



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

Global Britain and the Western Balkans

Tenth Report of Session 2017–19

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 3 July 2018*

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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6105; the Committee's email address is fac@parliament.uk.

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Summary

On 9 and 10 July 2018, the UK will host the fifth annual Western Balkans Summit, under the auspices of the Berlin Process. This inter-governmental forum, which brings together key EU Member States and the leaders of the six countries that make up the Western Balkans (WB6), was set up by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014 to accelerate the Western Balkans' journey towards EU accession.

This region has come a long way. In the 1990s, it witnessed some of the worst violence in Europe since the Second World War. However, the problems that have hindered its progress towards peace and prosperity—organised crime, corruption and authoritarianism—have not gone away. Some experts believe they are getting worse and that outside actors such as Russia are willing and able to exacerbate the situation. This, coupled with some EU Member States' reluctance to admit new members, means that the WB6's path to EU membership will be long and halting. In the light of this, it is important that the UK and its EU and NATO partners remain engaged in the Western Balkans. It will, however, take a long time to make a substantive difference.

The Government told us that the Summit in July is indicative of the UK's long-term commitment to the Western Balkans. The UK has long championed EU accession for the WB6 and the Government have told us that this will not change after Brexit. We welcome this commitment. However, there is a risk that UK leverage in the region will be reduced if it is no longer involved in the EU accession process. We are therefore calling on the Government to explain its vision for an independent UK role in the Western Balkans, to clarify what it wants to achieve in the region and to explain how it plans to get there. We also call on the Government, as host, to push for the Summit to adopt a robust set of commitments that can make a real difference in the Western Balkans.

The Government told us that working with the Berlin Process partners on the Western Balkans' reform agenda helps to prove that the UK is not stepping back from its commitments as a global power. We welcome this signal of Global Britain in practice and we believe that the Berlin Process offers lessons for UK diplomacy post-Brexit.

1 Introduction

1. The Western Balkans Summit will take place in London on 9 and 10 July 2018 under the auspices of the Berlin Process. This inter-governmental forum was set up by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014 with the intention of maintaining momentum in the Western Balkans' path to EU membership. The Process and its annual Summit brings together the main European powers involved in the Western Balkans. They are the Western Balkans six (WB6)—Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia—and the EU8—Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Poland and the UK. The Summit in July will bring together the prime ministers, foreign ministers and interior ministers of the Berlin Process partners to discuss ways to encourage greater co-operation between the WB6 and to strengthen the reform agenda in the region so that they can meet the criteria for EU accession.

2. Bulgaria will also be represented at the Summit. In May 2018, it hosted its own Western Balkans Summit, as part of its presidency of the Council of the EU. That summit was the first in nearly 15 years to bring together the leaders of the WB6 and all 28 EU Member States—rather than just the EU8—and it marked a revival of EU interest in the Western Balkans after a decade of neglect. However, despite this revival of interest from the EU, the problems that have held the region back from EU accession appear as deeply rooted as ever. Moreover, the UK—a long-standing champion of EU accession for the WB6—is hosting this Summit, focussed on EU enlargement, as it is preparing to leave the Union.

3. To explore what the recent increased interest in the Western Balkans means for the region, whether there is a realistic prospect of the WB6 joining the EU, and what the UK can do to help at the Summit and in the long term, we launched an inquiry on 4 May with the following terms of reference:

- What has the Berlin Process achieved so far and what can be achieved at the London Summit?
- What can the UK do in the long-term to support the Western Balkan path to EU membership and what impact does Brexit have on its ability to influence the process?
- What tools do other international actors use to exercise influence in the region and what should the UK do to counter or support this?
- What fora and mechanisms can the UK use after Brexit to ensure a collective European commitment to the stability and security of the Western Balkans?
- What role can Parliament play in strengthening parliamentary democracy in the Western Balkans?

We took evidence from former EU diplomat Sir Robert Cooper; Professor James Ker-Lindsay (LSE); Dr Cvete Koneska (Control Risks); Tena Prelec (University of Sussex); Dr Peter Sanfey (European Bank for Reconstruction & Development); and Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan (FCO Minister of State for Europe and the Americas), Andrew Page (Western Balkans Summit Co-ordinator) and Fiona McIlwham (FCO Western Balkans Department Director). We would like to thank all those who provided invaluable oral and written evidence.

2 The uneasy path to peace and prosperity in the Western Balkans

The problems facing the Western Balkans

4. Less than 25 years ago, the Western Balkans was blighted by armed conflict, including some of the most extreme violence perpetuated against civilians in Europe since the Second World War. Since then, the region has, as Dr Dimitar Bechev from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill told us, “overcome many of the problems which bred violent conflict in the 1990s”. But, he said, “this is where the good news ends”.¹ The Western Balkans remains hampered by a set of interwoven problems—state capture, chronic economic stagnation, bilateral disputes and ethnic conflicts—which prove that the region’s progress cannot be taken for granted.² These problems are exacerbated by local elites who have an interest in the status quo. According to Timothy Less from Nova Europa and the University of Cambridge, these elites “are opposed to the kind of liberal reforms which would undermine their control of the national economy”.³ In its written submission to this inquiry, the FCO echoes this assessment of the fragile state of the WB6. It says that “risks and threats are increasing” in the Western Balkans because “vested interests, state capture and weak governance allow space for organised crime (including drugs and human trafficking), illegal migration, radicalisation and potential terrorism”.⁴

The difficult path to EU accession

5. The EU accession process has been a key driver of progress in the Western Balkans because the prospect of joining the EU incentivises the WB6 to implement root and branch reforms. Dr Spyros Economides from the London School of Economics (LSE) described EU membership as “the highest goal for the states in the region”, while Dr Denisa Kostovicova, also from the LSE, said that EU accession “remains the only driver for comprehensive political and economic reforms in the region”.⁵ This view was supported by the EBRD’s Peter Sanfey, who said that a “credible perspective of ultimate membership” is very important for investors and potential investors.⁶ Dr Koneska told us that public support for joining the EU is high in the Western Balkans.⁷ However, according to Dr Othon Anastasakis from St Anthony’s College Oxford, Kyril Drezov from Keele University and Dr Koneska, this is not reciprocated within the EU.⁸ According to Timothy Less, “only 39% of EU citizens favour EU enlargement and 49% are opposed, with an absolute majority opposed in 19 of the EU’s 28 members”.⁹ In short, as Mr Less told us, “on its current trajectory, the region will take decades to join the EU”.¹⁰ According to the EBRD’s Peter Sanfey, it could take “in the region of 50 or 60 years” for the WB6 to catch up with EU living standards. The region has, he concluded, made a lot of progress, but “there is still a lot more to be done”.¹¹

1 Dr Dimitar Bechev ([WBS0007](#)), para 2

2 Dr Dimitar Bechev ([WBS0007](#)), paras 3–6

3 Mr Timothy Less ([WBS0013](#)), para 7

4 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 7

5 Dr Spyros Economides ([WBS0012](#)), para 22; Dr Denisa Kostovicova ([WBS0016](#)), para 1. See also: Dr Michael Taylor ([WBS0011](#)), para 11

6 [Q39](#)

7 [Q3](#) [Dr Koneska]; [Q5](#)

8 Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#)), para 4

9 Mr Timothy Less ([WBS0013](#)), para 8

10 Mr Timothy Less ([WBS0013](#)), para 6

11 [Q59](#); [Q71](#)

6. The further the prospect of joining the EU recedes into the distance, the harder it becomes to entrench reforms, and there is evidence to suggest that this exacerbates the region's problems. The British Council told us that the region is “experiencing a new phase of instability”, while Dr Bechev said that it had witnessed a “backslide into authoritarianism”, with international watchdogs registering “a general trend towards de-democratisation”.¹² Dr Kostovicova told us that an already fragile civil society “is under increasing pressure from increasingly authoritarian leaderships.”¹³ In turn, a weak civil society makes the fulfilment of civil rights more difficult. According to Stonewall, “high levels of discrimination and hate crime, lack of access to justice and restrictions on freedom of assembly, among other issues, prevent LGBTI people in the Western Balkans from exercising their rights”.¹⁴ The spiralling weaknesses of civil society are not helped by a fragile media environment.¹⁵

Filling a vacuum: other countries active in the Western Balkans

7. Outside actors such as Russia, China and Turkey have filled a void created by EU neglect of the Western Balkans over the past decade. Anastasakis, Drezov and Koneska told us that China and Turkey are big investors in the Western Balkans and that their reputations in the region were largely positive.¹⁶ Many suggested that, by contrast, Russian influence in the region is weak, not least because its economic presence is limited. Despite this, Russia is capable of exploiting the region's problems and undermining its progress towards peace, prosperity and, ultimately, EU and NATO membership. Indeed, the FCO told us that one of the biggest threats facing the region is “Russia's increased interference in the Western Balkans, as seen in the attempted coup plot in Montenegro in October 2016”, which it describes as “a brazen example of Russia's risk-appetite and willingness to attempt disruption”.¹⁷ The FCO also highlighted Russia's support for the “destabilising activities of political leaders in the Republika Srpska” in Bosnia and Herzegovina and cited media reports in early 2018 that local police were purchasing “long-barrelled weapons” from Russia, fuelling fears of Russia's ability to destabilise the fragile peace settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁸ The FCO's assessment of the Russian threat was echoed by several of those who provided us with written and oral evidence. Sir Robert Cooper, for example, said: “The Russians, as they do in other places, are very good at making a bad situation worse. That is one of their great skills. This is a place where there are quite a lot of bad situations, and they work on them”.¹⁹ Tena Prelec said that “Russia plays a weak hand in the Balkans very well”.²⁰ Oxford Analytica's Michael Taylor made a similar point.²¹

8. A number of witnesses also pointed to Russia's support for Milorad Dodik, president of the autonomous Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who has, according to Dimitar Bechev, “engaged in brinkmanship, threatening repeatedly to initiate a

12 British Council ([WBS0019](#)), para 1.2; Dr Dimitar Bechev ([WBS0007](#)), paras 3, 4

13 Dr Denisa Kostovicova ([WBS0016](#)), para 15

14 Stonewall ([WBS0018](#)), para 4

15 Jessie Hronesova ([WBS0006](#)), para 2; Professor Kenneth Morrison ([WBS0010](#)), para 8

16 Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#)), paras 19, 21, 23

17 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 8, 16. For more on the attempted coup in Montenegro, see: Dimitar Bechev, [The 2016 Coup Attempt in Montenegro: Is Russia's Balkans Footprint Expanding?](#)

18 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 16

19 [Q31](#)

20 [Q32](#)

21 Dr Michael Taylor ([WBS0011](#)), paras 30, 31

referendum for secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina”.²² This is also an area where, according to Professor Kenneth Morrison from De Montfort University, there are known links between extreme right wing groups and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, and these in turn have been implicated in the attempted coup in Montenegro. Professor Morrison pointed to this, among others, as reason “to treat Russia’s machinations in the region with suspicion”.²³

9. In oral evidence, Sir Alan Duncan (FCO Minister of State for Europe and the Americas) spoke about the risks of outside interference in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Fiona McIlwham (Director of the FCO’s Western Balkans Department) told us that the FCO was “very concerned about the situation in Bosnia”, where there are increased tensions between the three main ethnic groups.²⁴ We asked Ms McIlwham whether Russia was aggravating this situation by rearming Bosnian Serb groups. She said that the Government had commissioned a report on the rearming of groups across the country, but there is concern about accounts of the purchase of long-barrelled weapons in Republika Srpska. The Minister of State said that it was difficult to say much before this report was finished.²⁵

10. Sir Alan also pointed to the provisional agreement between Greece and Macedonia in June 2018 to resolve their long-running name dispute as an example of the region’s potential for progress.²⁶ It was, he said, “very, very, very good news, and we welcome it unreservedly”.²⁷ However, he cautioned that the agreement would have to be ratified by the parliaments and peoples of Greece and Macedonia—the point at which an agreement between the two sides in Cyprus fell down in 2017—and he agreed that there is a danger of “foreign interference through social media or the airwaves in a way that is designed to destabilise, rather than entrench something that is good”. He added that “we have to be on our guard, and I am sure we will offer every assistance that we possibly can”.²⁸

11. The problems facing the Western Balkans are deeply-rooted and intricately interwoven. Its path to European integration will be long and halting and there is no guarantee of success. It is vital that the UK and its EU and NATO partners maintain their commitment to the region, but they must acknowledge the difficulties and risks involved and recognise that it will likely take a long time to make a substantive difference.

12. Russia is willing to do what it can to disrupt the Western Balkans’ path to stability and democracy. This is demonstrated by Russia’s support for an attempted coup in Montenegro in 2016 and reports of Russian attempts to supply arms to militant groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, there is a risk that Russia will try to subvert or stop the ratification of the agreement recently reached between Greece and Macedonia to end their long-running name dispute, particularly in any referendum that may be held in Macedonia.

22 Dr Dimitar Bechev ([WBS0007](#)), para 6

23 Professor Kenneth Morrison ([WBS0010](#)), paras 12, 15

24 [Q89 \[Fiona McIlwham\]](#)

25 [Q92 \[Sir Alan Duncan\]](#)

26 For more on the provisional agreement, see: Zoran Nechev, [The Skopje-Athens agreement: A view from \(North?\) Macedonia](#) (14 June 2018).

27 [Q75](#)

28 [Qq76–78](#)

13. *It is not for the UK to say whether the people of Greece and Macedonia should ratify the agreement recently reached between the two governments to resolve their name dispute. However, as one of the leading powers resisting Russian aggression, it is vital that the UK does what it can to help ensure that a decision can be made in a free, fair and open way. The FCO should tell us what the UK has done and will do, in concert with its regional, EU and NATO partners and allies, to ensure that the ratification process is not disrupted by malicious outside interference.*

3 The UK's post-Brexit position in the Western Balkans

14. Several witnesses told us that there is a fundamental paradox to the UK increasing its engagement with the WB6, which are trying to join the EU, as it is in the process of leaving the Union. Professor James Ker-Lindsay told us that the UK's decision to host the Western Balkans Summit appears odd "to people from other EU Member States and from the region".²⁹ Professor Morrison and Dr Andi Hoxhaj, from the University of Warwick, also described the UK's position as "somewhat awkward" and "peculiar", while Dr Michael Taylor told us that "the irony has not escaped people in the Balkans" that the UK appears to be helping the WB6 to join an organisation it is leaving and that "the UK has a problem of credibility, quite apart from no longer having a say in the European Council, when it comes to admitting new members".³⁰

15. Despite this, several witnesses suggested it was important that the UK remain engaged with the WB6 and that it could help them to implement the reforms necessary to join the EU. For example, the EBRD's Peter Sanfey told us that "it is important for the UK's peace, prosperity and security that Europe as a whole thrives", including the Western Balkans, which "lags behind and has a number of problems". It is, he said, in the interests of the UK to help with that.³¹ Dr Sanfey also said that the UK has a lot to offer because it "still has a very good reputation in the region, particularly when it comes to things like governance".³² Similarly, Anastasakis, Drezov and Koneska said that the UK can be useful "in the fields of security, economic development and rule of law".³³ David McAllister MEP, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, told us that whatever the shape of the UK's relationship with the EU, "we hope for your continued engagement in the Western Balkans". He said that the UK's "role in promoting the rule of law and good governance whilst fighting state capture, corruption and organised crime and supporting independent civil society and free press is of core importance".³⁴

16. Many of those we took evidence from told us, however, that UK leverage may be limited because its trading relationship with the WB6 is, as James Ker-Lindsay put it, "nowhere at the moment".³⁵ Cvete Koneska said that "foreign investment is very important to the Western Balkans" but that the WB6 "has definitely received less attention from Britain than it has from some other countries", such as Germany, the Netherlands and Italy.³⁶ Professor Ker-Lindsay said that this is because British companies "are not as familiar with the region. They do not understand it".³⁷ Despite this, Dr Koneska said, there are opportunities for UK business in the WB6, particularly in the insurance and financial services sectors, which remain under developed in the Western Balkans.³⁸ This

29 [Q16](#) [Professor Ker-Lindsay]

30 Professor Kenneth Morrison ([WBS0010](#)), para 21; Dr Andi Hoxhaj ([WBS0002](#)), para 3; Dr Michael Taylor ([WBS0011](#)), para 16

31 [Q49](#)

32 [Q49](#)

33 Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#)), para 2

34 European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs ([WBS0021](#)), para 7

35 [Q22](#) [Professor Ker-Lindsay]

36 [Q15](#) [Dr Koneska]; [Q20](#)

37 [Q22](#) [Professor Ker-Lindsay]

38 [Q22](#) [Dr Koneska]

view was echoed by the EBRD’s Peter Sanfey.³⁹ James Thornley, Senior Partner for KPMG in Serbia and Montenegro, told us that there are “no major British banks, insurance, telecom or other major British strategic investors operating here” but that this masks the UK’s importance as a financial services centre for the region.⁴⁰

The Government’s commitment to the Western Balkans

17. In her Lancaster House speech in January 2017, the Prime Minister said that she was “proud of the role Britain has played and will continue to play in promoting Europe’s security”. She pointed to “working for peace and stability in the Balkans” as an example.⁴¹ The FCO referred to this in its written submission to this inquiry and said that it reflected the UK’s commitment to the WB6. On this basis, and in recognition of “the challenges in the region and our interests”, the FCO says that it plans “to increase our level of political and diplomatic engagement and spend in the coming years”.⁴² This was reiterated in oral evidence from Sir Alan Duncan. When we asked the Minister of State why the UK was increasing its engagement with the Western Balkans six despite leaving the EU, he said:

I have a very clear and straightforward answer to this question: it is because we are not going to resile and shrink from our commitment to the defence and security of Eastern Europe, or from meeting what we see as our responsibilities as a global nation. Notwithstanding the apparent paradox of our withdrawing from the EU at a time when many of the Western Balkans—indeed, all of them—want to join the EU, our interest in the Western Balkans goes far beyond the issues of the structures and existence of the EU itself. It is because we believe that it is a crucial region for European stability more generally.⁴³

The Minister added that the UK would support the WB6’s goal of EU membership “inasmuch as they wish to do that—which they do—and they go through the process of willing negotiations between them and the EU”.⁴⁴

18. The FCO told us that the UK spends £40 million bilaterally in the WB6 “to help improve the rule of law, support the implementation of much needed democratic reforms, and develop the region’s business environment and economies”.⁴⁵ According to the FCO, the UK also spends £85 million a year in the Western Balkans via the EU.⁴⁶ When we asked the Minister what was the business case for increasing UK spending in the region, he said:

I think I would point to the fact that we do have shared interests and concerns across the whole of Europe on things like organised crime, cyber, and the movement of people. Any instability and conflict anywhere on the continent of Europe ultimately affects everybody on the continent in some

39 [Q44](#); [Q50](#); [Q66](#)

40 James Thornley ([WBS0020](#)), para 2

41 The Prime Minister’s [Lancaster House speech](#) (17 January 2017)

42 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 5

43 [Q100](#)

44 [Q101](#)

45 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 6

46 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 6; [Q134](#)

way or other. In the same way as we would have advanced an argument for wanting stability, peace and security generally in Europe, so I would say the Western Balkans is an example where we need to make such an effort.⁴⁷

19. We asked Sir Alan if the FCO was looking at trade opportunities in the Western Balkans. He said: “We see it as a trade opportunity and we would like to encourage business between us and them”. He added, however, that “although we want inward investment here, we would like [the WB6] to be countries where there is a benign and attractive climate for inward investment to them” and that the UK’s objective was to help entrench free trade and democracy.⁴⁸

20. The UK has long championed the Western Balkans on its path to peace and prosperity. We welcome the FCO’s assurance that this would continue after Brexit. It is, however, difficult to make a meaningful difference in a region beset by deeply-rooted problems. Moreover, there is a risk that the UK’s capacity to do so will be reduced if it is no longer involved in the EU accession process. *In its response to this report, the Government should set out what it wants to achieve in the Western Balkans over the next ten years, including specific milestones and metrics for success for trade and investment, aid and development, security and defence, and civil society. This should explain how the UK will work with its regional and EU partners, but it must also show that the UK has a credible and independent post-Brexit strategy for achieving its objectives in the region.*

21. UK businesses are not investing in the Western Balkans. If the UK is to build sustainable, mutually-beneficial bilateral relationships with the Western Balkans six, they must be based on more than security and development. Business should be part of a healthy bilateral relationship. *The FCO should explain what the Government is doing to increase UK trade with the Western Balkans.*

47 [Q110](#) [Sir Alan Duncan]

48 [Qq128–129](#) [Sir Alan Duncan]

4 The Berlin Process and the Western Balkans Summit

The Berlin Process thus far

22. The Summit in London in July will be the fifth under the Berlin Process. Several of those from whom we took evidence were positive about what the Process has achieved since 2014. We were told that its primary achievement was to send a signal to the WB6 that Europe is committed to their progress, however long EU accession might take.⁴⁹ Dr Economides also said that because the Process is inter-governmental, it is relieved of some of the “institutional constraints” that inhibit policy making in the EU. The Process “allows for the promotion of reforms and programmes of a highly technical nature which will not only result in real change but could also show a true EU commitment to the Western Balkans”.⁵⁰ Tena Prelec pointed to the establishment via the Berlin Process of a Regional Youth Cooperation Office in Albania and the setting up of RECOM, a regional council that aims to gather information about the conflicts of the 1990s.⁵¹ In addition, Michael Taylor told us, the Process has helped to resolve bilateral disputes and “supported regional cooperation in cross-border transport and energy ‘connectivity’”, while at the Western Balkans Summit in Trieste in 2017, the WB6 signed a treaty establishing a Transport Community.⁵²

23. Some also made the point that, by bringing the leaders of the WB6 together to work on a shared agenda, the Berlin Process has helped them to take ownership over their own reform agenda, rather than simply implementing what the EU requires of them. In his written submission, Dr Andi Hoxhaj told us that the Process “has made a great contribution in getting these countries to work constructively together in building good neighbourly relations, regional cooperation, increasing trade and increas[ing] connectivity”.⁵³ Dr Sanfey told us that the EBRD has hosted its own parallel biennial Western Balkan Summits since 2014 and that summits like this have fostered bonds between the region’s leaders, bringing about a recognition that “they are not competing with each other and they are willing to put aside some of the problems of the past”.⁵⁴

What the London Summit can achieve

24. Anastasakis, Drezov and Koneska told us that the Summit in July could “capitalise on the achievements of the Berlin Process” with an agenda focussed on “connectivity, investment and education, as the UK has a long tradition and experience to convey on these issues”. They also said that the Summit could include a security agenda “that takes into account the concerns of the people in the region: uppermost for them is personal security, organised crime, lack of rule of law and undemocratic excesses in their own governments”.⁵⁵ Tena Prelec said that there is a feeling that the Berlin Process “is a bit of a

49 Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#)), para 8; Dr Michael Taylor ([WBS0011](#)), para 4; Dr Spyros Economides ([WBS0012](#)), para 15

50 Dr Spyros Economides ([WBS0012](#)), paras 16–17

51 [Q11](#) [Tena Prelec]. See also Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#)), para 8

52 Dr Michael Taylor ([WBS0011](#)), para 5, 9

53 Dr Andi Hoxhaj ([WBS0002](#)), para 2

54 [Q44](#)

55 Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#)), para 10

photo opportunity, at which political leaders gather and issues are discussed but nothing really concrete is achieved”. But, she suggested, the London Summit could “spearhead a better way of holding the Berlin Process meetings” by, for example, better incorporating civil society meetings that take place throughout the year into the main meeting.⁵⁶ Similarly, Jessie Hronesova from Aktis Strategy and the University of Oxford said that the Summit offers “an opportunity to set out a new UK agenda for the region that would reinvigorate the Berlin Process”.⁵⁷ Peter Sanfey said that the Summit could also address the investment environment and that the key was to “create a single investment space”.⁵⁸

25. Broadly speaking, these issues are reflected in what the FCO told us about the agenda for the Summit. The FCO’s Western Balkans Summit Co-ordinator, Andrew Page, told us that the topics addressed at the Summit will include the digital economy and entrepreneurship, a range of security-related concerns, such as counter terrorism and the fight against violent extremism, as well as conflict legacy issues such as the tracing of missing people.⁵⁹ Fiona McIlwham added that the fight against corruption will be a particular focus of the Summit and that the UK would seek to secure “anti-corruption pledges” from the WB6 and try to identify what is “practical, meaningful and achievable over the next year”. She said that this complements the UK’s capacity building work on the ground.⁶⁰ Mr Page said that the WB6 “have welcomed the fact that we are helping them on this progress towards the EU, where they are going to have to counter the difficulties of organised crime and corruption”. He said that, for this reason, interior ministers will meet for the first time under the Process.⁶¹

26. Mr Page told us that the Government had ensured that civil society fed into preparations for the Summit and that it would be involved in the Summit itself. He said that there would be a “civil society debate” on 9 July, focussing on improving opportunities for young people in the region, the future of the Berlin Process, bilateral issues and legacy disputes. There would also be “spotlight events” to discuss anti-LGBT discrimination, gender quality and media freedom.⁶² Previously, Professor Ker-Lindsay had told us that the Summit would be limited because not enough civil society representatives would get visas to come to the UK.⁶³ However, Sir Alan assured us that the FCO had put a lot of effort into making sure that they would. Mr Page added that the FCO was on target to have 100 civil society organisations represented.⁶⁴

The Western Balkans Summit and Global Britain

27. The FCO told us that the July Summit underscores the UK’s “willingness to work with international partners to help the Western Balkans” and showcases UK involvement in “joint initiatives with European partners”.⁶⁵ The FCO said that the UK had been “working closely with many international partners” including Bulgaria and the EU institutions, to ensure coherent but distinct approaches for the WB6/EU28 Summit in May and the

56 [Q15](#)

57 Jessie Hronesova ([WBS0006](#)), para 9

58 [Q68](#)

59 [Q79](#) [Andrew Page]

60 [Q82](#) [Fiona McIlwham]

61 [Q82](#) [Andrew Page]

62 [Q86](#) [Andrew Page]; [Q95](#) [Andrew Page]; [Q96](#)

63 [Q16](#) [Professor Ker-Lindsay]

64 [Q86](#) [Andrew Page]

65 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), paras 1, 12

London Summit in July.⁶⁶ Andrew Page added that the Summit demonstrated that “we work differently with different countries on different topics”. For instance, he added, “we work closely with the French and Germans on combating the difficulties of small arms and light weapons coming from the Western Balkans”, “we work very closely with the Italians on anti-corruption” and “we are already talking to Poland ... about how we counter Russian disinformation in the region”.⁶⁷ The Minister of State for Europe suggested that this willingness to work with international partners demonstrates that the UK is leaving the EU but is still committed to Europe’s defence, security and stability. He added:

We are going to be fully involved—perhaps, indeed definitely, more so than before. The Balkans Summit allows us to make that point. The work we are doing on so many levels in these six countries illustrates in practice that we are doing this, and it proves, I think, for all those to see, that we are going to be a global country and not one that is introspective and shrinking.⁶⁸

Sir Alan said that increasing engagement in the Western Balkans is indicative of the Government’s vision for a post-Brexit Global Britain. He said that it shows that the UK “is seriously on the world map and is going to stay there”, despite a “very, very challenging historic phase” in “an increasingly unstable and changing world”.⁶⁹

28. We welcome the Government’s bold ambitions for the Western Balkans Summit and the determination this shows for the UK to remain engaged in the region. The Summit’s agenda covers a wide range of issues but it will be difficult to achieve meaningful progress on so many fronts and to make a real difference on the ground. For the Summit to be more than a photo opportunity, the Government must be willing to push for a robust communiqué that sets out the challenges ahead and what is required of each Berlin Process partner. This must be accompanied by a set of specific milestones.

29. The FCO should report to us the outcomes of the Summit, including civil society events, and tell us how it plans to ensure that pledges made at the Summit are followed through. The FCO should also reflect on the effectiveness of the Berlin Process, the feasibility of tackling so many issues in such a short space of time, and options for alternative and more focused ways for the Berlin Process partners to work together. In the light of concerns about local elites’ willingness to implement meaningful reforms, the report should also consider ways to increase civil society participation in the Western Balkans reform agenda.

30. The Berlin Process offers a model for UK diplomacy post-Brexit. It allows the UK to work on a bilateral basis with each of the Western Balkans six, on a regional basis with the six together, and with the EU and its Member States in various configurations on a range of issues related to the region. If the Government is to deliver its vision of a Global Britain more active than ever on the world stage, it needs to learn lessons from this way of working. This is particularly the case in Europe, where the UK may need to find new ways of working with its EU and European partners at a time of increasing instability in Europe’s neighbourhood.

66 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#)), para 4

67 [Q117](#)

68 [Q114](#)

69 [Q114](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

The uneasy path to peace and prosperity in the Western Balkans

1. The problems facing the Western Balkans are deeply-rooted and intricately interwoven. Its path to European integration will be long and halting and there is no guarantee of success. It is vital that the UK and its EU and NATO partners maintain their commitment to the region, but they must acknowledge the difficulties and risks involved and recognise that it will likely take a long time to make a substantive difference. (Paragraph 11)
2. Russia is willing to do what it can to disrupt the Western Balkans' path to stability and democracy. This is demonstrated by Russia's support for an attempted coup in Montenegro in 2016 and reports of Russian attempts to supply arms to militant groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, there is a risk that Russia will try to subvert or stop the ratification of the agreement recently reached between Greece and Macedonia to end their long-running name dispute, particularly in any referendum that may be held in Macedonia. (Paragraph 12)
3. *It is not for the UK to say whether the people of Greece and Macedonia should ratify the agreement recently reached between the two governments to resolve their name dispute. However, as one of the leading powers resisting Russian aggression, it is vital that the UK does what it can to help ensure that a decision can be made in a free, fair and open way. The FCO should tell us what the UK has done and will do, in concert with its regional, EU and NATO partners and allies, to ensure that the ratification process is not disrupted by malicious outside interference.* (Paragraph 13)

The UK's post-Brexit position in the Western Balkans

4. The UK has long championed the Western Balkans on its path to peace and prosperity. We welcome the FCO's assurance that this would continue after Brexit. It is, however, difficult to make a meaningful difference in a region beset by deeply-rooted problems. Moreover, there is a risk that the UK's capacity to do so will be reduced if it is no longer involved in the EU accession process. (Paragraph 20)
5. *In its response to this report, the Government should set out what it wants to achieve in the Western Balkans over the next ten years, including specific milestones and metrics for success for trade and investment, aid and development, security and defence, and civil society. This should explain how the UK will work with its regional and EU partners, but it must also show that the UK has a credible and independent post-Brexit strategy for achieving its objectives in the region.* (Paragraph 20)
6. UK businesses are not investing in the Western Balkans. If the UK is to build sustainable, mutually-beneficial bilateral relationships with the Western Balkans six, they must be based on more than security and development. Business should be part of a healthy bilateral relationship. (Paragraph 21)
7. *The FCO should explain what the Government is doing to increase UK trade with the Western Balkans.* (Paragraph 21)

The Berlin Process and the Western Balkans Summit

8. We welcome the Government's bold ambitions for the Western Balkans Summit and the determination this shows for the UK to remain engaged in the region. The Summit's agenda covers a wide range of issues but it will be difficult to achieve meaningful progress on so many fronts and to make a real difference on the ground. For the Summit to be more than a photo opportunity, the Government must be willing to push for a robust communiqué that sets out the challenges ahead and what is required of each Berlin Process partner. This must be accompanied by a set of specific milestones. (Paragraph 28)
9. *The FCO should report to us the outcomes of the Summit, including civil society events, and tell us how it plans to ensure that pledges made at the Summit are followed through. The FCO should also reflect on the effectiveness of the Berlin Process, the feasibility of tackling so many issues in such a short space of time, and options for alternative and more focused ways for the Berlin Process partners to work together. In the light of concerns about local elites' willingness to implement meaningful reforms, the report should also consider ways to increase civil society participation in the Western Balkans reform agenda.* (Paragraph 29)
10. The Berlin Process offers a model for UK diplomacy post-Brexit. It allows the UK to work on a bilateral basis with each of the Western Balkans six, on a regional basis with the six together, and with the EU and its Member States in various configurations on a range of issues related to the region. If the Government is to deliver its vision of a Global Britain more active than ever on the world stage, it needs to learn lessons from this way of working. This is particularly the case in Europe, where the UK may need to find new ways of working with its EU and European partners at a time of increasing instability in Europe's neighbourhood. (Paragraph 30)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 3 July 2018

Members present:

Tom Tugendhat, in the Chair

Ian Austin	Ian Murray
Chris Bryant	Andrew Rosindell
Ann Clwyd	Mr Bob Seely
Mike Gapes	Royston Smith
Stephen Gethins	

Draft Report (*Global Britain and the Western Balkans*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 30 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Wednesday 11 July at 2.15pm]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 22 May 2018

Question number

Sir Robert Cooper, former EU Diplomat, **Professor James Ker-Lindsay**, Senior Visiting Fellow, European Institute, London School of Economics, **Dr Cvete Koneska**, Senior Analyst, Europe, Control Risk consultancy, and **Ms Tena Prelec**, PhD Candidate, University of Sussex

[Q1–36](#)

Tuesday 5 June 2018

Dr Peter Sanfey, Deputy Director for Country Economics and Policy, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

[Q37–71](#)

Wednesday 13 June 2018

Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan KCMG MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, **Andrew Page**, Western Balkans Summit Co-ordinator, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and **Fiona McIlwham**, Director of the Western Balkans Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

[Q72–134](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

WBS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 British Council ([WBS0019](#))
- 2 Democratization Policy Council ([WBS0004](#))
- 3 Dr Andi Hoxhaj ([WBS0002](#))
- 4 Dr Denisa Kostovicova ([WBS0016](#))
- 5 Dr Dimitar Bechev ([WBS0007](#))
- 6 Dr Enkeleida Tahiraj ([WBS0014](#))
- 7 Dr Michael Taylor ([WBS0011](#))
- 8 Dr Spyros Economides ([WBS0012](#))
- 9 Dr Thomas Keighley ([WBS0005](#))
- 10 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development ([WBS0015](#))
- 11 European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs ([WBS0021](#))
- 12 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([WBS0009](#))
- 13 James Thornley ([WBS0020](#))
- 14 Jessie Hronesova ([WBS0006](#))
- 15 Miss Jenny Blake ([WBS0003](#))
- 16 Mr Shaun Leavey ([WBS0001](#))
- 17 Mr Timothy Less ([WBS0013](#))
- 18 Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska ([WBS0008](#))
- 19 Professor Kenneth Morrison ([WBS0010](#))
- 20 Protection Approaches ([WBS0017](#))
- 21 Stonewall ([WBS0018](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response	HC 435
Second Report	The future of UK diplomacy in Europe	HC 514
Third Report	Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK	HC 518
Fourth Report	2017 elections to the International Court of Justice	HC 860
Fifth Report	The UK's response to hurricanes in its Overseas Territories	HC 722
Sixth Report	Global Britain	HC 780
Seventh Report	Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit	HC 831
Eighth Report	Moscow's Gold: Russian Corruption in the UK	HC 932
Ninth Report	The FCO's preparations for the 2018 World Cup	HC 1011
First Special Report	The United Kingdom's relations with Russia: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 322
Second Special Report	The UK's relations with Turkey: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 333
Third Special Report	'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2016–17	HC 334
Fourth Special Report	Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 868
Fifth Special Report	The future of UK diplomacy in Europe: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 918
Sixth Special Report	Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 983
Seventh Special Report	2017 elections to the International Court of Justice: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1012

Eighth Special Report	Article 50 negotiations: Implications of “No Deal”: Government response to the Committee’s Ninth Report	HC 1053
Ninth Special Report	The UK’s response to hurricanes in its Overseas Territories: Government response to the Committee’s 5th Report	HC 1052
Tenth Special Report	Global Britain: Government response to the Committee’s 6th Report	HC 1236