

Speech: Queen's Birthday Party 2017 in Tirana

“Zoti Kryetar i Parlamentit, Ministra, Shkëlqesi, zonja dhe zotërinj Kam kënaqësinë t’ju mikpres në ditën tonë kombëtare në të cilën festojmë ditëlindjen e nëntëdhjetë-e-një të Madhërisë së Saj, Mbretëreshës. Shpresoj që shqipfolësit mes nesh të më falin që po e vazhdoj fjalimin tim të shkurtër në anglisht.”

As many of you will know the Queen’s official birthday is in June but this year we are celebrating her real birthday which is on 21 April. The Queen was born 91 years ago in 1926, just 14 years after the birth of Albania, and she has ruled for 55 years. Her Majesty is a symbol of continuity in a changing world.

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This has been a year of change for the UK. Here in Albania not only have we changed the date we are celebrating our national day but we have also changed our Ambassador! Back in Britain the people have voted for a rather bigger change, deciding last June that we would leave the European Union. This will mean even more change for the UK as we move to a different relationship with our European friends and partners. Some things will change. But much will not.

Our Prime Minister, Theresa May, is fond of saying that we are leaving the EU not Europe. This remains our continent and its peace, security and stability will remain just as important to us in two years time as it has done in the past and does today. Our foreign interests will not diminish with Brexit but increase. We will see the UK take a more, not less active role in the World. This is particularly true of our engagement with the Western Balkans, which remains an area of real importance to the UK and is especially true of our engagement with Albania.

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This year, we will double the number of British diplomats in Tirana. This big increase in staff is partly to help us work more closely with the government of Albania to tackle the threat from organised crime but it is also a reflection of the broadening of our relationship. For example, from next month we will have a resident Defence attaché here in Tirana for the first time in more than a decade. This is a reflection of our close defence relations which last year saw further training for British troops in Albania and this year sees our two armed forces working together as part of NATO’s very high readiness forces.

The British Council is also increasing its presence in Albania and continues to bring to Albania the best of UK culture and education. The British Council has also been active helping to reform higher education and the university

accreditation process. All of this shows that our relationship with Albania is both deep and wide. Albania matters to the UK.

We want an Albania with which we can work together as partners. One with a strong, fair, justice system and one where the politicians work to find solutions not to create problems. We want to see an Albania that promotes political dialogue rather than political confrontation. We want to see an Albania on the path to membership of the European Union. We want to see a successful and prosperous Albania.

I should like to end with just a few words of thanks to those who have made this evening possible. Thank you to our sponsors. Thank you to my excellent, and expanding staff at the Embassy and thank you to my wife Kerry for all her support.

Which leads me to the toast. It is traditional that we have just one toast which is to the Queen. So please raise your glasses to toast Her Majesty "the Queen."