

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE PUBLIC INTEREST MERGER REFERENCE (COBHAM ULTRA ACQUISITIONS LTD. AND ULTRA ELECTRONICS HOLDINGS PLC) (PRE-EMPTIVE ACTION) ORDER 2021

2021 No. 944

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and is laid before Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.
- 1.2 This memorandum contains information for the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

2. Purpose of the instrument

- 2.1 On 18th August 2021 the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy intervened in the merger of Cobham Ultra Acquisitions Limited (“Cobham”) and Ultra Electronics Holdings plc (“Ultra”) on the grounds of national security under section 42 of the Enterprise Act 2002. This Order is made to prevent actions by the parties to the merger that might impede the Secretary of State’s ability to protect national security. The Order prevents any disclosure or transfer of information relating to goods or services supplied by Ultra to the UK Government or the armed forces, or to other persons that are used in goods and services provided to the UK Government or armed forces, pending the outcome of the public interest intervention. For national security reasons, it would not be appropriate to provide any further detailed information regarding the grounds for the intervention, nor the specific actions which are prevented by the making of this Order.

3. Matters of special interest to Parliament

Matters of special interest to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

- 3.1 The Order was made at 10:35 and came into force at 16:30 on 18th August 2021 and, therefore, came into force before it was laid and breached the convention that statutory instruments should not come into force until a minimum of 21 calendar days after laying. This was necessary in order to protect national security by preventing the parties to the merger from undertaking any actions that might prejudice a reference of the matter to the Competition and Markets Authority (“CMA”) under the Enterprise Act 2002 or impede any action which may be justified by the Secretary of State’s decision on such a reference.
- 3.2 It was not possible to avoid this course of action. A delay between the publication of the public interest intervention notice given by the Secretary of State and the coming into force of the Order might have undermined the purpose and effectiveness of the Order and allowed action by the parties which the Order is designed to prevent.
- 3.3 Notification was sent to the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker on 18th August 2021 drawing attention to the fact that the Order had come into operation before copies of it were laid before Parliament and explaining why this was

the case.

4. Extent and Territorial Application

- 4.1 The territorial extent of this instrument is the entirety of the United Kingdom.
- 4.2 The territorial application of this instrument is the entirety of the United Kingdom.

5. European Convention on Human Rights

- 5.1 As the instrument is subject to negative resolution procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

6. Legislative Context

- 6.1 The Secretary of State has the power under section 42 of the Enterprise Act 2002 to issue a notice intervening in certain merger transactions where (amongst other things) he believes that it is or may be the case that a specified public interest consideration is relevant to a consideration of the merger. National security is a specified public interest consideration. Following the issue of an intervention notice, the CMA must report to the Secretary of State, who is then required to decide whether to refer the transaction to a more detailed phase 2 assessment by the CMA. The report will include the CMA's assessment of whether a "relevant merger situation" has been created, or would be created by the proposed transactions, its assessment of the competition issues relevant to the decision and a summary of the representations it has received on the national security considerations arising. Government Departments and agencies will support the CMA. Taken together this information will enable the Secretary of State to make a decision on whether, if the grounds are made out, to refer the case for a more detailed Phase 2 investigation by the CMA, or in lieu of such a reference, to accept any undertakings the parties may decide to offer to mitigate national security risks.
- 6.2 Under paragraph 2 of Schedule 7 to the Enterprise Act 2002, the Secretary of State also has the power, where an intervention notice is in force, to make an order prohibiting or restricting the doing of things which the Secretary of State considers would constitute "pre-emptive action" and imposing obligations regarding the carrying on of activities or the safeguarding of assets. Pre-emptive action is defined in paragraph 2(12) of Schedule 7 as "action which might prejudice the reference or possible reference concerned under section 45 ... or impede the taking of any action ... which may be justified by the Secretary of State's decisions on the reference".
- 6.3 Such an order may apply to: conduct in the United Kingdom, but also to conduct outside the United Kingdom if the person concerned is a United Kingdom national; a body incorporated under the law of the United Kingdom or of any part of the United Kingdom; or a person carrying on business in the United Kingdom (section 86 of the Enterprise Act 2002).
- 6.4 A person to whom a such an order applies may seek a derogation from its terms; if the Secretary of State consents, the person may take action which would otherwise constitute a contravention of the order (paragraph 2(2C) of Schedule 7 to the Enterprise Act 2002).

7. Policy background

What is being done and why?

- 7.1 Under the Enterprise Act 2002, the Secretary of State has the power to intervene in certain mergers on public interest grounds covering national security, media plurality and financial stability. The Secretary of State determines whether to intervene in any individual case on a case-by-case basis following consultation with the relevant Government departments and agencies.
- 7.2 The Government has been monitoring the proposed merger between Ultra and Cobham. Following a consideration of all the evidence provided to him, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy initiated a public interest intervention on 18th August 2021.
- 7.3 In accordance with the public interest intervention notice issued by the Secretary of State, the CMA is required to report to the Secretary of State on the merger by 18th January 2022 after which the Secretary of State will make a decision whether to clear the merger, including by accepting undertakings from the merger parties designed to mitigate public interest concerns, or refer the merger to a more in-depth review by the CMA. This Order is required to prevent actions by the parties to the merger between Ultra and Cobham that might prejudice a reference of the matter to the CMA under the Enterprise Act 2002 or impede any action which may be justified by the Secretary of State's decision on such a reference.

8. European Union Withdrawal and Future Relationship

- 8.1 This instrument does not relate to withdrawal from the European Union / trigger the statement requirements under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act

9. Consolidation

- 9.1 This is the first order dealing with this issue and so the need for consolidation does not arise.

10. Consultation outcome

- 10.1 The Order has not been subject to any consultation. The purpose of this Order is to prevent actions by the parties to the merger between Ultra and Cobham that might impede the Secretary of State's ability to take steps to protect national security. As such, it was not appropriate to contact any of the parties or make others aware of the intention to lay this Order before it was brought into force.

11. Guidance

- 11.1 The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy contacted Ultra and Cobham immediately after the Order came into force to make them aware of this instrument and their obligations under it.

12. Impact

- 12.1 The impact on business, charities or voluntary bodies is limited to those parties to the merger between Ultra and Cobham, and their affiliates, and any third person that is a party to an existing or potential joint agreement involving the merger parties.
- 12.2 There is no, or no significant, impact on the public sector.

12.3 An Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this Order because it only affects a single merger and transactions related to or contingent upon it, whilst a public interest intervention under the Enterprise Act 2002 is in progress. These interventions are time limited.

13. Regulating small business

13.1 The Order does not apply to activities that are undertaken by small businesses.

14. Monitoring & review

14.1 The Order will only remain in force as long as the public interest intervention, which is time limited, is in progress.

14.2 At any stage, the parties may request a derogation from the Order. If this derogation request is refused by the Secretary of State, the parties have a right to appeal the decision to the Competition Appeal Tribunal.

14.3 The Order does not include a statutory review clause.

15. Contact

15.1 Owen France at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy email: owen.france@beis.gov.uk can be contacted with any queries regarding the instrument.

15.2 Chris Blairs, Deputy Director at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy can confirm that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

15.3 The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy can confirm that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.