

Speech: Matt Hancock's speech at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Western Balkans Summit

Your speech will follow the President of the EBRD and the Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

Good morning,

I'm delighted to be here with you today, in the heart of the City of London. What better place to talk about the wide ranging benefits of economic development and investment?

The EBRD was founded at the end of the Cold War, a war which for so many decades divided our people and put barriers in the way of economic growth.

The EBRD's mission – to use private investment to support the journey from conflict to peace and prosperity – is as relevant now as it was almost three decades ago.

You have done vital work in the Western Balkans to develop the private sector, enhance energy security and sustainability, and support connectivity and regional integration. We fully support your work and want to see it continue.

The potential of the Western Balkans

I vividly remember watching scenes of conflict from the region when I was growing up.

And yet since then, the region has made what seemed like unimaginable progress towards a brighter and more peaceful future.

The Western Balkans is a land of real economic potential, with rates of economic growth exceeding that of the EU.

And that potential can be further unlocked through structural reforms, to create an environment where investment and enterprise can flourish.

This means building relationships with the private sector to increase market diversity and also developing the structures that sustain a thriving economy.

But most of all it means co-operation. And that is why we are all here today.

It is fantastic to see every Western Balkans leader here in this room. For it is your political leadership that needs to drive this agenda forward to attract investors like those in the audience today. And we will be with you every step of the way as you do this.

International co-operation

As the Prime Minister said in Munich this month, the UK is unconditionally committed to peace, security and prosperity in Europe after we leave the EU.

And this is just as true in the Western Balkans. We have a longstanding and enduring commitment to the security, stability and prosperity of the region, and this will never change.

We are working with governments from all six Western Balkans countries to improve the rule of law; promote economic governance and address corruption.

And we are matching these bilateral efforts with multilateral efforts alongside our international partners.

Just look at the activity that is planned this year.

There's the European Commission's Western Balkans Strategy, the Sofia summit in May and our own Western Balkans Summit, hosted in London, in July.

We want this to build on the progress forged at previous "Berlin Process" Summits.

It will focus on security cooperation...

On tackling common threats that deter investment, like corruption and organised crime.

And crucially, on supporting economic stability and interconnectivity and taking steps to improve the business environment.

The power of digital

There is one theme that strikes a particular chord with me. Digital is a key part of my portfolio as Secretary of State at DCMS and I am a huge believer in the transformational power of new technology.

So I am thrilled that one of the themes of our Summit will be a focus on young people and especially giving them the digital skills they need to flourish.

The British Council, supported by the UK Government, has already been working with young people across the Western Balkans to make this happen.

The 21st Century Schools programme is helping young people in the region to learn about coding and other digital skills.

Whilst the Digital Cities programme has been connecting cities in the UK and Western Balkans to develop digital policies and strategies.

I welcomed some of the participants to Westminster last month and it was fantastic to see how they were energised by the connections they had made and the ideas they had exchanged.

The digital economy presents huge opportunities for the Western Balkans.

We've already seen the seismic effect it can have in other parts of Europe. Estonia is a country of just over a million people, but through its relentless focus on digital skills and innovation, it is now one of the world's leading tech nations.

Digital transformation, when done correctly, can make societies more open, more prosperous and can foster the development of civil society.

But digital investment will only go where the conditions are right. With your large young population and impressive growth, you have a real opportunity to build something special.

But to seize this opportunity you will need to build confidence; investors will look to you to improve the business environment, boost the private sector and deal with their concerns about corruption and the rule of law.

Digital has incredible potential to support you in your reform efforts in the Western Balkans.

That is why digital will be an important part of July's summit, and I hope it will provide the foundations for the next phase of progress in the region.

Conclusion

If I leave you with one message today it would be this; we have a shared ambition for a brighter and more prosperous Western Balkans.

To all the investors here today; thank you for your vote of confidence in the region.

And to all the leaders here today; you have a great opportunity ahead to drive lasting change that will shape your nations for decades to come.

And you will have our support as you do so.

Thank you very much and enjoy the rest of the day.

[Speech: New Queen's Counsel appointment ceremony speech](#)

It is a pleasure to be here today in Westminster Hall to preside over the formal appointment of all 119 barristers and solicitors to the rank of Queen's Counsel, as well as those being appointed as Honorary Queen's Counsel.

Let me welcome you warmly, the only warmth you will feel for a while. This is the day when your hard-earned achievements are publicly recognised by the Crown and by your peers. It is also a proud day for your long-suffering spouses, parents, children, friends and wider family, who I hope will enjoy the ceremony and importance of this day for you.

Today represents a journey to the pinnacle of your profession. That journey has been more marathon, than sprint, and I congratulate you on lasting the course so far.

The title of Queen's Counsel is a mark of excellence, not just in this country but around the world, where it plays an important role in supporting the attractiveness of English and Welsh legal services more broadly.

Since the eminent jurist, Sir Francis Bacon, who was the first person to be titled King's Counsel in 1604, the title has been sought after both by practitioners and by clients seeking to instruct counsel.

It recognises the depth of expertise and eminence you have in your particular field of law. It is also a mark of distinction in the art of advocacy, in developing and advancing a client's case and getting the best outcome for them.

As you will be well aware, the process for becoming Queen's Counsel is a robust and rigorous one, based on competence and merit. It is important that it is a process open to all suitably qualified advocates – including solicitors.

Given my own background, I was pleased to see that there are solicitor-advocates who are being awarded the title of Queen's Counsel amongst us today.

It's now 21 years since the first solicitor advocates were appointed as Queen's Counsel. One of those appointed in 1997 subsequently served on the Supreme Court. We should recognise and promote talent from whichever branch of the profession it comes.

I am also pleased to note that this year, 64% of female applicants have been recommended for practising QC, and 55% of BME applicants. As the leaders of your profession, you are role models for all aspiring lawyers and I hope you take this responsibility seriously.

This year there are 119 awards of silk. Her Majesty the Queen makes the appointments on the advice of the Lord Chancellor. My predecessors and I would not be able to undertake this role without the valuable advice of an independent selection panel. I am incredibly grateful for the work Sir Alex Allan has done in chairing the panel – and to all its distinguished members; including:

- Wanda Goldwag
- Tony King
- Martin Mann QC
- Edward Nally

- Quinton Quayle
- Dame Janet Smith
- Dr Maggie Semple OBE
- Shaun Smith QC
- Ranjit Sondhi CBE

They continue to provide advice of the highest quality, and run a transparent and open competition which ensures that we can have confidence that appointments have been made fairly and justly on merit.

In addition to those who have been awarded silk, there are also seven awards for Queens Counsel, honoris causa. I would like to thank the highly qualified selection panel, chaired by Scott McPherson, a former Director General at the Ministry of Justice and consisting of:

- Amelia Wright
- Professor Peter Alldrige
- Andrew Langdon QC
- Joe Egan
- Lord Justice David Richards

This award is recognition for lawyers who have made a major contribution to the law of England and Wales outside of practice in the courts.

Honorary QCs

I would like to say a few words about each of those who are receiving the title of Honorary Queen's Counsel today.

Professor Michael Bridge is a leading academic and Fellow of the British Academy who has made a major contribution to the law of England and Wales in relation to the sale of goods.

Professor Louise Gullifer has contributed widely through her work in academia and beyond, including as Professor of Commercial Law at Oxford and her work on Security Interests as part of the UK delegation to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

Dr Charles Harpum, who unfortunately is unable to attend today's ceremony, is a barrister and former academic who served as a Law Commissioner and made a major contribution to the law of England and Wales as a significant architect in the shaping of the Land Registration Act 2002.

Janet Legrand is a pioneer in enhancing the role of women in the law, promoting social mobility, diversity and inclusion within her own firm and the wider profession through the board of PRIME.

Professor Nigel Lowe has done a mixture of international work and family law and is particularly known for his work relating to the Hague Convention.

Professor Nicola Padfield has made a huge contribution in both academia, where she is Professor of Criminal and Penal Justice at Cambridge University, and in the criminal justice system, where her research focuses on sentencing

and parole.

Finally, Professor Maurice Sunkin has pioneered an empirical approach to the law and undertaken a number of leading studies of the use, operation and effects of judicial review in England and Wales.

Conclusion

I'd like to warmly congratulate all of you and thank you for your contribution to the law across such a diverse range of disciplines and fields.

The role of Queen's Counsel is not only a mark of quality recognised around the world, it also promotes high standards of advocacy in the legal profession.

All of us here today, and all those who supported your appointment, have shown confidence and belief in you. That's a confidence and belief that I entirely share.

I would like to again thank everyone involved in the process of appointing this year's selection of barristers and solicitors to the rank of Queen's Counsel and Honorary Queen's Counsel.

I would like to congratulate you all again on being appointed Queen's Counsel and wish you well for the future.

[News story: Digital and service solutions to NHS challenges: apply for funds](#)

NHS prescriptions sign in pharmacy shop window.

Innovate UK is to invest up to £4.5 million on behalf of the [Office for Life Sciences](#) in projects that combine digital and service innovations to significantly improve healthcare.

[NHS England](#) is to invest a further £1.5 million specifically in projects that apply digital approaches to supporting people with type 2 diabetes.

Test in real-world settings

We are seeking initial expressions of interest from both businesses with innovative digital projects and NHS organisations willing to lead a series of

trials.

Successful applicants will be invited to a workshop where they will be able to meet and select partners. Consortia will then be invited to submit a detailed application to apply for funding.

It is part of the [NHS test beds programme](#) that aims to help innovators work with the NHS and test innovations in products and process in real-world settings.

Projects must meet NHS priorities

Business should have a market-ready digital product that meets safety and regulatory standards and could address a health and care challenge.

Projects will need to meet the priorities set by NHS England in its [5 Year Forward View](#).

NHS organisations must have a clearly defined health and care challenge and be willing to lead a consortium that will test whether a combination of product and service innovation can address that challenge.

Projects must produce significant health improvements at the same or lower cost.

Competition information

- we are now inviting expressions of interest and the deadline is midday on 27 March 2018
- to apply you can be:
 - an NHS organisation or partnership
 - a business of any size, but funding is only available to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
- we expect projects to range in size from £500,000 to £1.5 million and to last up to 18 months
- businesses could receive up to 70% of their costs. NHS organisations will receive 100% of their costs
- there will be a briefing event on 2 March 2018

[Press release: Government appoints new VCSE Crown Representative](#)

Claire Dove has been named as the new Crown Representative of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE).

Ms Dove, who succeeds Michael O'Toole, will work alongside government

departments and the Crown Commercial Service to strengthen the sector, support the upcoming Civil Society Strategy, and encourage VSCE organisations to operate more commercially.

Claire Dove VCSE Crown Representative, said:

It's an honour to take on this role. Millions of people benefit from the work that charities and social enterprises do and I cannot wait to get started to ensure this sector continues to go from strength to strength.

Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

Claire will bring a lot of passion and experience into this role – having chaired Social Enterprise UK among other organisations. I am looking forward to working alongside her and the Crown Commercial Service to help support the VCSE sector and societies across the country.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Claire Dove's biography:

Claire Dove OBE, DL, has been a key player in the social enterprise movement since the early 1980s and has led the award-winning Blackburne House Group, one of the leading providers of adult and community education in the country, since its inception.

From December 2007 to January 2017 Claire was Chair of Social Enterprise UK (SEUK). She is a member of the Alder Hey Hospital Trust and, until recently, was a Board Member for the Charity Commission. She has chaired the Liverpool Fairness Commission on behalf of Liverpool City Council, is currently serving on the Liverpool Mayoral Development Board and is chair of the Society Advisory Board for the British Council.

Claire was awarded an MBE for her work in the mid-nineties. She received an OBE in 2013 and was given the Queens Lifetime Achievement Award for Enterprise Promotion.

Crown Commercial Service

- The Crown Commercial Service runs the Crown Representative programme across a number of business areas, of which the VCSE Crown Representative will be part
- Crown Representatives help the government act as a single customer. They work across departments to:
- Ensure a single and strategic view of the government's needs is

communicated to the market

- Identify areas for cost savings
 - Act as a point of focus for cross-cutting supplier-related issues
-

[News story: CNC officer takes on marathon challenge for charity](#)

PC Mike Frost is based at Hinkley Point and over the next few months will run the Bath Half marathon, the Weston Half marathon and the London marathon, a total of 52.4 miles.

Mike is carrying out the runs to raise money for the Miscarriage Association, a charity founded by a group of people who had experienced miscarriage which offers support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby in pregnancy and to raise awareness. Find out more from their [website](#)

Mike said: "I have been fundraising for the charity for a number of years, as prior to the arrival of our beautiful son, we suffered three miscarriages and the charity provided invaluable support to both me and my wife at this extremely upsetting and difficult time.

"I have run the Bath Half Marathon for the last two years and raised over £2,000 for the charity, however other commitments mean that this is the last year I will be able to fundraise, so I wanted to go out with a bang and complete two halves and a full marathon.

"The thought of completing three long distance runs is daunting but I have been training a lot, which has meant the added bonus of a two-stone weight loss! My aim is to complete the London Marathon in just over four hours and 30 minutes so that is what I am working towards at the moment.

"Miscarriage is a subject that is not talked about much, especially amongst men, so I have also found running a way of dealing with my issues and hope that by completing these marathons, I will also raise awareness of the charity. My goal is to raise £1,500 and I would very much appreciate any donations people can spare." To sponsor Mike in his fund-raising efforts, visit his [fundraising page](#).