

Speech: Opening speech of the regional Chevening conference in Montenegro

Dear Chevening friends,

It's a pleasure to be here with you today and see so many of you from across the region, working together to make this part of Europe a better place.

I want to use this opportunity to thank Chevening scholars from Malaysia, Egypt, Belarus and Colombia as well as representatives of RYCO and Politikon Network for joining us.

And to thank MAUK for organising not one but two events in the last week highlighting the aspirations and abilities of young people across the Western Balkans.

The scientists among you may recognise that change is a constant variable, if not always a controlled one. Each generation feels they are living in a time of unprecedented change, and this one is no different – with technology evolving faster than ever, the amount of information being exchanged around the world multiplying exponentially, old political certainties being challenged and economic power shifting across the globe.

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In this environment, we need to have strong and inspiring leaders to take positive action. Leaders like you, who have taken Gandhi's mantra of being the change you want to see in the world, to heart.

The UK is here to help enable that change both as you continue to build your careers post-Chevening and to support the aspiration that exists in the Western Balkans to build closer links both across the region, and between the region and Europe.

The UK supports the Western Balkans countries when they set out a vision for the future, based on a peaceful, prosperous and democratic region. A vision anchored to European values and systems. This is a path along which Montenegro has already travelled a considerable distance.

The UK hosted the fifth Berlin Process Western Balkans Summit in July 2018, which was a visible manifestation of our commitment to that positive vision, to securing the stability and security of the region, and of Europe as a whole.

One of the ways in which we can support positive change is the Chevening scholarship, which aims to create leaders and contribute to an exchange of ideas. But Chevening is more than that, it is also about networking and collaboration between scholars beyond the borders of their countries. That's why you're here today!

This conference, which will last until Sunday, will focus on democratic transformation. I do hope that what you hear from your Chevening colleagues from the region and Chevening guests from Malaysia, Egypt, Belarus and Colombia will inspire you to build similar conversations amongst your own alumni networks.

I encourage you to use the conversations you will have here in Igalo and the beautiful town of Herceg Novi, to stimulate you into thinking how you'll build on this when you return home. How will you play this experience forward to be a positive force for change with your own career, your professional and your Chevening networks? How can you motivate others to use their own talents and do their best, in any one of a number of areas, such as youth development, human rights online, corporate social responsibility, and addressing radicalisation, etc?

Given how hard you worked to become Chevening scholars, and the commitment and sense of adventure you have displayed by joining us here today, I know that Chevening alumni and this group in particular have the energy and commitment to make a constructive contribution to change and development in the region

There are three important anniversaries we celebrate this year. First, the 140th anniversary of UK bilateral relations with Montenegro, second the 35th anniversary of Chevening scholarships and lastly the 5th anniversary with MAUK.

I am particularly pleased that in the year of these important milestones, we can take pride in the relationship with our Chevening alumni, and in particular with MAUK through this event. Thank you for your work.

I hope that you will enjoy your participation in this conference. I wish you good luck and abundance of inspiration.

Thank you.