>Culture and Education</i>)	<u>Council agrees partial position</u>	05/10/2026: Indicative plenary sitting date, 1st reading
'AgoraEU' 2028-2034	<u>Awaiting committee decision</u> (<i>Culture and Education/Civil liberties, justice and home affairs</i>)	<u>Council agrees partial position</u>	No indicative plenary sitting date available
Horizon Europe, 2028-2034	<u>Awaiting committee decision</u> (<i>Industry, research and energy</i>)	<u>Council agrees partial position</u>	19/10/2026 Indicative plenary sitting date, 1st reading
European Competitiveness Fund	<u>Awaiting committee decision</u> (<i>Industry, research and energy</i>)	<u>Council agrees partial position</u>	23/11/2026 Indicative plenary sitting date, 1st reading

UK-EU relations

This section outlines developments in UK-EU negotiations.

- In June, former Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, **gave a speech** on the 10th anniversary of the Brexit referendum. It focused on the importance of the UK-EU relationship to issues such as security and trade.
- In June, the UK Government **published statistics** on UK participation in EU programmes. The report covers Horizon 2020 (2014-20) and the first 4 years of Horizon Europe (2021-24).

- In July, the UK and the EU signed the **UK-EU Treaty on Gibraltar**. The treaty establishes a “fluid border between Gibraltar and Spain, and a tailored customs model” but does not “affect sovereignty in any way”. The treaty went into effect provisionally on 15 July but has yet to receive formal ratification.
- Following the resignation of Prime Minister, Keir Starmer MP, the planned UK-EU Summit in July **was postponed**. European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen **spoke with new Prime Minister**, Andy Burnham MP, where it was “agreed their teams should work closely towards a UK-EU Summit later in the year”.
- Hamish Falconer MP **was appointed** Minister for Intergovernmental Relations and European Relations, following Andy Burnham’s appointment and the subsequent cabinet reshuffle. In September, he **met with EU trade commissioner** Maroš Šefčovič.
- Since taking office in July, it **has been reported** that Andy Burnham wants to reach a “new Brexit deal”. However, reports also state that plans for any new Brexit deal will not likely be a topic for the upcoming summit, with EU sources saying “the feeling is that’s one for another day — maybe the 2027 summit”.
- In September, Prime Minister, Andy Burnham MP, **hosted French President Emmanuel Macron**. During the meeting, the Prime Minister pushed for “greater cooperation with Europe to support British businesses”.
- Prime Minister, Andy Burnham MP, spoke to President Christodoulides of Cyprus in September. They **discussed UK-EU relations** during Cyprus’s presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the “UK’s intention to continue to get closer to the EU”.

Wales-EU relations

This section provides updates on Wales-EU relations.

- In June, **an opinion piece** on 10th anniversary of the Brexit referendum by the First Minister, Rhun ap Iorwerth MS, was published on Wales Online. He described it as the “greatest act of economic self-sabotage in modern history”.

- The First Minister **addressed EU ambassadors** to the UK in June, saying the Welsh Government is “determined to take meaningful action to strengthen cultural and economic ties with our European neighbours”. In September, Jukka Salovaara **assumed his duties** as Ambassador of the EU to the UK, replacing Pedro Serrano.
- In June, the Senedd published **a statement of opinion**, tabled by Joshua Kim MS, on the ‘10th Anniversary of Wales Voting to Leave the EU’.

Wales-Ireland relations

This section provides updates on events and policy relating to Wales-Ireland relations.

- The First Minister, Rhun ap Iorwerth MS, **made his first overseas visit to Ireland** in June to attend the **6th Ireland-Wales Ministerial Forum**. At the forum, both governments agreed to advance cooperation across clean energy, education, trade and collaborative working around sports diplomacy. Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to the **Ireland-Wales Shared Statement 2030**.
- In July, the British-Irish Council held its **45th Summit meeting** hosted by Guernsey’s Chief Minister, Deputy Lindsay de Saumarez. The theme of the Summit was ‘Nurturing Beginnings: Strengthening Early Years and Family Support for Happy, Healthy Childhoods and Lifelong Wellbeing’.

Developments from across the UK

This section highlights developments from the UK, Scottish and NI Governments and parliaments in relation to Europe and the European Union. This includes updates on committee inquiries.

UK

- The following table provides updates on UK Parliament inquiries relating to Europe and the European Union:

Committee	Inquiry title	Update
House of Commons Business and Trade Committee	<u>UK-EU relations a decade on</u>	Report published in June (<u>update on a report published in 2025</u>).
House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee	<u>Cultural touring in the EU</u>	Report published in June
House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee	<u>The UK-EU reset: rebuilding a strategic partnership in uncertain times</u>	The Committee comments on UK Government response
House of Lords European Affairs Committee	<u>Dynamic alignment</u>	Inquiry resumes taking evidence in September.

Scotland

- In June, the Scottish Government **issued a statement** on the 10th anniversary of the UK's Brexit referendum, saying "Scotland's future is in the European Union as an independent country".
- In June, the External Affairs Minister, Stephen Gethins MSP, **wrote to the Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade**, Helen McEntee MLA, on the start of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

3. Trade

Welsh trade

This section highlights updates on Welsh Government trade policy and activity.

- The **Welsh Government** responded to **the latest figures** on foreign direct investment (FDI) in June. Figures for 2025-26 show Wales attracted 75 foreign investment projects and created over 1,500 jobs. Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity and Energy, Adam Price MS, said it's "encouraging to see Wales bucking the trend as the only part of the UK to see an increase in inward investment projects". According to the **latest figures** "between 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026, the number of FDI projects which landed in the UK decreased by 25.8%". The number of projects in Wales increased **from 65** to 75 in the same time period.
- The Welsh Government supports businesses to attend overseas export events throughout the year. A full list of **upcoming events** is available. Taking place in October is the MRO Europe in Amsterdam, which is focused on aviation, and ADIPEC in Abu Dhabi, which is focused on energy and renewables.

UK trade policy and negotiations

The table below shows the status of ongoing UK trade negotiations:

Country	Update	Welsh Government Response
Türkiye	Fifth negotiation round: 15 - 23 June 2026.	No Welsh Government statement
Greenland	Trade talks resumed: October 2025	No Welsh Government statement

Israel	Trade talks suspended: May 2025	<u>Previous Welsh Government statement</u> (July 2022)
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Developments from across the UK

This section highlights developments from the UK, Scottish and NI governments and parliaments in relation to trade. This includes updates on committee inquiries.

UK

- The UK Government **concluded trade talks** with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with the summary of the trade deal published in June. The Welsh Government **issued a response**, saying “goods trade between the GCC member countries and Wales was valued at £1.9bn in 2025”.
- In June, the UK Government **commented on the** Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership’s (CPTPP) decision to begin preparatory talks on accession with the Philippines. It said the “UK has been a consistent supporter of the Philippines’ application to join CPTPP”.
- The UK Government published the UK-Japan **Frontier Technology Partnership** and **Joint Declaration on Economic Security Cooperation** in June. The latter outlines closer alignment in areas such as trade and investment, supply chains, and the rules-based international trading system.
- The UK Government **agreed a free trade deal** (FTA) with Switzerland in July, alongside a separate agreement on the use of Swiss e-gates. The FTA is services focused but does contain some provisions for trade in goods, including a 0% rate within Switzerland’s World Trade Organization quota for sheepmeat. No Welsh Government statement was issued but the Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity and Energy **wrote to the** Constitution, Justice and External Affairs Committee.

- From 1 July, the UK Government's **new steel measures** came into effect. It limits tariff-free steel imports and reduces overall quota volumes by 51% when compared with the previous steel safeguard measure. Any imports above these levels will face a 50% tariff.
- The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office launched the **Global Network Programme** in August. The programme aims to provide UK businesses with access to "British diplomatic expertise to support international trade opportunities".
- The following table provides updates on UK Parliament inquiries relating to international trade:

Committee	Inquiry title	Update
Welsh Affairs Committee	Promoting Wales for Inward Investment	Report published in May
Transport Committee	National Policy Statement for Ports	Committee responds to UK Government response
Business and Trade Committee	The UK-US economic relationship: 250 years on	Report published in July
Welsh Affairs Committee	Wales' role in defending the UK	Inquiry launched in July

Scotland

- In June, the Scottish Government **commented on statistics** from EY Scotland on FDI. The report said "UK FDI flows into Scotland weakened in 2025, with its project numbers falling by 20%". However, Scotland was "the most attractive UK region or devolved administration for FDI outside London".
- The Scottish Government **published its** USA Export Plan in June. This forms part of its six-point export plan, announced in its **programme of government** in May.
- In July, First Minister, John Swinney MSP, **welcomed the lifting** of USA tariffs on Scotch whisky and the creation of a 'zero-for-zero' tariff

regime. The exemption was announced by President Trump following the King's USA State Visit in April. It removes tariffs on both imports and exports of whiskey between the UK and the USA.

- The Scottish Government **published its** Scotland-India Strategic Market Insight report in July. The report said the trading partnership could be worth more than £3bn a year by 2030. The report considers the UK-India Comprehensive Economic and Trade agreement (CETA). The Welsh Government **published its analysis** on CETA in February 2026.
- The Scottish Government published a **trade in services report** in August. The report stated “nominal value of total service exports stood at approximately £16bn in 2023”.

Northern Ireland

- The Northern Ireland (NI) Executive **highlighted the publication of two pieces of independent research** in July, looking into the impact of recent changes in USA trade policy on Northern Ireland. It notes that “while Northern Ireland's unique dual-market access under the Windsor Framework may provide some resilience and opportunities arising from shifts in global trade patterns, these benefits are unlikely to outweigh the wider economic costs of increased trade barriers”.
- The NI Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald **criticised** the UK Government's **steel trade measures**, saying they “do not serve the interests of businesses in Northern Ireland”.