

PM calls for international cooperation to create the foundations for success in the Western Balkans

Theresa May will today call on European countries to work to strengthen the institutions of the Western Balkans in order to tackle organised crime, improve governance and allow the region to move on from the legacy of conflict.

The Prime Minister will use her intervention at the Western Balkans Summit to demonstrate the UK's long-term commitment to ensuring stability and security in the region in order to firmly address the legacies of conflict.

She will say that crimes such as money laundering, human and drugs trafficking, weapons trading, cyber-attacks and terrorism threaten lives in the UK and undermine security and stability in the Western Balkans.

The PM is expected to say:

There is no doubt that serious and organised crime and corruption are security challenges we all face across Europe. They can only be tackled by strong international cooperation.

The PM will add:

The UK remains a committed friend of the region. I remain confident that by working together, we can make progress that will do justice to the peaceful, prosperous, European aspirations of the people of the Western Balkans.

At a meeting of Interior Ministers on Thursday, countries signed-up to an illicit finance and anti-corruption roadmap developed by the UK. This will work to strengthen institutions to prevent the Western Balkans being a refuge for organisations engaged in illicit activities.

The Prime Minister will argue that European countries must play their part to increase security in this important region. At the Western Balkans summit hosted in London last year, the UK committed to double spending on security in the Western Balkans to £80m by 2020/21.

UK cooperation with the region and European partners has previously delivered positive results, including bringing down a crime network which was estimated to have imported an average of more than 8,000kg of cocaine a year into the UK, with an estimated street value of £800m.

Crime and instability in the region prevents economic growth and wider development, and the Prime Minister will also use her intervention to urge member countries to implement commitments made at last year's summit in London in areas such as war crimes, good neighbourly relations, missing persons and creating opportunities for young people in the region.

The Prime Minister will argue that supporting the aspirations of young people in the Western Balkans is key to the region's future stability and prosperity.

She will encourage other EU countries to contribute to this goal and work with Western Balkans states to nurture entrepreneurship and innovation.