

Press release: UK hosts Western Balkans Summit

The Western Balkans Summit concluded yesterday (10 July) with Prime Minister Theresa May welcoming the six Western Balkan leaders to London, alongside other European figures including German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki.

At the Summit, the Prime Minister welcomed the signing of Joint Declarations on Good Neighbourly Relations, War Crimes and Missing Persons by leaders of the Berlin Process. Leaders congratulated Prime Ministers Zev and Tsipras on securing agreement on the Name Issue. In support of these declarations, the UK will commit to an additional £1 million to help the region address difficult legacy issues.

The Prime Minister also announced at the Summit that the UK will increase its funding to the region to £80m in 2020/21 and will double the number of UK staff working in the region on the security issues affecting the UK and the Western Balkans. This will help prevent crime reaching UK streets and also help strengthen the region's own response to serious and organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The UK will also invest £1m in the region's cyber capability.

The Summit was the culmination of preparatory meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Security, and Economy and Finance Ministers in Vienna and London.

At the meeting of Foreign Ministers in London on 9 July, Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan announced that the UK will 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 to children in over 4,500 schools, to bolster digital literacy and core skills across the region. Foreign Ministers also heard directly from young people and civil society groups from the region and congratulated the winners of the Youth Entrepreneurship "Start Up" Games.

Sir Alan also announced a new £4m programme to expand Westminster Foundation for Democracy across the Western Balkans.

In parallel, at the meeting of Interior and Security Ministers chaired by Home Secretary Sajid Javid, Western Balkans ministers signed a Joint Declaration on the Principles of Information-Exchange in the Field of Law Enforcement, committing them to deeper cooperation on tackling transnational serious and organised crime and terrorism.

Participants also endorsed a Franco-German initiative to combat the illicit possession, misuse and trafficking of firearms from the region by 2024 and

welcomed the endorsement of the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, and Human Trafficking by the Western Balkans. As next year's hosts, Poland's Interior Minister Joachim Brudziński confirmed that their Summit will continue the UK's security agenda.

At the meeting of Ministers of Economy and Finance in Vienna on 4 July, co-chaired by Sir Simon McDonald, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Permanent Under Secretary and Austrian Minister Schramboeck, Western Balkans' ministers agreed to deepen regional economic integration.

Further information

[Press release: New scheme to fight plastics pollution gains Government grant funding](#)

The Government has announced a package of funding and support for UK Overseas Territories.

The new projects will see a scheme to reduce and monitor plastic pollution on the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean and a new data collecting and reporting system for Montserrat to help create long-term sustainable fisheries.

At the same time, the [Darwin Plus](#) scheme today opens for the latest round of applications to fund conservation and environmental projects in UK Overseas Territories. [Darwin Plus](#) will deliver on flagship commitments set out in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) in UK Overseas Territories around the globe.

The new scheme on St Helena will aim to reduce the amount of plastic used by those living on the island and will establish a recycling programme for waste plastic. As part of this project, a marine debris monitoring programme will be established along St Helena's coastline to better understand this issue. Local school children and communities will be engaged in the project through an educational outreach programme.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove said:

We must protect our oceans and marine life from plastic waste if we are to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity in the UK's Overseas Territories will help to make crucial activities such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism more sustainable.

[St Helena Government's](#) Director of Environment & Natural Resources, Derek Henry, said:

This project provides a fantastic opportunity for St Helena to become involved in reducing the amount of plastic that enters our marine ecosystem. It will involve the whole community and will educate and set up the processes for monitoring and reducing plastic waste to create a better marine environment around our Island.

During June, the St Helena National Trust Marine Team and the St Helena Government Marine Section and four Prince Andrew School students, walked to [Sharks Valley on the island for a beach clean-up](#). More than 1,000 plastic bottles, 1,540 pieces of polystyrene, 50 fishing buoys/floats and 124 flip-flops and shoes were collected by the volunteers.

The island has a huge array of fish and marine life along with coral ecosystems and plastic pollution in the South Atlantic Ocean could threaten these species and their habitats. Amongst a wide range of migratory birds that make the island their home, the Saint Helena Plover, is the symbol of the island and also known locally as the Wirebird.

Darwin Plus

Further support through the Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund (also known as Darwin Plus) provides funding for:

- Environmental projects in UK Overseas Territories
- Fellowships for UK Overseas Territories (OT) Nationals to train in the UK

Since the start of 2018, the Darwin Plus funding has been awarded to 13 projects in South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha, Falkland Islands, Montserrat and other UK Overseas Territories.

The fund is administered by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for International Development (DFID) and uses the UK Government's Official Development Assistance.

Professor Stephen Blackmore, [Chair of the Darwin Plus Advisory Group](#) said:

The range of the projects funded by Darwin Plus in the UK's Overseas Territories shows how we can effect change and better support and protect biodiversity around the globe. I am proud that we are delivering Darwin Plus funding to benefit animal and plant species and their habitats, which are vital to humanity's economic and social development.

A [full list of projects](#) currently being supported by Darwin Plus is available

on the Darwin Initiative website.

[Press release: Commission for Countering Extremism launches evidence drive](#)

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) is today (Wednesday 11 July) launching an intensive period of evidence gathering with the aim of publishing a first-of-its-kind study into all forms of extremism.

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan says she is willing to be as radical as needed, when it comes to looking at how to counter extremism in the future.

Neither the issue of terrorism nor the government's counter terrorism strategy (which includes Prevent) are in the CCE's remit.

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan says she wants to show people the deep, chronic harm extremism causes in communities.

In the coming months, the CCE will review existing academic evidence on extremism, commission bespoke research and issue a public call for evidence. Sara wants to hear from victims, their families and all those that counter extremism.

The government has already committed to sharing information with the commission.

The CCE will also ask regulators, local councils and police forces, universities and other public and private bodies to share information on extremism.

The evidence drive and comprehensive study will, Sara explains, help build greater understanding of extremism and engage more people than ever in tackling it.

Marking the launch Sara reveals she has already met more than 300 experts and activists, and visited ten towns and cities.

She has identified critical issues for the Commission to investigate as part of its study:

- communities are deeply concerned about extremism – the CCE will investigate the scale of the problem; the changing tactics of extremists and the harm extremism causes in communities

- we have the start of a powerful counter extremism movement but brave individuals and groups face abuse and vilification – the CCE will investigate the current response to extremism and how we can help everyone to do more challenge extremism
- the public debate on extremism is increasingly polarised, leaving some nervous about speaking out – the CCE will consider how we can have a constructive and civilised debate on the issue

In a further announcement, Sara today confirms that she has created a new Expert Group to advise and challenge the CCE on its work.

The experienced and diverse panel includes grassroots activists; individuals with decades of frontline experience; leading figures on Far Right and Islamist extremism, experts on social media and campaigners on freedom of speech. (the full list is below).

The group will meet around four times over the coming year to advise and challenge the lead commissioner.

Sara was asked by the previous Home Secretary to lead the CCE in January.

In March, the CCE was formally launched as an independent body, with the publication of a charter outlining its independent role.

Sara agreed the following three objectives for her first year: publish a comprehensive study; engage widely, building a network of counter extremists; and establish a robust commission making recommendations about its future structure.

Today's announcements come after Lead Commissioner Sara Khan met the Home Secretary Sajid Javid to update him on the work of the CCE shortly after his appointment.

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan said:

This is an important moment for the commission as we move from our introductory phase to a period of intensive evidence gathering, with the aim of publishing a first-of-its-kind study.

I've already met with more than 300 experts and activists. Communities are deeply concerned about the impact of extremism.

Extremism is sowing division and hate, spreading fear and undermining democratic values and human rights.

But it's also complex and changing – in 2018 the old stereotypes of Far-Right thugs and Islamist hate preachers don't always apply.

Whether it's Far Right, Islamist or other forms of extremism, we need to investigate their changing tactics such as a new-found

professionalism; the intellectualising of hate and abusing the power of social media.

There are brave, inspiring counter extremists up and down the country making a difference despite threats and abuse. I believe we have the start of a powerful counter extremism movement.

We need to understand modern day extremism better, so we can help more people to challenge it. That is why this study is so important.

The public debate on extremism is increasingly polarised, leaving some nervous about speaking out. We need to investigate how we improve the debate around extremism, so it's more constructive.

We must be prepared to follow the evidence and to be as radical as necessary when it comes to countering extremism.

Evidence gathering

In the coming months, the CCE will:

- work with research experts to assess current academic evidence and pinpoint the gaps. The CCE will use the government definition of extremism as a starting point for this stage. Its work and research, however, will not be limited by this definition
- work with experts and activists at local and national levels, including government, to prioritise work to address the gaps
- use this assessment as a springboard to commission bespoke pieces of research on critical issues
- consult the public, including asking them to submit evidence, and visiting communities affected by extremism
- the government has already committed to sharing information with the commission – the CCE will also ask regulators, local councils and police forces, universities and other public and private bodies to share information on extremism

Expert Group

- Sir David Anderson KBE QC, former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation

- Jamie Bartlett, author and Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos
- Professor Chetan Bhatt, Director, Centre for the Study of Human Rights, LSE
- Dame Louise Casey DBE CB, led a review into opportunity and integration in some of our most isolated communities
- Sasha Havlicek, Chief Executive of the Institute of Strategic Dialogue
- Dr Azeem Ibrahim, author and Research Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute
- Sunder Katwala, Director, British Future
- Nick Lowles MBE, Chief Executive, Hope Not Hate
- Katie Morris, Head of Europe and Central Asia, Article 19
- Fiyaz Mughal OBE FCMI, founder and director of Faith Matters and founder of Tell Mama
- Pragna Patel, Director, Southall Black Sisters
- Sir Mark Rowley KB QPM, former Assistant Commissioner Metropolitan Police

Full biographies will be available on the [Commission's blog](#)

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[Speech: Women, Peace and the Security in the Sahel](#)

Well, thank you very much indeed Minister for being with us again today. It's fantastic to have you here and thank you for all the work Sweden has done on this important dossier. Particularly, for keeping it at the forefront of our minds in the Security Council and the way you have tried to ensure that these issues are properly integrated and that the Security Council and the UN more generally gets out of the silos that we're all familiar with. A huge thank you obviously to Ms. Diop and to the Deputy-Secretary-General for leading this mission. I think it's an incredibly important event. Like other speakers, I think it would be an excellent thing if it were to be regular. As my Dutch colleague said, there are lots of areas of the world that would benefit from your insights and your engagement. You can't be everywhere but I think you've made an incredibly good start on this occasion.

I was particularly interested in the assessment of the level of women's participation in decision making and in peace and development processes and I was struck by the same comment about "prefer not to be raped" as my Dutch colleague but I think even more than that was the interest shown by the people you talk to in producing more female candidates. And I think if we had only one thing we could concentrate on, to build that pipeline for the future and to start changing behaviours through governments, I think will be definitely worth thinking further about.

I'd like to say at the outset, Madam President, that we in the UK fully share your goal of having full delivery of [Resolution] 1325 by 2020. So you can count on Britain to work with you here and in Geneva at the United Nations to realize that. I think as other speakers have hinted, the question of women's economic empowerment and their enjoyment of human rights and their role within their families and communities is something that needs to be nurtured and curated. And this is not just a moral issue. This is an economic issue. It's a prosperity issue. Those countries will thrive who properly make use of and develop all the talents of their people. And I think the Kazakh Ambassador set it out very well when he talked about the link between security and development. So we do everyone a favour by intensifying this link between women's participation in economic life and the foundation of peace and security.

And from our perspective, we would like to see even more effort be dedicated to integrating a gender perspective in strategies including those about countering violent extremism and we would like to see more women's involvement in policy planning – so right at the ground floor and I think that was one of the conclusions of the Informal Expert Group on Women Peace and Security in June.

We heard a lot yesterday in the Children in Armed Conflict debate about the stigma of women returnees being disproportionately targeted when they go back to their communities and I think that's just worth putting on the table again today. It would be very good to hear from the countries themselves what can be done to address that particular issue.

Specifically on the Sahel, the United Kingdom is increasing our regional presence in the Sahel. We opened a mission in Chad in March this year. Chad and Niger sadly sit at the bottom, as I understand it, of the gender equality index and that's why we in the UK want to do more to help those colleagues develop women's empowerment. And I think the efforts that the Security Council, the U.N. system, the African Union and the G5 themselves have undertaken so far to ensure that we can fine-tune adequate measures to empower women is a very good step forward.

From our perspective, we concentrate a lot on providing reproductive health services to displaced populations and refugees and we are prioritising access to voluntary family planning for future support. We spend a lot of our programme funds on climate and environment resilience in eastern Chad and the BRACED program commits to 50 percent women beneficiaries and includes the component on gender-based violence. So I think all those things are contributing, I hope, to what we're talking about today.

We also have a partnership with France arising out of the Anglo-French summit in January to work on gender within the Alliance Sahel; supporting greater mainstreaming on gender across the work of that alliance and if there are other colleagues in the United Nations who would like to know more about that, or even contribute with us, we've been very happy to work with other colleagues on that.

You, Madam President, particularly mentioned education and girls education and again we spoke about that yesterday under the heading of Children in Armed Conflict. I'd just like to highlight that in the Sahel millions of children and youth are out of school, thanks to the presence of terrorist groups, the militias; the conflict between farmers and herders; the difficult economic situation experienced by many families; and of course girls are particularly affected. Sometimes it's because of very basic things like schools lacking hygiene facilities to accommodate the particular needs of girls. The Sahel region, as we heard, has one of the highest rates of child, early and forced marriage in the world. So, the barriers to girls enjoying a proper education are very severe. The United Kingdom therefore has been concentrating on what we call the Girls Education Challenge and it is already working to support 1.5 million girls achieve a quality education. We are one of the largest donors to 'Education Cannot Wait' which Chad is one of the four initial investment countries. So, I just wanted to give a snapshot, Madam President, of some of the things we've been doing but to say how much we share your view that this is an absolutely critical part of being able to embed peace, security and stability in an important region. Thank you.