

Speech: UK update on the Western Balkans London Summit

Good morning and my thanks to Foreign Minister Professor Darmanovic for his invitation to join this important forum for discussing regional issues in particular the results of the London Summit. I'd like to update you on the UK's plans to continue our support for the integration process and reform in the region.

WB6 Foreign Ministers meeting

At the Summit, the Prime Minister and her colleagues set out the UK's long-term commitment to the prosperity and security of the region. We announced that the UK would increase our bilateral programme funding in the region to £80 million per year by 2020 to work with the countries of the Western Balkans and key partners in order to reinforce the UK's engagement on security and social-economic development in the region, and support for reconciliation and the development of good neighbourly relations.

In terms of UK engagement on security:

- The Prime Minister announced that the Government would double the number of UK staff working in the region on security issues affecting the UK and the Western Balkans. Through this co-operation we aim to prevent crime having a negative and destabilising impact both in the region and in the UK by strengthening the region's own response to serious and organised crime, corruption and money laundering.
- At the Summit, your colleagues, the six Western Balkans Interior Ministers signed the Joint Declaration on the Principles of Information-Exchange in the Field of Law Enforcement which committed to deepen regional cooperation against serious and organised crime and terrorism through increased operational and strategic information sharing.
- Your governments also endorsed a Franco-German roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons in the region.
- Recognising the important role of civil society in this effort, the British Government used the Summit to launch the Balkans Organised Crime Observatory, jointly with the Austrian and Norwegian governments, which will enable civil society to play a more effective role in tackling organised crime and corruption. Led by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, this will serve as a virtual network for key civil society actors to work together to monitor, report on and expose serious and organised crime and corruption, share research and good practice and improve strategic and operational coordination.

- As Foreign Minister Professor Darmanovic and Foreign Minister Crnadak noted the First Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group met last week in Podgorica, to take stock of progress since the Interior Ministers' Meeting and to consider the concrete steps necessary to counter serious organised crime and other threats faced by the region.
- The UK committed to working with the region to improve its cyber resilience through a £1m investment in training and advisory activities, launching a Security Fellowships course on cyber security, and providing strategic support to Governments across the region, and establishing a UK-Western Balkans Security Discourse on Cyber Security.

In terms of UK support for socio-economic development, we pledged UK support for regional economic growth, including a special focus on youth and by offering help for the next generation of Balkan entrepreneurs:

- At the Summit the UK announced it would commit £10 million to help build digital skills and employment prospects for young people in the Western Balkans. The funding will see the British Council provide training in every primary school in the region, reaching around one million children, to bolster digital literacy and core skills across the region, and help improve the employability of young people across the region.
- The UK also announced an expansion of its Global Entrepreneur Programme across the Western Balkans, which will help foster entrepreneurial spirit and provide mentoring to talented young people with an aspiration to scale up an existing business.
- Over 140 civil society and youth representatives from the region attended the London Summit's Civil Society and Youth Forum.

In terms of UK support for reconciliation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans, we helped renew support in the region for taking action on legacy issues from the conflicts of the 1990s and on developing good neighbourly relations.

- The Heads of all Berlin Process countries signed a Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations at the Summit. Through the Declaration, the governments of the Western Balkans re-committed to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues and to report annually on the progress made in strengthening good relations within the region. To ensure that this Declaration is implemented, Austria has recently hosted, and Macedonia has also agreed to host, stock-take meetings with the governments of the Western Balkans and other Berlin Process participants within six and nine months of the London Summit respectively, ahead of the 2019 Summit in Poland.
- The UK Government announced a new £4 million programme to expand the activities of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy across the Western Balkans, to support efforts to strengthen political cooperation. The programme will strengthen the three pillars of democracy – parties, parliaments and voters.

- As Foreign Minister Crnadak said, the Summit, Berlin Process Heads also signed separate Joint Declarations on War Crimes and Missing Persons, through which the region's leaders pledged to resolve as many remaining missing persons cases as possible over the next five years, to increase efforts to bring perpetrators of war crimes to justice and to support survivors of these crimes, including by addressing stigma resulting from conflict-related sexual violence. These declarations will be supported by a £1.5m project with ICMP to strengthen regional cooperation in the WB to resolve Missing persons' cases, by project with MICT, and by a number of bilateral projects (currently underway) in BiH and Kosovo.
- Finally, we will also continue to work closely with Poland to ensure that agreements reached in London are followed up ahead of and during the 2019 Summit.

We did all of this because history teaches us that a secure and stable Western Balkans means a secure and stable Europe. By contrast, fragility in the Western Balkans holds risks not only for the people of the region but for everyone who calls Europe home. So it is in our shared interest to work together to increase stability and help the region on its Euro-Atlantic path.

The UK is leaving the EU, but that does not change the fact that we want a strong, stable and prosperous European neighbourhood. And we remain of the view that the EU accession process is fundamental to delivering security, stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans. After we leave the EU, we will continue to work with international partners including the EU institutions and Member States, and with important groups such as this one, to achieve that goal.

Thank you.