

Press release: PM reveals package of measures to promote a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic Western Balkans

Prime Minister Theresa May today announces a package of measures to help the Western Balkans prosper by improving the collective security and economic stability of the region.

The Prime Minister will welcome the six Western Balkan leaders to London today, alongside other European figures such as German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, for the 5th annual Western Balkans Summit under the Berlin Process.

The Berlin Process, established in 2014, has already achieved a great deal in the region – advancing the economic integration, building energy and transport links, and forging connections between civil society and young people.

The package announced today will complement this progress, helping build a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic Western Balkans.

It will help the region to address complex security challenges, particularly around serious and organised crime and drug smuggling, which in turn will help prevent illicit activity on the streets in the UK.

Organised Crime Groups from the Western Balkans have a significant nationwide presence in the UK. 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.

Encouraged by these results and recognising the importance of the Western Balkans, the Prime Minister wants to go further to strengthen the security and economic integrity of the region.

Prime Minister, Theresa May said:

I am proud to host this year's Western Balkans Summit, bringing together leaders from across the region with European partners to look at how we can ensure the economic stability and collective security of the Western Balkans.

For history shows that a stable and secure Western Balkans region means a more stable and secure Europe. We are leaving the EU next March, but we remain fully committed to improving the prosperity and security of the Western Balkans, and Europe, both now and in

the years to come.

The package that I have announced today will help the Western Balkans tackle threats to their progress, such as serious and organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism, while also having a positive effect in the UK by cutting off criminal activity at the source and helping prevent crime from reaching British streets.

The new package, which demonstrates the government's enduring commitment to the region, includes:

- increasing UK funding to the region by over 95% from £41 million in 18/19 to £80 million in 20/21 from the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund
- doubling the number of UK staff working in the region on the security issues affecting the UK and the Western Balkans. These experts will help stop crime reaching UK streets and also help strengthen the region's own response to serious and organised crime, terrorism and violent extremism, corruption and money laundering
- launching the Balkans Organised Crime Observatory, jointly with the Austrian and Norwegian governments which will enable civil society to play a more effective role in tackling organised crime and corruption. Led by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, this will serve as a virtual network for key civil society actors to work together to monitor, report on and expose Serious and Organised Crime and corruption, share research and good practice and improve strategic and operational coordination
- improving the region's cyber capability through a £1m investment in training and advisory activities. This includes direct support to Computer Emergency Response Teams in Serbia and Montenegro, launching a Security Fellowships course on cyber security, and providing strategic support to Governments across the region, and establishing a UK-Western Balkans Security Discourse on Cyber Security to enhance UK bilateral and regional relationships and information sharing among senior cyber officials
- agreeing a Joint Declaration on the Principles of Information-Exchange in the Field of Law Enforcement that will help law enforcement agencies in the region share information more easily in the fight against serious and organised crime and terrorism. Countries will also commit to concrete actions to tackle corruption
- chairing a senior-level Security Commitments Steering Group to push for better exchange of information and best practice, including through establishing regional forums, the first of which for customs officers. These will meet regularly at senior and operational level to discuss strategic approaches and complex transnational financial criminal investigation
- extending the Pan Balkans Strategic Reserve Force (SRF) for another year which is held at readiness in the UK to move into the Western Balkans if the security situation deteriorates or the UK needs to support stability in the region. The current UK commitment to maintain the SRF ends on 31st December. We are extending this for another year as a demonstration

of our commitment to maintain security and stability in the Western Balkans

- committing £10 million to help build digital skills and employment prospects for young people in the Western Balkans. The British Council will provide training to children in over 4,500 schools, to bolster digital literacy and core skills across the region. By providing access to a digital education, this funding will help foster the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs
- providing an additional £1million to help the region address difficult legacy issues, including supporting the organisations working to find and identify the 12,000 victims still missing from the conflicts of the 1990s