

Press release: UK hosts Western Balkans Summit

The Western Balkans Summit concluded yesterday (10 July) with Prime Minister Theresa May welcoming the six Western Balkan leaders to London, alongside other European figures including German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki.

At the Summit, the Prime Minister welcomed the signing of Joint Declarations on Good Neighbourly Relations, War Crimes and Missing Persons by leaders of the Berlin Process. Leaders congratulated Prime Ministers Zev and Tsipras on securing agreement on the Name Issue. In support of these declarations, the UK will commit to an additional £1 million to help the region address difficult legacy issues.

The Prime Minister also announced at the Summit that the UK will increase its funding to the region to £80m in 2020/21 and will double the number of UK staff working in the region on the security issues affecting the UK and the Western Balkans. This will help prevent crime reaching UK streets and also help strengthen the region's own response to serious and organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The UK will also invest £1m in the region's cyber capability.

The Summit was the culmination of preparatory meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Security, and Economy and Finance Ministers in Vienna and London.

At the meeting of Foreign Ministers in London on 9 July, Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan announced that the UK will commit £10 million to help build digital skills and employment prospects for young people in the Western Balkans.

The funding will see the British Council provide training to children in over 4,500 schools, to bolster digital literacy and core skills across the region. Foreign Ministers also heard directly from young people and civil society groups from the region and congratulated the winners of the Youth Entrepreneurship "Start Up" Games.

Sir Alan also announced a new £4m programme to expand Westminster Foundation for Democracy across the Western Balkans.

In parallel, at the meeting of Interior and Security Ministers chaired by Home Secretary Sajid Javid, Western Balkans ministers signed a Joint Declaration on the Principles of Information-Exchange in the Field of Law Enforcement, committing them to deeper cooperation on tackling transnational serious and organised crime and terrorism.

Participants also endorsed a Franco-German initiative to combat the illicit possession, misuse and trafficking of firearms from the region by 2024 and

welcomed the endorsement of the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, and Human Trafficking by the Western Balkans. As next year's hosts, Poland's Interior Minister Joachim Brudzinski confirmed that their Summit will continue the UK's security agenda.

At the meeting of Ministers of Economy and Finance in Vienna on 4 July, co-chaired by Sir Simon McDonald, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Permanent Under Secretary and Austrian Minister Schramboeck, Western Balkans' ministers agreed to deepen regional economic integration.

Further information