

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The Western Balkans – 13 June 2018, HC 1013

Wednesday 13 June 2018

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Bob Seely; Royston Smith.

Questions 72-134

Witnesses

I: 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.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon. Sir Alan Duncan KCMG MP, Andrew Page and Fiona McIlwham.



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Chair: Welcome, Minister, and thank you for attending this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Welcome, Mr Page and Ms McIlwham; it is very nice to see you. Ms McIlwham is a very old friend so it is a particular pleasure.

Q72 **Mike Gapes:** Thank you for coming. What do the six Western Balkans countries want from us as the host of the summit?

Sir Alan Duncan: You started to introduce my officials; Andrew is the co-ordinator for the summit, and Fiona is the head of our Western Balkans department.

I think they recognise that this is an important continuation of an ongoing process that started in 2014—the Berlin Process. They see us as having been a significant influence in the region and as a country that continues to take a deep and constructive interest in the region, in terms of both defence and security and wanting to see political progress and the reconciliation of legacy issues. They are looking more and more towards the European model on which to base an improvement in their economic and political prospects. They see our engagement and involvement as an entirely positive influence.

Q73 **Mike Gapes:** What do we expect or want from them? What are we doing to get it?

Sir Alan Duncan: First, we want them to turn up—and hope that they will. Of course, it is not just us, because the process involves other countries as well. Obviously, Chancellor Merkel is a significant figure in the process, given that she launched it.

And, look, it is a continuum. These summits are not momentous in the sense that they are designed to be a conclusive moment which solves all problems; they are part of a continuing process in the history of six countries who emerged from conflict only two decades ago and are making significant progress in terms of NATO accession and having aspirations to join the European Union.

There are legacy issues, one of which, I am pleased to say, would appear last night to have been solved: the Macedonian name issue, which I can advise the Committee a little more on in a minute, if you so wish. I think they want to be helped to be drawn ever more deeply into the family of nations by entrenching proper democratic values and economic progress in each of these six countries.

Q74 **Mike Gapes:** On the Macedonian issue, so far I think it is just an agreement between the Prime Ministers of the two countries. It has to go through a political process in both countries.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes.

Q75 **Mike Gapes:** And therefore the Greek Parliament, where there is a minority Government, will have a say. And presumably different groups in



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Macedonia—or Northern Macedonia—will also have an internal discussion.

Sir Alan Duncan: As a young oil trader, I was always told that a deal is only done when the money is in the bank. The same sort of applies to this. But this massive first step of agreement between the Prime Ministers is potentially one that will be seen as the moment when an historic breakthrough was established.

There are, of course, processes of endorsement that now need to follow, but the fact that they have reached agreement after 20 years, really, of disagreement and inability, as it were, to have a contract is fantastically good news. We have been involved in this—of course, the UN have been driving it—but crucially at this stage we should give massive praise and credit to the two Prime Ministers themselves, who in a very enlightened and responsible way have shaken hands on a deal which is crucial to the progress of the Western Balkans and can really develop much deeper regional harmony and progress. This is very, very, very good news, and we welcome it unreservedly.

- Q76 **Mike Gapes:** I agree. I remember discussions when I chaired this Committee 10 or 12 years ago: at that point everyone thought there might be a breakthrough, but it never quite happened.

Sir Alan Duncan: We have been batting about dots and commas now for quite a few weeks. At the Sofia Western Balkans summit—Bulgaria has the EU presidency at the moment and therefore hosted it—it looked as though the deal was about to be done. There was a moment of euphoria, and then suddenly the next day it was, “Oh, actually we ain’t quite there.” But now, three weeks later or thereabouts, it would appear that this is a solid understanding, and very, very good news.

- Q77 **Chair:** May I go on? On that very point, Sir Alan, you are quite right that this is fantastic news—first of all, all credit to the two Prime Ministers and to the UN for facilitating it. Will you speak a little about what the Foreign Office are going to do to support both nations? Perhaps more specifically, we all sadly have rather a lot of experience now of various outside parties playing internal politics in that region—without referencing any one nation in particular—so will Her Majesty’s Government be involved in supporting the two individual nations to get ratification through their own systems, and to avoid interlopers playing politics?

Sir Alan Duncan: I would start by saying that we have to be very careful not to appear to interfere in another country’s domestic politics—

Chair: Of course.

Sir Alan Duncan: We see our role as that of facilitator and encourager. To that end, I think the timing of the Western Balkans Summit is actually very fortuitous. We are obviously very conscious of the perils of referendums, and of course that was also one of the issues that affected the ultimate failure, sadly, of the Cyprus unification talks. Taking it to the Parliament or to the people is a very important stage, which has to be handled extremely adeptly by the political leaders in each of these two



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countries. But I commend them for, first, having reached an agreement and, secondly, being prepared to take a measure of political risk, which has shown courage and vision. That is what we would like to encourage.

I hope that the Western Balkans Summit in London in July will assist the wider appreciation of the merits of this deal not only widely across the world, of course, but particularly in the two countries affected.

- Q78 **Chair:** I am coming back to the referendum for the very obvious reason that we have seen foreign interference in democratic processes around the region. I don't think anyone here is encouraging us to get involved in the referendum; it is more to make sure that others don't. Here we are talking about not just the simple old forms of interference that people used to get into, but the more modern forms. We are aware that now Her Majesty's Government have a much greater capability to assist with identifying attempts at foreign interference. Will you be offering this to the Macedonians?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think I can confidently say that we will. I haven't discussed it yet in such terms, so this is a speculative yes, but I think you are absolutely right, and the Committee is right, to point out the dangers of foreign interference through social media or the airwaves in a way that is designed to destabilise, rather than to entrench something that is good. We have to be on our guard, and I am sure we will offer every assistance that we possibly can.

Chair: We welcome that and very much thank you.

- Q79 **Mike Gapes:** I go back to the summit and the arrangements for it. Which Departments will be involved in the summit?

Sir Alan Duncan: Well, most and many. We are in the lead on this. Andrew on my right, the whole of the Western Balkans team and others in the Foreign Office have been working on this for the best part of a year. That includes of course the apparatus of No. 10, as it will involve the Prime Minister and other Prime Ministers. There will be a meeting in Vienna of Economy Ministers, and we are also inviting Interior Ministers—Home Office—and Foreign Ministers. There will be elements in the agenda that will encourage NGOs and civil society, and issues such as LGBT ones will be raised in that sort of forum. So it is quite a wide spectrum. I shall just check with Fiona McIlwham in case I have missed any crucial Department that should have been on the list.

Fiona McIlwham: The Department for International Trade is also involved, because of—Andrew could say more on this—the programme around global entrepreneurship. It really is a full-spectrum and all-encompassing HMG effort. Andrew might want to add to that.

Andrew Page: I would simply add to what Sir Alan said. You absolutely identified the four ministerial meetings—the three ministerial meetings plus the heads—and of course preparation for the thematic areas, for the plenary discussions, involves a lot of Departments. On the side of the Foreign Ministers, it is particularly Foreign Ministry, but we are also looking



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at digital issues, which involves DCMS; and, as Fiona says, at what we can do to encourage entrepreneurs, which involves the DIT. On the security side, Interior Ministers will discuss a large nexus of security-related issues, which are common challenges and bring in other Government Departments in Whitehall—not just the Home Office but the National Crime Agency, HMRC and those working to counter terrorism and violent extremism. So quite a broad spectrum of Government Departments are involved.

On the economy side, when Economy Ministers meet, that will involve a lot of other international organisations. Therefore, that brings into play other Government Departments in London that are involved on the economic side, including the Treasury and DFID.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am very pleased to say that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has agreed to host a reception at St James's Palace. He has always taken a personal interest in missing persons, so to have that icing on the cake is much appreciated.

Q80 **Mike Gapes:** Good. You mentioned No. 10; what is the role of the Cabinet Office in this very complex arrangement?

Sir Alan Duncan: As always, its tentacles reach everywhere, but on the actual wiring diagram of organisations, perhaps Andrew is best placed to explain.

Andrew Page: First, the Prime Minister met all six of the Western Balkans Prime Ministers at the EBRD summit that took place in February, when she hosted a reception for them after the EBRD summit in the city. Secondly, she went to the Sofia summit where all the EU28 and the Western Balkans 6 were involved. Immediately after that, she visited Macedonia. Indeed, she has been chairing National Security Council meetings on the subject of the Western Balkans. Her engagement has been very prominent and continuous. Likewise, No. 10's interest in the details of the summit has been ongoing ever since the summit team was born in October. It is following very closely the detail of all the programmes, the component parts and the initiatives that we have planned.

Q81 **Mike Gapes:** You said "following" the progress; I understand that the Cabinet Office is actually conducting its own research into the Western Balkans ahead of the summit. Is that unusual? Surely, it would be the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that normally would do that, would it not?

Andrew Page: Research? Perhaps I should have said not "following" but "driving" by No. 10. It is being very instrumental in helping to shape our summit and has been from the outset. On the research side, the Foreign Office has done and continues regularly to do a lot of research, as do all our missions in the region. That feeds into the policy areas that we have identified as priorities for our summit.

Mike Gapes: But the Cabinet Office is also doing its own, as I understand.



Andrew Page: I am not sure quite what you are referring to.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am puzzled; there is the cyber dimension and things like that, which perhaps fall within that network, but it is not something that duplicates or substitutes what we are doing in the Foreign Office. It is a proper part of joined-up government in addition to what we are doing.

Q82 **Chris Bryant:** We had witnesses before us in the last session who talked about the problems in building more trade with the Western Balkans and helping to build the economies there. They highlighted corruption and the black or alternative economy—whatever you want to call it—as being one of the most significant areas. How much emphasis will you put on that in the summit? Where do you think ongoing British support can lie?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think the issue of corruption in some of these countries that has emerged from their past over the last quarter of a century is so important. We are always at pains to do our best to stress the importance of and implement the rule of law in these countries.

One particular dimension we will focus on is that of organised crime, where being able to follow the money and the people in a much more collaborative way will be a very important part of the agenda we are trying to champion at this summit. That, if you like, is a dimension of corruption, in addition to what you have in your mind of political enrichment by people. Corruption can mean so many different things. In the Foreign Office I always try to ask people to say which bit of it they are really talking about. It will form part of the agenda. If either of my officials wish to add anything on the corruption theme, please do so.

Fiona McIlwham: Indeed, building on that, we are seeking to secure anti-corruption pledges from countries in the region, building on the London summit model¹. We are also building on what the Italians did when they hosted an equivalent summit last year. They put a particular emphasis on anti-corruption. We are building on that, working with the countries and identifying what they can do that is practical, meaningful and achievable over the next year. They will be making forward commitments on that. On an ongoing basis, we engage in capacity building and interventions that seek to tackle corruption as part of our programmatic effort and our co-operation through the Home Office and others on the ground.

Andrew Page: Might I add one point, Chairman? When the Commission published their enlargement strategy and in February, one of their six flagship initiatives was the importance of tackling serious organised crime and corruption. We have been working very closely with the Commission on that, as well as with the partners in the Berlin Process. Indeed, the countries of the Western Balkans 6 themselves have welcomed the fact that we are helping on this progress towards the EU, where they are going to have to counter the difficulties of organised crime and corruption. This

¹ Note from witness: should read as ‘...building on the London summit [on anti-corruption] model.’



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is a new element in our summit, compared with the four previous Berlin Process summits. The fact that the Interior Ministers will be meeting at 14 is an innovation. We are very encouraged by how much that has been welcomed by the Western Balkans 6 countries themselves.

- Q83 Chris Bryant:** We were more hands-on 10 years ago, when we had British troops as part of EUFOR in Banja Luka stopping illegal logging and effectively doing policing jobs, rather than historically military jobs. How do you deal with those problems in a country like Bosnia, which is now divided into silos that seem to be splitting further apart than they were 10 years ago?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think Fiona is best equipped to answer that, because her experience goes back a long way.

Fiona McIlwham: It is an ongoing challenge. The posture of the international community has shifted. It is less about boots, and more about practical, programmatic assistance. Our footprint, in terms of tackling some of these security threats, includes more Home Office and NCA—

- Q84 Chris Bryant:** Are there any policing boots?

Fiona McIlwham: There are across the international community. It is recognised as an ongoing challenge. In Bosnia, there is an added complexity, because of the complicated governance structure. As Andrew highlighted, the Commission strategy and our assessment of key partners are consistent. We need to look at how we can strengthen the law enforcement capability, so they can tackle crime at home and partner with us in tackling those threats. That is a focus of the summit.

- Q85 Chris Bryant:** Is it your impression that Bosnia is a happier place than it was 10 years ago, or are the silos even stronger? Do youngsters go only to their religion's schools, do people work and live only in their religion's community, and all the rest of it? Is that worse than it was 10 years ago?

Fiona McIlwham: We are very concerned about the situation in Bosnia. There is increased tension again. There is an election coming up, so tension always increases in that context. Regardless of that, it is not as cohesive as we would want it to be. We would certainly have hoped that Bosnia would be in a different place 10 years on. There is appreciation of that from key partners. We have been very active in our diplomacy, but also in our operational and programmatic support. We led an intervention with the Germans to try to animate Bosnia's accession path, but we are also looking at how we can bolster some of the institutions and strengthen the cohesion within Bosnia, whether that is through a bottom-up boosting of economic development, or through harder-edged security and capacity building.

- Q86 Chris Bryant:** Just one other thing from me on civil society. Obviously, you mostly talked about Government Ministers and that set of people. Are civil society getting visas to come here to take part in that?



Sir Alan Duncan: Yes is the answer. We have put a lot of effort into making sure that is possible, so you get the real people here in London to participate in considerable numbers.

Andrew Page: May I amplify that a little, to inform Mr Bryant that we are doing absolutely as much as we can, given the visa constraints, to make sure that civil society are involved, not only in the preparatory months—giving their own views, doing their own policy papers, and feeding into the policy-making process and the discussions at plenary—but also in the two days of the summit itself, on 9 and 10 July. We acted well in advance in order for them all to be able to apply for their visas. Our intention is to have a civil society event involving well over 100 civil society and youth groups on day one of the summit, and at the moment we look on target for that.

Q87 **Mr Seely:** Parking the fact that visa constraints are a massive issue across Eastern Europe—really, we are shooting ourselves in the foot—just to follow up what Chris was saying about the insecurity in Bosnia, I understand that the Russians have been rearming the Bosnian Serbs. Do you understand this to be correct? What is the scale of that rearmament? What do you think the purpose of it is?

Fiona McIlwham: EUFOR, which is the military presence and the command, has been asked to produce a report for us, and we await the assessment. What we do know is that there has been a disproportionate purchase of certain weaponry, not only by Serb groups but across Bosnia-Herzegovina. So we await the full assessment. There is a high level of weaponry across Bosnia, but the point of concern is a recent purchase of new longer-armed weapons².

Q88 **Mr Seely:** Yes. A lot of kit that has been bought does not seem to have much purpose unless it is to stockpile weapons in order to use them. Would you agree with that statement?

Fiona McIlwham: I am trying to understand and get a fuller picture.

Q89 **Mr Seely:** Okay. You are not really answering the question, though. I understand that there is a report and you do not want to answer the question until you see that report, but there is plenty of evidence—reports from think-tanks and other places—that the Russians have been arming the Bosnian Serbs. Are you willing to give me a yes or no on that? Are you willing to think about or give me an indication on this?

Fiona McIlwham: We are very concerned about this purchase of weaponry—indeed, it was a point of discussion at a recent peace implementation council in Sarajevo, and I think it was mentioned precisely because of not just UK concern but broader international concern about the implications of that.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think their claim was that this was for legitimate policing. We have raised concerns directly with law enforcement agencies

² Note from witness, should read as ...'new long barrelled weapons.'



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in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have told us that the purchases followed the appropriate legal procedures, including approvals from state-level bodies. That of course does not mean that the purpose you are thinking they might be put to is not a valid question, but there is no yes/no answer to this because we do not know—how can we? But the concern is definitely there, and to see weaponry of this sort being introduced on such a scale is a very worrying development—and in our view a potentially backward one.

- Q90 **Mr Seely:** You are saying that it is not just the Bosnian Serbs doing that but other groups as well. Are the Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats also purchasing weapons, or is it predominantly thus far the Bosnian Serbs who are purchasing weapons, or having weapons purchased and supplied for them?

Fiona McIlwham: I think the purchase recently was made by the Bosnian Serbs—but following legal procedures, as the Minister rightly set out.

- Q91 **Mr Seely:** And you believe that they are getting that kit from the Russians.

Fiona McIlwham: That I simply cannot answer. We await the report.

Mr Seely: Thank you.

- Q92 **Chris Bryant:** Will you send us the report when you get it—or whatever is possible—

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. That will depend on classification and all that kind of stuff—

Fiona McIlwham: Yes, and the source.

Sir Alan Duncan: Of course, we are very happy to share any information we feel we are permitted to share with you.

- Q93 **Mr Seely:** There are publicly available reports which name the amount of kit that has been purchased. I do not know if you have seen those reports.

Fiona McIlwham: Sorry?

Mr Seely: There are publicly available reports listing the kit that has been purchased. Would you like me to send you those reports, if you have not seen them?

Sir Alan Duncan: We are happy to. In my view, this is slightly adrift from what we understand to be the focus of the inquiry in advance of the summit, so we had not been specifically briefed on weapons sales, but inasmuch as we can compare notes and offer information, we will of course be very willing to do so.

- Q94 **Chair:** I understand. We are just interested in Russian activity in the region—

Sir Alan Duncan: Understandably so.



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Chair: —as it affects not only the summit, but any outcome of the summit, and that is why I have allowed that.

Mr Seely: The stability of Bosnia is pretty much at the heart of this.

Chair: Indeed. I think we have just covered that.

Q95 **Ann Clwyd:** Can I get back to civil society and the role it will play in the summit? How many people will get visas to come here as part of the civil society group?

Andrew Page: My most recent estimate—I am happy for you to correct me if I am wrong—is that about 150 have been invited.

Sir Alan Duncan: That is the figure I saw. It is a substantial number.

Andrew Page: We are on target to achieve around 100 or just over at a civil society debate that will take place on the morning of the Foreign Ministers' meeting on 9 July.

Q96 **Ann Clwyd:** What issues are they most likely to be interested in?

Andrew Page: Our proposal is that at the debate there should be discussion of how we can improve perspectives for the younger generation in the Western Balkans, which is very important in the context of high youth unemployment, and that there should also be discussion of the future of the Berlin Process and resolution of bilateral issues and disputes. At spotlight events, which we are also planning on the day, there will be discussion of discrimination issues—including LGBT, as the Minister says, but also gender equality issues—and quite likely also media freedom, among the topics that will be of importance to civil society.

Q97 **Ann Clwyd:** You have identified a political aim of helping to resolve bilateral disputes and address legacy issues from the wars of the 1990s, including untraced and missing people.

Andrew Page: Yes.

Ann Clwyd: I am particularly interested in that aspect of it, because I was involved in it myself in Iraq and I know how important it is to the people who are still looking for missing people and want answers on what happened to them. How will you approach that?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is a massively important issue. In the Falklands, for instance, we have just had a similar exercise of DNA testing of deceased soldiers in the Darwin Cemetery. Even such a long time after the conflict, it is of massive importance to the families who wish to have closure, and that applies in this region too. Missing persons are a crucial issue; the Prince of Wales has taken a long-standing interest in it, and we are delighted that he will be championing it further in his reception in July.

On bilateral issues, we mentioned one earlier. If we can see the name change agreement permanently banked, that is a crucial legacy issue that we will be able to put behind us and benefit from. There are also some border issues. We are very wary of any proposals to do land swaps and would rather not risk any further instabilities, so we are certainly making



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our view clear on that, as is the EU more widely. Those legacy issues will be on the agenda on 9 and 10 July.

- Q98 **Ann Clwyd:** I wonder whether you have drawn on the experience of people who have dealt with similar issues in countries such as Iraq. I know there was a group of British archaeologists, for example, who were involved in training people in Iraq to look for missing persons, etc. It would be good to look at their experience, and maybe for those people to talk to the people coming through the Balkans about how they are continuing to investigate—because it has not come to an end.

Andrew Page: I have been very impressed by the levels of expertise that exist in organisations such as the International Commission on Missing Persons and the International Committee of the Red Cross—and not just at international level, but in also other NGOs that are very active in this area in the region. We have been working in close co-ordination with them. My understanding is that some of these international organisations have very good experience of other conflicts where missing persons issues have arisen, and we therefore want to work with the experts. In that context, we have also had a lot of contact with them and through them with the national associations for missing persons. We have invested a lot of diplomacy and effort on this issue, from London and through our embassies, over an extended period of time, and we are trying to use the summit as a kind of impetus to make further progress.

The number of missing persons, which I expect you are familiar with, was well over 40,000 in the whole of the former Yugoslavia as a result of the conflict. About 70% or so of those have been found, which leaves nearer 12,000 remaining. We want the summit to spur trying to find as many more of those 12,000 as we can, to give closure to the families.

- Q99 **Andrew Rosindell:** Sir Alan, you have a very busy schedule as Minister of State, with 77 countries in your portfolio, of which I am sure there is at least one overseas territory—I think you mentioned the Falkland Islands. How much time do you actually get to devote to the Western Balkans? Is it something that you are doing at the moment because of the summit, or is it something that you actually have a serious amount of time to spend on?

Sir Alan Duncan: Both. You are quite right that I cover 77 countries. Obviously, a number of countries within those 77 tend to be covered at a higher level. For instance, France and Germany are covered much more at the Foreign Secretary and prime ministerial level, albeit at the Foreign Minister level, with regular European Foreign Minister meetings, you do of course deal with them.

The stimulus, if you like, of the job of being the Minister is that, in the course of any one day, I have to jump from one issue to another on probably 12 or 15 occasions, be it through witness hearings like this, answering questions, debates, meeting ambassadors and so on. The Western Balkans has been a serious focus for the last six months, and I am well served by the team preparing the summit.



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I have also had a significant focus, of course, on Russia, having visited in December in advance of the Foreign Secretary, and then we had the Skripal Novichok incident. I have had a major focus on Turkey ever since the failed coup attempt, at the time when the Government was formed under Theresa May. This is pretty relentless stuff.

Overseas territories, of course Gibraltar in the context of Brexit, and the Falklands—partly in the context of Brexit, funnily enough, because of the funding and the market they need for their squid, but also because of the reset that we have crafted with Argentina, which is all the more significant in advance of the G20 meeting in November.

So it is relentless; it is non-stop, but I have to say that, as one prioritises, the Western Balkans has been in a steady crescendo. I have visited them all; only fleetingly did I go to Serbia, but otherwise I have been to all the other five. I have got to know all the Western Balkans Foreign Ministers now really quite well. We have all been together on three or four occasions, so there are some functional and genuinely friendly associations there, which I think puts the UK very strongly in the mix, not just for the summit but for the longer term.

Q100 Andrew Rosindell: Could I just dig a bit deeper there? Is our focus on the Western Balkans something that Britain wants to do to deepen our bilateral relations and friendships with those six countries, or is it somehow still related to EU ambitions of wanting those six countries to be part of the European Union? Why is our focus particularly on those countries?

Sir Alan Duncan: 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 issue 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. They matter in themselves, because we want to see them improve and overcome the legacy of conflict. It is that much closer to Russia, both in terms of geography and its potential interference. In all respects, this is the UK being outward-facing, playing its part and showing that we are a global nation. In a way, the timing of the summit is very fortuitous, in that it allows us to prove that all the more, just as we are going through the discussions of leaving the EU.

Q101 Andrew Rosindell: Is it still our policy to encourage them to join the EU, or are we now taking a neutral position on that?

Sir Alan Duncan: Oh, I think our view is clear. Inasmuch as they wish to do that—which they do—and they go through the processes of willing negotiations between them and the EU, then yes, we will say that we are in favour of this, notwithstanding our own departure. When we leave the



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EU, we will not be anti-EU; we will have strong bilateral relations across the whole of Europe and, I hope, a strong relationship with the EU itself. There are many areas in which we are going to need to co-operate, even though, in terms of structures, we will not be sitting around exactly the same tables. One straightforward example is sanctions. We have just passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill—it is now an Act. When it comes to sanctions we will work very closely alongside anything the EU does. I am certain that because of the significance of the UK, the EU will want to work closely with us on sanctions, even though we would derive the powers to implement them from our own law, rather than from our membership of the EU, which we do at the moment. We will have to devise new structures within and outside the EU for lots of purposes. I imagine too that we will be part of certain EU missions in this region, even though we will not be a member of the EU.

Q102 Andrew Rosindell: Going forward, Minister, what are the United Kingdom's long-term intentions here? Are we trying to build a strong bilateral partnership between the countries of the Western Balkans? If we are, why not also include Bulgaria in that process? Why exclude them? They may not be in the EU, but they are still a country in the Balkan region with which we should be working and co-operating. What structures will we be establishing to do this bilaterally? Is it not a danger that we finish up just doing exactly what the EU is doing and not actually building our own mechanisms for co-operating and working with these friends and partners in the future?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think we will do all those things. We will be very flexible. Because they hold the presidency at the moment, we have just had a Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, in Bulgaria. Although they are not one of the Western Balkans 6—

Q103 Andrew Rosindell: Why are they not coming to this conference?

Sir Alan Duncan: They are, and so are Poland. Poland will be there as well, because they will assume the chair. We will pass on the Berlin process to them after our London Summit. We are being very inclusive here, so Bulgaria will be attending this summit.

Q104 Chris Bryant: Regarding the sanctions point that you were just making, your Spanish counterpart—well, he was—

Sir Alan Duncan: It is all change.

Chris Bryant: He told me 10 days ago that last year he was absolutely convinced that Europe was going to ditch all the sanctions on Russia, until Theresa May turned up at the dinner and convinced everybody—personally, in his view—to maintain those sanctions on Russia, which we are all very pleased with. I wonder how we will do that, if we are not at the dinner in the future.

Sir Alan Duncan: There is no doubt that there will be EU meetings that will take important decisions, and that we will not be part of that decision-making process. There will be, for instance, External Action Service decisions at Foreign Ministers' meetings, in which we do not play a direct



part. But we will remain a significant country with a significant foreign policy, global network and influence in the United Nations Security Council, G7, G20, NATO, etc. I think we will see certain structures emerge, where we are, as it were, of the EU decision-making process but not actually in it. Sanctions, I think, is a clear such example. I cannot imagine any significant global sanctions that the EU is likely to engage in, in which we do not in some way figure as a partner.

Q105 Chris Bryant: My anxiety is the other way round, in a way—that they would want to ditch them, while we might want to keep them; but similarly, because you said earlier that one of the really important reasons for the UK to remain engaged with the Western Balkans is because we believe that its security is essential to the security of Europe—and I completely agree with that, and I understand the dangers of meddling from Russia and all the rest of it—but again that poses the same question: let us say Bosnia kicked off again and troops had to go in again under EUFOR. Britain, I presume, would want to be part of that; but we might not be part of the decision-making process or the command structure. That seems a troubling place for us to be.

Sir Alan Duncan: Our view, I think it is fair to say—and I said this in a speech in Berlin last Thursday—is that if we are to commit resources in that way, then we would also expect to be part of the decision-making process. I think those have to go hand in hand.

Q106 Chris Bryant: So you are hopeful that there would be some kind of tweak in the process of negotiating this through to the next year.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think there will be a tweak. It may be on an ad hoc basis, as things emerge. I do not want to overspeculate in this witness session—

Chris Bryant: Go on.

Sir Alan Duncan: Tempting though it is, Mr Bryant, thank you very much—unless the officials want to add to that. I think practices of that sort will emerge, but it is going to take a bit of time for the structures to be negotiated and fall into place.

Fiona McIlwham: On a point of detail, EUFOR is Berlin-plus, which means that it is a NATO command and control, so actually in that specific instance we would be part of the decision making.

Chris Bryant: It has Swiss in it as well, doesn't it.

Fiona McIlwham: And Turkish.

Q107 Chair: Forgive me, as this is a slight sideline, but as we are on it you are effectively arguing for a significant upgrade in our diplomatic presence both in Brussels and across the wider European continent, in order to multiply these representations in a way that is currently done around the table in Brussels.



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Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, Chairman; I think we, funnily enough, did cover that at the last witness session when you were looking at all this.

Chair: We did.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am very happy to repeat what was said at that. If only I could remember exactly what it was.

Q108 **Chair:** I was merely wondering whether, since then, you had had any updates on where you were with applications for increases.

Sir Alan Duncan: I don't think we have got any updates. I know this is something in which you maintain a continuing interest, and the Foreign Secretary is determined to make sure that anything we are able to say we will say to you. I don't think there is anything particular to add to the last comments that were made by him to you—and also in a letter, I think.

Chair: He did, yes.

Q109 **Royston Smith:** Minister, just to dig a bit deeper on the EU question, it makes perfect sense that the UK should want the Western Balkans to join the EU, even at a time when we are ourselves leaving. In those conversations that you have had with your counterparts in the Western Balkans, have you ever had any negative comments or questions about our exit at the time that you are promoting their entrance?

Sir Alan Duncan: Not in that context, as such. I think there is a spectrum of opinion and reaction to our referendum result, which has been disappointment and upset, in some cases resentment, despair—that is diluted a bit now. I think over the last couple of years, those who were initially quite virulent in their reaction have come to terms with the fact that it is going to happen, which is why I went to Berlin last Thursday to disabuse the Germans of some oft-repeated myths, if you like—"Oh, well, come the end of the day you'll not leave the EU, or there will be a second referendum." I made it absolutely clear that both of those are myths. We will be leaving and there will not be a second referendum.

There is, yes, in many quarters, disappointment we are leaving; but there is also gratitude that we maintain support for their wish to open accession talks. Of course, so long as we are in the EU we will do that. Even if we are outside the EU, we can still have an opinion. If that is what they want, who are we to say they shouldn't? Again, we are going back to the paradox I mentioned earlier. We are going in opposite directions, but we can still work together: as I put it, same friends, new structures, and we want to make sure that the Western Balkans have an underpinning of stability.

Q110 **Royston Smith:** We have invested some money bilaterally in the Western Balkans, and I think that will increase further.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes.

Royston Smith: How do you persuade people in this country that that is a good investment for them?



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Sir Alan Duncan: I don't think I have ever encountered voices here that say we should not—

Royston Smith: They probably do not know that we are doing it, but in the event that they did.

Sir Alan Duncan: 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 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. Our direct programme funding for helping good governance and improvements in their systems in a number of areas is due to hit, I think, £47 million.

Fiona McIlwham: £41 million.

Sir Alan Duncan: I beg your pardon; it will hit £41 million this year. I think that is a perfectly reasonable amount of money. Indeed, I could quite cogently advance arguments to say that we should spend more. And it is ODA-eligible. They are countries that are eligible for overseas development assistance officially, even though they are not at the poorest level compared with certain countries in Africa, for instance.

Q111 **Royston Smith:** But that is in addition to the significant contributions from the European Union as well.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, indeed.

Q112 **Andrew Rosindell:** Just to follow up, Minister, to slightly go back on what we are talking about, I think you said that if that is what they want to do in terms of joining the EU, it is not for us to tell them not to. I think that is what you said. Surely we should also put forward a balanced position on this because, clearly, we are leaving. It is odd to say to countries, "No, that's fine, you do that," if we ourselves have decided we do not want to be a part of it. Surely we should put a balanced position and explain to them as friends that there are alternatives to being part of a political union—there are other forms of European co-operation that do not involve a loss of sovereignty and the transfer of legal powers to a supranational institution. Surely it is our job to do that as friends.

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I don't agree. I would not choose to go down that line with them and say that just because we are leaving they ought to have second thoughts about what they want to do. They are sovereign countries. It is for them to decide what they want to do. It is not for me to lecture them about the structures and opinions that they should wish to see in their own country. If they so wish to join the EU and if the process leads in that direction, that is their sovereign right. Just because our referendum has gone one way does not mean that we should try and say, "Look, we're going that way and therefore you should, too." I'm sorry, I do not agree with the tone of the question that you would seemingly be asking me to put to these six countries.



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Q113 Mr Seely: I think we've been flirting around this discussion, anyway, but I will put this question to you. How does the Western Balkans summit fit into your view of Global Britain?

Sir Alan Duncan: Mr Seely, I think to a large part it is all the answers I have been giving throughout this entire session, but it is helpful to have your question cast in that broader context. It does allow us to reinforce the point that, as Mr Rosindell says, we are leaving the EU, but here we are looking at the Western Balkans trying to be part of a more cohesive and stable European family, and that our efforts are worth it. We are not going to shrink. We are not going to look in on ourselves. We are not going to turn our back on wider European defence and security, and stability. 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 to see, that we are going to be a global country and not one that is introspective and shrinking.

Q114 Mr Seely: Great answer; thank you very much indeed. It's the sort of answer that I would hope you would give. Can you just reassure me on something—that the Foreign Office is actually doing some thinking about what Global Britain means? My understanding of where Government is at is that you are so tied up with Brexit. I really get that, and the world is a very busy place at the moment. I see very little that makes me confident that, apart from "Isn't it obvious what Global Britain is?", there is much structural thinking going on about what the substance of Global Britain actually means—apart from "Let's try to do a lot of stuff and be reasonably busy." I do think there are some serious questions about aid versus defence and values versus trade, and I see no structural thinking.

For example—this is meant to be a question, not a statement, so I'll try to make it pithy—your answer, the Foreign Office's answer, to our Global Britain report was pretty thin. It was a "What I did this summer" sort of thing—if I was back at school. You know: "We did something over Salisbury and we have had lots of Commonwealth involvement, and that proves we are a great and global Britain." No, it doesn't. It just proves that's business as normal. Can we please have some structural thinking on what Global Britain means?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. I think there is a big backdrop to your question, Mr Seely, which goes beyond Brexit sucking up so much of the oxygen of press coverage and Government reaction and time, and it's that we are actually, I think, living in an increasingly unstable and changing world. Look, for instance, at the Middle East. I never thought we would see a Gulf Co-operation Council split down the middle. I never thought we would see two conflicts—Syria and Yemen—going on for so many years. I never thought we would see such a close association between Saudi Arabia and Israel. There are massive things going on here, including, sadly, some significant divergence between UK policy and that of our closest partner, the United States—for instance, on Iran and Jerusalem and, possibly, tariffs.



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So the question of Global Britain is one that has to fit into this very, very challenging historic phase. I would be at pains to say that although you use the phrase that the Foreign Office is consumed by Brexit, we are not. DExEU is consumed by Brexit, because that is their job, and of course the Foreign Secretary is a significant figure in the Cabinet Committees making these decisions, but in the meantime, what am I doing? I am doing the Western Balkans Summit. I was the first Minister ever into Belarus, who are doing some extraordinary things very quickly. I was the first Minister, after the death of Karimov, into Uzbekistan, who have now admitted the EBRD and are now much more western facing. They have dramatically improved their relationships with their neighbours. With Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, there used to be significant, scratchy tension. This is Global Britain in action, in that we are seriously in the mix of these sorts of things. The argument is to say that we are not in any way going to shrink from this, and perhaps, by doing things as the UK and not collectively with the EU, our flag is more prominent than it would have been before.

Look: Global Britain—I'm always suspicious of two-word labels in politics and policy of any sort; "zero tolerance" or whatever it is. They end up losing meaning after—

Chair: They weren't invented by this Committee.

Sir Alan Duncan: I appreciate that; I am not in any way suggesting that anyone is at fault here.

Chair: It may have been someone sitting a little closer to your desk who came up with it.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am just trying to flesh out the simple label. There is an enormous amount going on and there will be, and perhaps once Brexit is behind us, we will be able to prove, with an expanded diplomatic network, working with the Department for International Trade, DFID and everything else, that the UK is seriously on the world map and is going to stay there.

Q115 **Chair:** Sir Alan, you may have seen some rather wonderful international trolling by the Irish Government, as they have launched their Global Ireland policy, which has rather more flesh on the bones than what we have so far seen from our own Government.

Sir Alan Duncan: We look forward to working very closely with them across the globe.

Q116 **Mr Seely:** What lessons in bilateralism does the Western Balkans Summit offer? Can any lessons be learned from the way that countries such as Norway support the Western Balkans' European integration from outside the EU?

Sir Alan Duncan: Ultimately, I suppose we will be in a similar position of supporting them from outside the EU. We have very effective ambassadors in each of these six countries, so our network and our embassies have very good, strong relations and extraordinarily regular and high-level



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access, so those bilateral relationships are in a very good condition and play into the broader collective approach we are taking to the Western Balkans 6.

Bilateralism, as with the EU27, has always been there, but it is going to be there with a slightly different emphasis and focus once we have left the EU. The relationships we have through a diplomatic network that has very high-calibre people and extensive reach are a great credit to the UK, and will remain so.

Q117 Chair: On that note, may I put on the record a tribute to Ed Ferguson, the ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who is absolutely outstanding. I have met him on several occasions and he has been truly impressive.

Sir Alan Duncan: Thank you. We will make sure that that praise is passed on word for word.

Andrew Page: If I may add one point in answer to Mr Seely's question about bilateralism, which is: what are we learning about bilateralism from our summit? One thing that I have learned in my role in the nine months since I have been the Western Balkans Summit co-ordinator for the Berlin Process is the additional value of that process, which the UK will continue to be part of, including at the Poland Summit in Warsaw in the summer of 2019.

Another thing I have learned about how we work with our EU8 partners within the Berlin Process is that we work differently with different countries on different topics. In a way, that is a form of bilateralism. For instance, we work very closely with the French and Germans on combating the difficulties of small arms and light weapons coming from the Balkans region into Europe. We work very closely with the Italians on anti-corruption. We are already talking to Poland, as we were at the UK-Poland IGC, about how we counter Russian disinformation in the region. There are different relationships within that structure.

Sir Alan Duncan: I will add one thing that I think we have learned, which is about the value of the use of modern communications to build and maintain personal relations between Ministers in different countries. Twenty-five years ago when I came here, we did not have mobile phones—pagers were a revolution, and so it went on. Now, you can ping a WhatsApp message to a fellow Minister and it can be quite useful for banking something, alerting them to something, setting up a phone call and that kind of thing. That is an evolving skill, actually.

Q118 Mr Seely: On that point, you raise an incredibly important point about how you build relationships to get things done in day-to-day business. Are you confident that we are WhatsApping as much as any other country and that we are using these tools of social media? Do you have a WhatsApp ambos group for the Western Balkans or something?

Sir Alan Duncan: Not quite, but we are pretty good. The Foreign Secretary is very adept at keeping in touch with people through WhatsApp and a quick phone call and things such as that. He works incredibly hard



at cultivating these relationships in some parts of the world where there are some very difficult issues and pressures from other countries doing the same sort of thing. He is no slouch on this, and he really is doing a hell of a lot. In the Balkans, I have been doing similar such things.

Fiona McIlwham: Personal relationships are obviously hugely important in the region—in diplomacy writ large, but particularly in the Balkans. WhatsApping and mobile interaction is a really effective way of maintaining and building relationships, both between the top levels and also among officials. We do use all the means, including social media, for influencing. There are some recent examples, including in Macedonia, where very effective use of social media, not just by the Government and political leaders, but also by western diplomats, had quite an important effect.

Q119 **Mr Seely:** Does that make the FCO more transparent in the way that you do business? It tended to be that the FCO was a very closed shop. You sucked in lots of information but you weren't necessarily very good at pushing out an informational presence. Is that changing the view of the way that you think and interact with people as well?

Fiona McIlwham: I think it is strengthening us and I think we do draw in and engage different audiences now more effectively.

Andrew Page: I was simply going to add, to answer Mr Seely's question, that we do have a WhatsApp group, certainly for the summit team. I will check whether the Western Balkans 6 ambassadors also do. Indeed, we use WhatsApp, for instance in Bosnia's business continuity plans, in case there are IT problems. There are a number of ways that we use WhatsApp.

Mr Seely: This is sounding like a plug for one particular company.

Andrew Page: I am just answering part of your question. I would add to what Fiona says about how we use it at posts. From my experience, when I was in a post in Slovenia, it was amplifying a lot of our message and I think it does change the way, in terms of transparency, that we communicate and the way we think and the way we work. Tom Fletcher is one example of somebody who has thought very long and hard on the issue in his book about naked diplomacy, and I think it is influencing the diplomatic service.

Q120 **Chris Bryant:** I think that is also how he proposed to his wife, but that is another story.

There are some dangers in this. For instance, you won't be archiving any of that, so nobody will know the real decision-making process, in 50 or 100 years' time, whereas 50 years ago there would be letters and formal telegrams and all the rest of it. In some senses, it is more transparent and in some areas it is much less transparent.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think that's a very fair point. Any conversation in a corridor is not recorded, but if it is set up through the No. 10 switchboard, with an official listening in, then it is.



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I think what does happen, and you could find this reassuring, is that if there has been an exchange like that—let's say I ping something to a fellow Minister—I invariably would report it to my private office and give them an account, which then gets into the email chain.

In the same way as so many years ago things were done by letter, now of course, in the BlackBerry and iPhone age, you get lots of people copied on exchanges that are what we call "whirring". It whirrs around and probably the email chain gets too long and involves too many people. The danger is that you don't just stop and think and compose something that is of lasting value; there is too much chit-chat through too many layers and too many people. A bit of discipline not to do that too much is probably what is required in the Department, rather than being so transparent that absolutely everybody knows everything.

Q121 **Chris Bryant:** And it may not always be secure, of course.

Sir Alan Duncan: Indeed, and of course we are being extra cautious on that.

Q122 **Chris Bryant:** On resources, I am not going to rehearse the questions that we had last time, but you are increasing the programme spend in the region. I wondered if you could say what you are doing and why that is a good plan and why it is in the interests of my constituents in the Rhondda, or those in Rutland.

Sir Alan Duncan: In Rutland they think of little else.

We have increased our spending from £27 million to £41 million this financial year. I can do a very quick canter through the countries. In Kosovo, we are helping to strengthen the justice system, attack corruption and nepotism, and address the legacy of conflict. For instance, we are trying to ensure that senior heads of public institutions are recruited in a fair system.

In Macedonia, we have been giving technical assistance.

Chris Bryant: Northern Macedonia.

Sir Alan Duncan: Indeed. Well, not yet. We will choose our moment to—

Chris Bryant: Transition.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. Not a verb.

Chris Bryant: Tell the Foreign Secretary.

Sir Alan Duncan: In Bosnia-Herzegovina we are working with the police and security agencies and state level judicial institutions. In Montenegro, we are helping with their capacity building to improve cyber-resilience and with the reform of some of their public administration. In Serbia and Macedonia again, we are promoting freedom of expression in a programme. There is a variety of stuff, all of which I think falls under the

label of enhancing and encouraging democratic liberal values, as well as assisting in their public administration and domestic protection.

Fiona McIlwham: It's about strengthening, obviously, their domestic law enforcement, but also building more reliable partners for us in tackling some of the threats. It's probably important for the UK public to understand that the partnerships that we are developing with those countries are of benefit.

Sir Alan Duncan: We are trying to get them to work on cross-border things like criminal and money movements, so it's not just with individual countries; it's also between the countries.

Q123 **Chris Bryant:** I just wonder whether you feel that you have enough personnel in the western Balkans. I think there are just two people in Montenegro. Is that right?

Sir Alan Duncan: It's very small, yes.

Chris Bryant: I ask that especially because some of these countries have difficult geographical terrain and it's quite difficult to get an impression outside the capital city.

Mr Seely: And there was a coup in Montenegro. Those areas are very susceptible to activity by other countries in that—

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, definitely. Look, we could always do with more resources. Occasionally, in addition to the formal registered diplomats, you might get National Crime Agency people. In certain circumstances, perhaps not in the Balkans but elsewhere, you might get a DFID humanitarian person, corruption adviser or something. Other tentacles of Whitehall can land in a mission and supplement its staff and activity.

Andrew Page: All I would add is that there is a very clear rising trajectory of programme spend in the years ahead in the Western Balkans, and with that goes a commitment of human resource, whether it be in London or in the missions, so you should expect to see human resource rising on a rather similar trajectory. *[Interruption.]*

Chris Bryant: Yes, I have one more question if it's on that.

Mr Seely: It is, but it's broader, so you go, Chris.

Sir Alan Duncan: Can I just add very quickly that we might see a little shift of defence attaché appointments moving in that direction, particularly given—

Q124 **Chair:** Moving into the Western 6?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, partly on that, and what has happened in Moscow of course.

Q125 **Chris Bryant:** You have said that anything that affects any part of the continent affects the whole, including ourselves and including on



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migration, people trafficking and so on. I just wonder whether you welcomed what the Italians did in turning down the migrant ship landing, or whether you welcomed what the Spaniards did in accepting it.

Sir Alan Duncan: Look, I don't think I ever welcome 600 poor people being stuck in a sweating ship in the middle of the Mediterranean with little food and water, so one's first thoughts are for the human condition of the 600 people crammed on to a ship.

In terms of the dilemma of taking them in or trying to stop them at source, that of course is the policy difficulty we have been wrestling with for years. I'm glad they found safe haven, but that doesn't mean to say that I think that it's always right that any ship that manages to get off the coast of north Africa has to be taken in by a European country. We have a problem here with the movement of people, which needs to be addressed comprehensively, and preferably at source.

Q126 **Chris Bryant:** And part of doing that might be making sure that areas like the Western Balkans are not places that people want to flee, because they are safe places to live and work and they have a prosperous economy and all the rest.

Sir Alan Duncan: Of course. Conflict and economic collapse always end up displacing people. For instance—just swinging across right to the other side of the world—one of the problems of Venezuela is that tens of thousands of people are leaving for neighbouring countries. That is now a regional problem; it's not just a Venezuela problem. And that invariably happens whenever there is a conflict and state collapse.

Q127 **Chair:** I don't wish to go into that any further, but helping countries like Colombia, which have been allies and friends of the United Kingdom for many years, would seem to be another area of an inquiry, another area of a conversation, but it's—

Sir Alan Duncan: You would get me again if you do that, because it's one of my 77. Let me assure you that that it is one of the issues to which I have to jump regularly in the course of my working day.

Chair: I am delighted to hear that. It is an area of interest of mine—

Sir Alan Duncan: And elections, of course—

Chair: Exactly. And that could cause further problems.

Q128 **Mr Seely:** To follow up that question, Western Balkans is a security and development issue. In our future as Global Britain, we will probably be very trade focused to ensure that we keep earning a living and that everything works well after Brexit. Is the Balkans to any extent an economic market that the FCO is looking at? Or are you really looking at this purely in terms of stability and longer-term development?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think wherever we can apply or lift from the widest possible menu, we will. I always look at every country, and this is a full-spectrum opportunity or challenge—whatever it is. We do not just look at



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a country and say, "Oh, it's only corruption and security." No, no, no. Every country where sanctions do not apply is for us a trade objective. We see it as a trade opportunity and we would like to encourage business between us and them.

Q129 Mr Seely: Very briefly, what are the trade opportunities you see in those six Balkan states?

Sir Alan Duncan: They are not at this stage massive, but from little beginnings other things happen. Apart from anything else, although we want inward investment here, we would like them to be countries where there is a benign and attractive climate for inward investment to them. Free trade and democracy bind countries together. They are the two guarantors of peace, in my view—much more than many other components in a country's make-up.

In terms of sectors, my colleagues have lived in the region more than I have.

Andrew Page: Can I add something from the summit perspective? First of all, the EBRD summit that took place in February is very relevant in this context. An entire day focused on this issue, with nearly 300 people, most of them investors in the City, looking at opportunities in the region. The head of the EBRD, Suma Chakrabarti, mentioned the sums of money that the EBRD has committed to help over the last five years or so since EBRD summits started.

Chair: We had evidence from the EBRD.

Andrew Page: Fantastic. That is a part of the answer. But another part of the answer is what the Berlin Process has helped to initiate. One of the major steps forward at the Trieste summit in 2017 was the establishment of a regional economic area of the Western Balkans six, with a multi-annual programme. That has four pillars and the aim is: to bring about greater regional integration among the six themselves, so that they can present themselves as a market of 20 million people, with better economic prospects for inward investment; and to improve the cross-border connections, particularly when it comes to trade but also movement of people, which is a big issue for the Kosovars. The four pillars are effectively trade, investment, digital and mobility.

We are building on that at our summit. This will be a major theme of the Economy Ministers' meeting of the Berlin Process, which will take place on 4 July. The other thing which we, the UK, are trying to do in addition is to use the strengths of the City of London and the strengths we have in financial services particularly to improve the prospects for entrepreneurs, and especially the small among the SMEs, and especially to help in areas of access to finance for people who have very good ideas for their own business or for start-ups but cannot get access to venture capital or NGO investors.

Mr Seely: Thank you.



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Q130 Royston Smith: Just one question from me. In all of our discussions and in the evidence sessions we have had on the Western Balkans, I have not heard Albania mentioned, and we have a former ambassador from Albania here with us.

Chair: To Albania, not from Albania.

Royston Smith: To?

Sir Alan Duncan: Ambassador to Albania.

Royston Smith: I understand that.

Chris Bryant: Thank God that's cleared up.

Royston Smith: Yes—that was the important bit. Where is Albania in the pecking order for the UK? When you were talking about investment in the rest of the Western Balkans, I did not hear about anything we were doing for Albania.

Sir Alan Duncan: Here is the expert on my left, if may defer.

Fiona McIlwham: We do have substantial engagement in Albania. We are working with the Government and institutions in particular around tackling organised crime, because Albanian criminal groups have a pretty high impact on the UK. Those networks run globally and are not just operating in Albania. We have an important partnership with the authorities there to try to tackle that, both operationally and in building up capacity. Again, that is the development point. We are working with DFID expertise and the Home Office to look at interventions that will mitigate some of that and build stronger institutions.

Q131 Chair: Can I go straight from that on to something slightly connected? I appreciate that this is not directly in the line of this inquiry, but there has been an article in *The American Interest* by a pretty reputable journalist by the name of Ben Judah, who has interviewed a guy called José Grinda, who is the anti-mafia investigator in Spain. In this article, he has complained very vociferously about co-operation with UK authorities on serious and organised crime, and particularly on oligarchs.

You will be aware of the report that we produced on Russian oligarchs using the City, and the connection that that could have to Albanian crime. I appreciate that you probably cannot give an answer on it immediately. I am just highlighting it as an element of concern that a Spanish anti-mafia prosecutor should make that comment.

Sir Alan Duncan: That surprises me. When it comes to organised crime and obvious mafiosi activity, I would have thought that there is very extensive co-operation between us and Spain. I would be very surprised if there isn't. Obviously, this is a different Department—it would fall, I think, primarily under Ben Wallace and, of course, the NCA and that kind of thing.



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In terms of oligarchs, in the wake of Salisbury we are looking at this more closely. There is obviously the big philosophical question about when an oligarch is a definite baddie and when an oligarch is a legitimate rich person. It may be that there is a slight difference of opinion between us and the Spanish. That is entirely speculation on my part—I have nothing to go on, and I have seen no pieces of paper to suggest so. We will, if we may, take it away and put the question to colleagues in Whitehall. It is a perfectly fair and legitimate question, and we will look at the article.

Chair: I apologise for bouncing it on you—it's just that it came up today.

Chris Bryant: And just to carry on bouncing on you—

Sir Alan Duncan: Bounce on!

Q132 **Chris Bryant:** José Grinda was the person who Bill Browder was visiting to assist with their inquiries. He was subsequently arrested by the Spanish authorities. There is clearly an issue about how Interpol operates the system of Russian requests. Ben Wallace spoke to the all-party parliamentary group on Russia about this. There might be value in the Foreign Office talking with them.

Sir Alan Duncan: We will do that. I am due to see Ben soon on many such issues, and it does sound as if that visit may have been the inspiration for this article, which explains it.

Chair: It may well have been.

Fiona McIlwham: Just a point on criminal networks and how we are tackling organised crime in the Western Balkans. We are working not only with the countries themselves—the Western Balkans 6—but with other European and international partners. Over the past 18 months we have built up some pretty productive relationships, both at a political level and operationally.

Andrew Page: That is feeding into initiatives at the summit that will be discussed further by Interior Ministers, and that we hope will lead to further announcements.

Chair: Bob, is this the very last one?

Q133 **Mr Seely:** It can be a very brief point, and I don't mean it flippantly. It is great that you are saying that corruption is really important, but London has had an unenviable reputation for attracting a lot of dodgy money. I hope we have our own house in order, as well as getting other people to get their house in order. It was a Back-Bench rebellion that encouraged Ministers to come up with the brave decision that they did on overseas territories. I am just making that point.

Sir Alan Duncan: That, if I may say so, is one interpretation that can be put upon it.

Q134 **Chair:** Forgive me, there is one thing I overlooked to ask. Very briefly—I'm sure you've got this in your notes—what are your plans for the £85



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million that the UK is currently spending in the region through the EU?

Sir Alan Duncan: Look, as with all EU questions at the moment, it depends on so many things, such as the implementation period. I hope you will excuse me if I do not speculate or just make a stab at answering that. Decisions of that sort are in the hands of others at the moment.

Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. We ranged a bit more widely than intended, but thank you very much for being so co-operative. We are very grateful to all three of you.