

Speech: Fairness of the election process is common to all democracies

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is very good to join you at the opening of this conference on political finance reform, a highly relevant topic which concerns us all. I want to welcome our distinguished panellists from Germany, Sweden, Japan, and Latvia. Welcome to Montenegro.

Political parties play an essential role in all European democracies. The public may be cynical about them. But they affect all our lives in important ways. Successful politics delivers the power to take major decisions affecting economic and social life. If they are to play their essential democratic roles effectively, they need adequate funding, both nationally and locally. It is essential, therefore, that political parties obtain their funding in ways free of suspicion that donors are able to receive favours or improper influence in return.

Conference on financing political parties and campaigns

A failure to ensure transparent party funding erodes democracy on many different levels, from the trust the ordinary citizen has in the election process, to the authority with which the government can speak to its international partners. The quest to ensure the fairness of the election process is common to all democracies, no matter how established and old a democracy might be. It is as relevant to politics in the UK, as it is to you in Montenegro.

That is why it is good to see that the issue of party funding is being addressed so thoroughly through this study. Recent events have brought the issue of political financing to the forefront of public attention. This scrutiny is healthy and while it might provoke some uncomfortable conversations for political parties it is vital. Nothing bolsters a democratic dialogue more than a vigorous, transparent, public debate between voices representing contrasting opinions.

I imagine today's discussions will cover a range of challenges on this topic, including the lack of transparency in political finance reporting, the position of foreign financing, and the role of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption. I look forward to hearing the results of your discussions.

And I am pleased that the British Embassy, together with its partners, is contributing in a modest way to this frank and useful exchange of opinions about a topic of vital importance to Montenegro.

I wish the participants fruitful discussions as you consider how reform can support the development of a party financing system which is right in principle, sustainable and even-handed in its effects.