

Speech: PM statement at London Western Balkans Summit: 10 July 2018

Four years ago Chancellor Merkel established the Berlin Process, convening like-minded countries with the singular aim of advancing the prosperity of the Western Balkans.

I want to extend particular thanks to the Chancellor for this initiative.

For the welfare of the Western Balkans should be a high priority for all of us in Europe. And through working together under the Berlin Process, we have already achieved so much.

We've helped build up energy and transport links, enhanced economic integration and developed links between civil society and young people – ensuring the contemporary voice of the region is heard.

And today we've made further progress, establishing agreements that will help contribute to a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic Western Balkans – anchored to European values and integrated in the Euro Atlantic family.

We have agreed initiatives to expand connections between people, organisations and businesses, and improve access to finance for start-ups and small firms.

However, as we all know, long-term prosperity is intrinsically linked with security. And we need to work together to tackle the common challenges, such as corruption, organised crime and terrorism, that deter investment and undermine confidence in the region.

That is why I welcome the commitments made by the Western Balkan leaders today to ensure their countries work more closely together to tackle corruption and organised crime, and control the misuse and trafficking of small arms and weapons.

I also welcome the continued commitment to resolve outstanding bilateral disputes. I want to extend a special welcome to Prime Minister Tsipras from Greece, and pay tribute to him and Prime Minister Zaev for reaching an agreement on the Name Issue – showing that progress is possible.

History has shown us that a stable and secure Western Balkans region means a more stable and secure Europe.

That's why today I have announced an ambitious package of measures to help the region improve its collective security, stability and its capability to tackle threats in the future.

Alongside this, I have also announced that the UK is increasing our financial support to the region by over 95% to £80 million in 2020-21 which will go to fund projects that make a real difference such as:

- strengthening public administration in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia and Montenegro
- promoting judicial reform in Kosovo and Albania
- nurturing the business environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia
- equipping up to a million primary school children across the region with the digital skills to help realise their potential in the modern world
- and strengthening democracy and the rule of law across the entire Western Balkans

The UK has always had a strong commitment to the region – from our role in the peace agreements that followed the conflicts of the nineties, through the post-conflict transition.

I know that some have seen our decision to leave the European Union as a sign that we are retreating from this role.

This is absolutely not the case.

Today I hosted this Summit to bring together leaders from across the Western Balkans and Europe to discuss our shared objective of ensuring our continent remains safe, stable, prosperous and free.

And let me be completely clear – when we are outside the European Union, the UK will be just as committed to supporting the Western Balkans.

Thank you.