

Foreign Secretary's speech in Sarajevo: 26 May 2022

Minister Podzic, Major General Masovic, ladies and gentlemen. A quarter of a century ago conflict devastated this country. Now Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought war and bloodshed back to our continent. Putin is not just waging the war on the Ukrainian people but the very foundations of our societies: freedom, sovereignty and the rule of law. This aggression must not succeed.

We must learn the lessons of history and the consequences of inaction. The West took too long to act in the 1990s. We were not bold enough to prevent terrible events such as the genocide at Srebrenica. This hesitancy only prolonged the fighting. Sarajevo suffered under siege for 1,425 days. We should have acted sooner. We said never again would we allow such suffering in Europe – Let's show that we meant it. Russia's aggression cannot be appeased. It must be met with strength.

And we cannot allow a prolonged and increasingly painful conflict to develop in Ukraine. That means backing Ukraine in their brave defence of their country. We must be relentless in delivering military aid and sanctions. Ukraine must prevail. We can't take our foot off the accelerator now. We stood side-by-side with Bosnia and Herzegovina at the UN condemning the invasion. I urge Bosnia and Herzegovina to join us in imposing sanctions on Russia – cutting off funding for Putin's war machine. We must guard against backsliding. Nobody should be pushing Ukraine to negotiate under duress. We must support Ukraine to drive Russia out of Ukraine.

And we must also counter Russia's malign influence here in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia is already seeking to undermine reforms that are taking place in this country, and undermine your Euro-Atlantic ambitions. They are fuelling secessionists, threatening Bosnia and Herzegovina's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. This cannot be tolerated. We will do everything we can to drive out this malign influence and protect peace, prosperity and stability in the region. That is why the UK is increasing our support in three ways.

Firstly, we are working to protect the hard-won Dayton Peace Agreement. That's why we have sanctioned two politicians for their unacceptable nationalist rhetoric and denial of the genocide. We will support Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and we will back High Rep. Christian Schmidt.

Secondly, we are investing to boost your economic security. We are extending our offer of honest and reliable infrastructure investment, through British International Investment, to the Western Balkans. We aim to mobilise \$100m of UK-backed investment by 2025, and we are also putting in £2bn worth of UK export financing for this country. This will help ensure the resilience and capabilities to counter the threat of malign influences. Russian

interference. It will also help your country boost your energy independence – a strategic asset.

Thirdly, we are boosting your ability to counter security threats and malign influences. Our commitment to this country is enduring. In the 1990s British soldiers were here in the darkest days of the conflict. We were here to maintain the fragile peace that followed, and to help build the country's single, unified Armed Forces that we see here today. 59 British soldiers gave their lives in that effort. We will never forget their sacrifice. Our defence relationship continues to grow today. We are training your talented young cadets in world-class British military academies, like Sandhurst. Some of them are here this afternoon.

History tells us we must meet aggression with action and with strength. Our support for Bosnia and Herzegovina – like our support Ukraine – is about our belief in a simple principle: the right of people to decide their democratic future and to protect themselves. This country's future lies on this path, and in greater partnership with NATO and countries like the UK. I am calling on all of our friends across Europe to match our ambition. Let's work together to strengthen freedom, sovereignty and the rule of law, to the benefit of us all.

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