

Speech: Jubilee of the School of Democratic Leadership in Montenegro

Foreign Minister Darmanović, Ambassadorial colleagues,

I'm really pleased to be here today to mark the fifteenth jubilee of the School of Democratic Leadership.

When contemplating the themes of today's alumni forum, I thought of the 17th century English poet and priest John Donne, who said: No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main."

He might well have been thinking of the relationship Europe has both with the Western Balkans, and with the UK.

After two World Wars, Europe has evolved structures which promote integration and dialogue to address our shared development. These themes are particularly important as Europe contemplates the future of the EU. As Montenegro looks to the future of its EU accession process. And, as the UK considers Brexit.

British Ministers have consistently made clear that the UK is leaving the EU, not leaving Europe.

As Prime Minister May said, in Florence on 22 September, "Brexit does not mean we are no longer a proud member of the family of European nations." We are not turning our back on Europe; and we continue to believe that the success of the EU is profoundly in the national interest of the UK, and we believe of the wider world.

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The UK has played and will continue to play an active role in the Western Balkans, in promoting European prosperity, stability and security.

And that is why the UK is a strong supporter of Montenegrin reforms. And why we are delighted to host the Western Balkans Summit in London in July 2018.

The Berlin Process is an important tool to advance our shared aims of embedding stability in the Western Balkans.

It is quite fashionable today to complain about either being in a crisis or being on the verge of crisis. However, nobody who has ever spent more than a few days in the Western Balkans can say that the joint European and Western Balkan reform efforts have not borne fruit.

As you know, Chancellor Merkel launched the Berlin Process in 2014, with the aim of boosting European engagement and regional cooperation in the still fragile Western Balkans region.

The Berlin Process is based around three pillars: firstly regional

cooperation and resolving outstanding bilateral questions, secondly strengthening good governance and thirdly increasing prosperity via sustainable economic growth.

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The UK is still in the planning phase for the Summit. We want the Summit to continue the achievements of the Berlin Process, and of previous Summit hosts, and to promote partnership and responsibility.

We want to build momentum on the interconnectivity agenda – including the delivery of large-scale transport and energy projects and achieve progress on regional and inter-regional integration. We very much welcome the important work that the Commission and the international financial institutions are doing in these regards.

We are keen to ensure a strong focus on digital and entrepreneurship in order to boost the region's growth potential, job creation and economic cooperation.

Youth will be a key focus. We are delighted that the Regional Youth Cooperation Office has been inaugurated and look forward to it becoming fully operational. We want to profile young peoples' achievements across the region and support vocational educational and expand youth and professional exchanges.

And, we hope the Summit will build ever stronger partnerships with the region to deliver against common security challenges including on serious and organised crime, anti-corruption, cyber security, terrorism and violent extremism.

In addition, the UK is conscious of the importance of supporting reconciliation efforts in the region. It is a painful truth that stability will always remain limited and elusive until we face not only what has been done to us, but what has been done to others in our name.

In all these areas, the UK is looking forward to helping, sharing its expertise, and stimulating further delivery and cooperation.

Our support for the Western Balkan's EU accession process remains unchanged – it is fundamental for driving forward reform, embedding stability and addressing security challenges. Our departure from the EU does not affect that, even if future decisions, after we have left, will be for others.