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The UK and the future of the Western Balkans

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Q in footnotes refers to a question in oral evidence.

SUMMARY

In the 20th century, the Western Balkans endured a number of serious conflicts—each following periods of complacency, meddling or inattention from the international community, each expanding beyond the borders of the region, and each involving the UK. It is a region which, in many respects, remains in the shadow of the wars of the 1990s. Whereas many of its neighbours have progressed, political instability, inter-ethnic tensions and the competing influence of third countries have slowed progress towards regional reconciliation and greater consonance with the rest of Europe. The region suffers from authoritarian leadership, weak democratic institutions and serious challenges from organised crime and corruption. This situation is exacerbated by uncertainty about EU accession, a brain drain of young and educated people, and a rise in extremism and anti-democratic nationalism.

These factors make the region of great and continuing importance to the UK, quite independently from our changing relations with the institutions of the EU. We have significant interests in supporting stability and prosperity in the region, not least to avoid a repetition of the tragedies and horrors of the 1990s and as part of our wider commitment to peace and stability in Europe.

All of the countries in the Western Balkans aspire to join the EU. Albania and Montenegro are already members of NATO; Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo also aspire to join, though each faces serious challenges before membership can be a realistic prospect. Serbia currently has no aspirations to join NATO but takes part in joint military and civil defence exercises.

However, there is serious concern that gains made towards good governance and the rule of law are in danger of being lost as countries in the region turn to authoritarian leadership, nationalistic politics and state capture. This is being exacerbated by an apparent reticence on the part of the international community to challenge these tendencies, as well as endemic organised crime and corruption in the region.

Stability in the region has also been undermined by the influence of third countries. There is serious concern that Russia's role in the region is simply one of "spoiler", intent on disrupting any closer integration with the West. China has been investing in the region, which has been welcomed by some as a vital source of funding for infrastructure and industry. But it is important that the level of indebtedness of an already poor region does not rise. Other countries, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have an interest in the region, potentially disrupting already fragile relations between states and between communities in the region.

There have been fears that post-Brexit, the Western Balkans will be low on the UK's list of overseas priorities. The Government's statements to date have repeatedly expressed support for continued engagement in the region. However, this intention will have to be followed up by deeds once the UK leaves the EU. We therefore welcome the UK's decision to host the 2018 Western Balkans Summit.

New ways of coordinating and cooperating with the EU and bilateral partners will need to be found and the perception that the UK's role may be diminished

will need to be combatted. There is substantial scope for this to be done. The UK's reputation in the region for its diplomatic, security and soft power influence remains high. We urge the Government to use the occasion of the Western Balkans Summit to set out in detail, and for a substantial period ahead, the contribution that Britain is prepared to make, in partnership with the EU, to support stability, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in the Western Balkans. This initiative, coming at an important stage of the Brexit negotiations, would demonstrate that the Government is indeed not leaving Europe when it leaves the EU.

In sum, the British involvement in the region must continue, both in our national interest and as part of continued commitment to European security and close cooperation with other EU states. We must support the region to promote freedom of the press and of expression, tackle organised crime, human trafficking and corruption, manage migration through and from the region, create welcoming business environments which enable the private sector to grow and which encourage foreign companies to invest, and entrench strong democracy institutions. To do this the UK must continue to conduct sustained, coordinated and consistent engagement along with its international partners (particularly through international institutions present on the ground, including KFOR, EUFOR, the Office of the High Representative and the Peace Implementation Council) to protect the progress made since the wars of the 1990s.

The UK and the future of the Western Balkans

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. The UK has a long history of engagement in the Western Balkans—not least the UK’s military operations in the region since 1992, in which 72 armed forces personnel have lost their lives, and extensive diplomatic and humanitarian investment.¹ Some witnesses described the interests of the UK in the region today as being “mild”.² However, in her speech at Lancaster House on 17 January 2017, the Prime Minister “identified the Western Balkans as a region in which the UK Government has played, and will continue to play, an active role in promoting European prosperity, stability and security.”³ In written evidence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) stated “In recognition of the challenges in the region and our interests, we plan to increase our level of engagement and spend in the coming years.”⁴ The decision to host the Western Balkans Summit (see Box 1) in London in 2018 was, the Foreign Secretary said, “a firm demonstration of our support” for engaging with the region to meet the challenges it faces “which pose a threat to all of us whether in the Western Balkans or the UK.”⁵

Box 1: Western Balkans Summit

In 2014 Germany hosted a conference of Western Balkan countries to demonstrate the EU’s commitment to the accession ambitions of those countries. The 2014 summit marked the beginning of a five year initiative referred to as the Berlin Process. The 2018 summit in London will be the fifth meeting.

The meeting in London will bring together the Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and Economy Ministers from the six Western Balkans countries (see paragraph 6). EU institutions along with Germany, Austria, France, Slovenia, Croatia and Italy will also attend.

2. More broadly, in its Brexit negotiating position paper published in September 2017 *Foreign policy, defence and development: a future partnership paper*, the Government stated “The UK will remain a committed partner and ally to its friends across the continent, not simply because UK and EU citizens face the same threats and as it is in both our interests to do so, but because the UK has a deep, historic belief in the same values that Europe stands for: peace, democracy, freedom and the rule of law, in our continent and beyond.”⁶
3. The Western Balkans is a region which faces many challenges. In the 20th century, the region endured a number of serious conflicts—each following

1 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

2 [Q 17](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

3 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

4 *Ibid.*

5 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Press Release: *Foreign Secretary shows support for the Western Balkans Summit in Italy* (12 July 2017): <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-shows-uk-support-for-the-western-balkans-at-summit-in-italy> [accessed 28 November 2017]

6 HM Government, *Foreign Policy, defence and development: a future partnership paper* (12 September 2017) p 2: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643924/Foreign_policy_defence_and_development_paper.pdf [accessed 28 November 2017]

periods of complacency, inattention or meddling from the international community and each expanding beyond the borders of the region and into the rest of Europe. Britain was involved in each of these major wars in the region.

4. Whereas other post-communist European countries have progressed—several joining the EU—the Western Balkans remains in many respects in the shadow of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the wars that accompanied it in the 1990s. The reactions in the region to the recent conviction of the Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić for war crimes and the suicide of the Bosnian Croat General Slobodan Praljak are examples of the continuing legacy of the wars of the 1990s. Our cautious assessment is that the region has made slow progress. While the immediate danger of all-out conflict is remote, the lack of political progress and the deep problems of nationalism, a failure to face up to the past and endemic corruption make the region prone to insecurity.
5. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy summarised the challenges the region face today:

“Instability in the region is driven by serious and deep-rooted governance challenges. These are the results of political elites with an interest in maintaining ethnic division and status quos, external influences, deeply embedded corruption, and serious organised crime, among others. These result in low citizen engagement, weak inclusion particularly of youth, women and minorities, and growing discontent and mistrust in public institutions ... External influences are high, particularly from Russia, Turkey, China and the Middle East. At the same time, EU enlargement now seems like a distant prospect. This combination weakens the momentum towards institutional integration and governance reform. In some cases, previous governance progress has been reversed.”⁷
6. In this report we focus on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia (see Figure 1).⁸ We focussed only on these Western Balkan countries and not the wider region where several countries are already EU and NATO members.
7. Brief country summaries can be found in Appendix 4.

7 Written evidence from Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([BUB0006](#))

8 We recognise that Croatia is often included in definitions of the Western Balkans. However, as it is an EU member state the issues it faces differ, so we have not focussed on it in this report.

Figure 1: Map of the Western Balkans

8. During our inquiry we made two visits to the region: one to Kosovo and Macedonia; another to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Notes of those visits are in Appendix 6. We also had a meeting with the Macedonian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nikola Dimitrov, (see Appendix 5) and held a roundtable session with young people from the region (see Appendix 7). We are grateful all those who took part in these meetings. We would also like to thank our Specialist Adviser, Professor Kenneth Morrison.
9. In this report we assess the importance the region has for the UK after Brexit, the influence the UK could have and, in the light of that, how the UK can contribute to its progress and stability. We also explore the challenges faced by the region.

10. As a region which remains a source of instability in Europe and one to which British armed forces have repeatedly been deployed, it is vital the UK remains active in the Western Balkans. Involvement in the region will also allow the UK to demonstrate its continued commitment to European security and to a close partnership with the EU.

CHAPTER 2: IMPACT OF BREXIT ON THE UK IN THE REGION

11. All six of the Western Balkan countries covered by this inquiry hope to join the EU. Although they are each at different stages in the membership process (see Box 2 in Chapter 4), the prospect of eventual EU membership has been a driving force: “The most important lever in the region is and will be an accession process.”⁹ Some of our witnesses thought that once the UK leaves the EU its influence in the Western Balkans would be reduced.
12. There were differing views on this aspect. The European Council on Foreign Relations considered that the UK after Brexit would be reduced to “aligning with the EU but with little influence over determining the EU’s actions ... With Brexit the UK risks being relegated to the side-lines, able to cheer and boo but mostly occupied with watching the action on the pitch.”¹⁰ Professor James Ker-Lindsay, St Mary’s University, added, “there is evidence that British influence is already waning because of the vote to leave the EU.”¹¹
13. In relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, Christopher Bennett, political and communications adviser to the Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor, said the UK’s position had been “untenable ever since the Brexit vote. The country cannot, on the one hand, argue, as it has done hitherto, that the panacea for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s ills is European integration, including eventual membership of the European Union, and, on the other, prepare to leave that same community of countries and what it represents.”¹² This was a view Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe, recognised. He said the UK’s position “may appear slightly paradoxical” but the Government believed that EU membership remained “important for the stability of the region” and would therefore “encourage and support countries that wish to join the EU” even as the UK leaves.¹³
14. Other witnesses and people we talked to in the region were concerned that the UK’s decision to leave the EU had done more than simply diminish the UK’s influence in the region. In some cases, local politicians were presenting Brexit as a “general failure of the European Union and not as a genuine attempt to recreate a network of already complex UK relations with the EU, the US, NATO and the British Commonwealth.” This narrative allowed some Balkan politicians to “encourage euro-scepticism; fuel nationalism and strengthen autocracies”. There was a danger of Brexit being used “to challenge the Western liberal consensus, even within European peripheries already involved into integration with the EU and NATO.”¹⁴
15. In contrast, other witnesses thought Brexit would not have a solely negative effect on the UK in the region. Behar Sadriu, Teaching Fellow, SOAS, said “Unencumbered by the EU and its bureaucratic structures, the UK is able to work on a more focused strategy in the region to ensure it forms strong political and economic relations “. ¹⁵ Kurt Bassuener, Democratization Policy Council, considered that, regardless of Brexit, the UK’s “diplomatic

9 [Q 36](#) (Michal Makocki)

10 Written evidence from the ECFR ([BUB0020](#))

11 Written evidence from Prof James Ker-Lindsay ([BUB0015](#))

12 Written evidence from Christopher Bennett ([BUB0022](#))

13 [Q 69](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

14 Written evidence from the International Security Institute ([BUB0002](#))

15 Written evidence from Behar Sadriu ([BUB0010](#))

credibility in the region remains potent”.¹⁶ Many of those we spoke to in the region said that their regard for the UK’s role in the region had not changed since the referendum outcome and would not be affected by Brexit.¹⁷ Angus Lapsley, Director Defence and International Security, FCO, and Dr Jonathan Eyal, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), pointed to the UK retaining a role in security as “our reputation as a security provider remains undiminished.”¹⁸

16. The Government’s position was that the UK would remain “well placed to influence, bilaterally, multilaterally and through ad-hoc joint initiatives.”¹⁹ This is in line with the Government’s paper on foreign policy, defence and development published as part of the Brexit negotiations, which states:

“The UK is—and will remain—a major global diplomatic, defence, development and trade policy actor. The UK has the largest defence budget in Europe and the second largest in NATO (after the US). The UK is the only European country that meets both the NATO target of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence, with 20 per cent of this on equipment, and the UN target of spending 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) on international development. The UK has also committed to invest at least 50 per cent of development spend in fragile states and regions. The UK is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a leading member of other international fora such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the G7, the G20, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth.”²⁰

17. These are multilateral fora through which the UK can continue to work in the Western Balkans. In addition, the UK will remain a member of the Peace Implementation Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Appendix 4). Angus Lapsley thought that leaving the EU would affect how the UK operated in the Western Balkans, but argued “Whether it makes us less important is up to us”.²¹ Dr Eyal agreed: “Whether we will be successful in maintaining our footprint depends largely on us ... there is nothing automatic about us being written out of the plot.”²²
18. For some witnesses, the key to retaining the UK’s influence was high-level political engagement. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2002 to 2006, said:

“I do not think that there is huge engagement with the Balkans in the United Kingdom. I do not think that the situation is widely known about, and given the other problems facing the world, why should it be? It was very much at the forefront of everybody’s mind throughout the 1990s ... I was very conscious when I was there that Bosnia was, if not at the top of the agenda, then close to it. You saw that in the seniority of the diplomats and representatives of the various Peace Implementation Council members who would turn up to regular meetings in Sarajevo.

16 Written evidence from Kurt Bassuener ([BUB0013](#))

17 See Appendix 6.

18 [Q 51](#) (Dr Jonathan Eyal)

19 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

20 *Foreign Policy, defence and development*, p.6

21 [Q 51](#) (Angus Lapsley)

22 [Q 51](#) (Dr Jonathan Eyal)

By the time I left, the posts that had started off being filled by senior people in the Foreign Office had diminished down to being filled by much more junior ones, which is a fair indication of how this has gone off the boil.”²³

19. Not all our witnesses agreed that high-level political engagement was absent. Dr Eyal said “The interests of Ministers ... remain undiminished.”²⁴ Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe, disagreed with the idea that “the Balkans are a slightly lower priority than some other countries in my portfolio. They are not; they are very significant ... the Balkans matter”.²⁵
20. **The UK does not exert its influence only through the EU. We are concerned that the UK’s role in the region could negatively affected by Brexit. We believe that the UK is still well placed—particularly in its role as a security provider—to play a valuable role in promoting democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in the Western Balkan countries and in preventing an outbreak of violence or war.**
21. **Giving effect to the intentions the Government has expressed in its Brexit negotiating papers and in evidence to us will depend largely on the cooperation of the remaining 27 EU Member States. The Government’s expressions of commitment will need to be matched by new ways of working with the EU and bilateral partners after Brexit.**

23 [Q 8](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

24 [Q 51](#) (Dr Jonathan Eyal)

25 [Q 68](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

CHAPTER 3: REGIONAL STABILITY

22. Witnesses were concerned about stability in the region. The Government's aim, in the light of the region's "fragile stability", was to "help the Western Balkans become a more stable and resilient region".²⁶ Professor James Ker-Lindsay described the Western Balkans as "a source of instability within Europe".²⁷ General Sir Michael Rose thought Bosnia and Herzegovina "at risk of being a failed state".²⁸ Though many agreed that the Dayton Peace Agreement had been "a superb agreement to end a war but a very bad agreement to make a state"²⁹ and had not left the country with a properly functioning constitution,³⁰ the prospect of it becoming a failed state was strongly rejected by those we met in the region.³¹
23. Much of this instability is a legacy of the disintegration of the Yugoslav state and the wars that accompanied it in the 1990s. Dr Denisa Kostovicova, LSE, described the region as having an inherently unstable "peace without reconciliation" where "there is no consensus on the causes and nature of violence committed in the conflicts of Yugoslavia's dissolution in the 1990s. Also, all ethnic groups still tend to see themselves primarily as victims and not as perpetrators of violence."³² Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon said that the Western Balkans was typical of places with "unfinished wars" where "the nomenklatura who run the war immediately translate themselves into the running the political situation afterwards, and they do not change the aims of the war; they simply pursue them through the means of politics."³³
24. Part of this legacy are state boundaries, recognised by the UN and others,³⁴ which encompass communities with ethnic or cultural backgrounds more closely aligned with neighbouring countries. For example, almost 20% of Serbs in the Western Balkans live outside Serbia and around 48% of Albanians in the Western Balkans live outside Albania (see Table 1).

26 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

27 Written evidence from Professor James Ker-Lindsay ([BUB0015](#))

28 [Q 2](#) (General Sir Michael Rose)

29 [Q 9](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

30 See Appendix 4 for more detail.

31 See Appendix 6

32 Written evidence from Dr Denisa Kostovicova ([BUB0012](#))

33 [Q 9](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

34 Though Kosovo remains unrecognised by many countries. See Appendix 4 for more detail.

Table 1: Ethnic makeup of Western Balkan countries

Ethnicity	Total population in the Western Balkans	% in principal country	% elsewhere in the Western Balkans
Albanian	4,808,462	52% (in Albania)	47.6% (mainly in Kosovo and Macedonia)
Bosniak	2,160,393	89% (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)	10.5% (mainly in Serbia)
Macedonian	1,350,589	100% (in Macedonia)	0
Montenegrin	289,148	100% (in Montenegro)	0
Serb	7,361,895	80% (in Serbia)	19.5% (mainly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo)

Source: Figures derived from CIA, *World Factbook Library 2017*: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/> [accessed 21 December 2017]

25. Timothy Less, *Nova Europa*, said that this was “the fundamental structural defect in the region: the mismatch of political and ethnic boundaries.”³⁵
26. Because of these cross-border connections, a number of witnesses told us that stability in the Western Balkans had to be viewed on a regional basis. For example, Behar Sadriu, SOAS, saw the Serbia–Kosovo question as a risk to the whole region. The longer it remained unresolved, the greater the risk of border issues in the region re-opening: “This would have significant impact on, to begin with, Bosnia but also FYROM (Macedonia) and eventually—as in the 1990s—farther afield.”³⁶
27. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon considered Bosnia and Herzegovina as a similar risk to the region: “if Bosnia goes bad, the rest of the Balkans goes bad.”³⁷ Any approach therefore had to be regional.
28. Some witnesses saw signs that the region was moving on from the instability of the past. The fall of the previous government in Macedonia and its replacement through elections (see Appendix 4) was referred to by Peter van der Auweraert, IOM:
- “In Macedonia, for example, while there was political instability for a certain period of time, there is now something like a Macedonian spring, whereby through democratic and electoral means a change of Government has led to increased political stability for the moment.”³⁸
29. The UK has an interest in encouraging regional stability. General Sir Michael Rose said that “some 72 Britons, mainly soldiers, have died in the

35 [Q 38](#) (Timothy Less)

36 Written evidence from Behar Sadriu ([BUB0010](#))

37 [Q 8](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

38 [Q 43](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

western Balkans since the early 1990s, so we have a great interest in making sure that their lives were not sacrificed for nothing.”³⁹ Andreja Bogdanovski, Security Analyst, said that any deterioration of peace across the region could “heavily harm the UK’s interests in the short and long term ... There is also of course the potential impact on UK business and other investment across the Western Balkans.”⁴⁰

30. **The region still suffers from the legacy of the wars of the 1990s. Some political leaders are pursuing the aims of those wars by different, political and diplomatic, means including calls for redrawing national borders and secessionism. Any such act would be regressive, dangerous and destabilising for the region. Progress cannot be taken for granted. Without sustained, co-ordinated and consistent engagement from the region’s international partners there is a risk of the progress made in the region towards establishing functioning democracies and the rule of law stagnating or going into reverse. Such engagement must take a regional view. We therefore welcome the Government’s decision to host the Western Balkans Summit in 2018.**
31. **We would urge the Government to use the occasion of the Western Balkans Summit to set out in detail, and for a substantial period ahead, the contribution that Britain is prepared to make, in partnership with the EU, to support stability, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in the Western Balkans. This initiative, coming at an important stage of the Brexit negotiations, would demonstrate that the Government is indeed not leaving Europe when it leaves the EU.**

39 [Q 3](#) (General Sir Michael Rose)

40 Written evidence from Andreja Bogdanovski ([BUB0008](#))

CHAPTER 4: EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

32. Many witnesses saw peace and stability in the region as being achieved through greater Euro-Atlantic integration. In most cases, witnesses meant countries joining NATO and the EU.

NATO

33. Of the six Western Balkan countries, two are already members of NATO (Albania joined in 2009; Montenegro in 2017) and two are in the process of seeking membership (Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia). Serbia currently has no membership ambitions. Kosovo has expressed a desire to join NATO but as a number of NATO members do not recognise it, Kosovo has not been able to begin the process of moving towards membership.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

34. In Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told that support for NATO membership was high in the Entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina but not in the Entity of Republika Srpska. So, although membership was the country's formal ambition, it was a divisive policy. This was emphasised when the National Assembly of the Entity of Republika Srpska adopted a proclamation on military neutrality on 17 October 2017 with particular reference to military alliances.
35. This division has stalled progress on one of the key requirements laid down by NATO before the Membership Action Plan (MAP) can be joined: the registration of immovable defence properties (for example, barracks). Sixty-three of these remained unregistered or registered as Yugoslav, as there were disputes about whether they ought to be registered as properties of one or other entity or of the state. However, we were told by the Deputy Foreign Minister, Josip Brkić, that there was no "plan B" to joining NATO.⁴¹

Kosovo

36. Kosovo has a long-standing aspiration to join NATO but as four NATO members do not recognise Kosovo—Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain—formal accession procedures have not been able to begin. However, NATO remains very active in Kosovo. NATO's peacekeeping Kosovo Force (KFOR) has been in the country since 1999. Its role in the country has developed over time and has included capacity building support for Kosovo's security organisations, counter-radicalisation work and assisting with the establishment and training of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF).
37. In Kosovo we were told that the KSF was in the process of evolving into the Kosovo Armed Force as part of its state building efforts and desire for greater Euro-Atlantic integration. The KSF took part in NATO regional exercises as well as regional activities and had signed Memorandums of Understanding with defence ministries of the region. However, we were also told that the creation of Kosovan army was objected to by Serbia.⁴²

Macedonia

38. In Macedonia NATO membership is popular (and a more immediate priority than EU membership). The Foreign Minister, Nikola Dimitrov, said that

41 See Appendix 6.

42 *Ibid.*

over 70% of the population were in favour of joining. Mr Dimitrov said that membership would prove “that Macedonia is here to stay and within these boundaries”.⁴³ However, progress towards membership has been blocked by Greece’s objections to the country’s name. Sir Adam Thomson, European Leaders Network (ELN), saw little prospect of their membership moving forward without the name issue being resolved.⁴⁴ In contrast, Angus Lapsley, FCO, hoped that the recent change in government raised “the prospect that they might be able to reach an agreement with Greece on the name issue, and the Greek Foreign Minister himself has recently said that there may be a window of opportunity.”⁴⁵ Mr Dimitrov also believed that there was a chance for progress to be made. He hoped to present Macedonia as an ally to Greece and to build a positive relationship to allow resolution of the name issue.⁴⁶ The Government’s position was that the UK would “encourage discussions between Athens and Skopje ... using and identifying opportunities where we can offer practical and more active support.”⁴⁷

Serbia

39. Serbia does not currently aspire to join NATO. According to Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski, LSE, “NATO is still perceived to be the villain among the ethnic Serb population, despite over 18 years since the bombing of Yugoslavia.”⁴⁸ However, Angus Lapsley thought that full membership was not the only level of co-operation Serbia might have with NATO. For example, “President Vučić of Serbia is coming to address the NAC—the North Atlantic Council—in a few weeks’ time.”⁴⁹ Dr Jonathan Eyal, RUSI, noted recent civil defence exercises NATO had held with Serbia.⁵⁰ General Sir Michael Rose referred to Serbia holding 22 military exercises with NATO in the last year.⁵¹ Angus Lapsley concluded that “it is perfectly plausible that Serbia will not for a long time, or may never, see NATO as its future.”⁵²

Impact of joining NATO

40. Dr Jonathan Eyal described NATO as an “exporter of security in the region”.⁵³ He said that although membership could not remove tensions between member states, “it suspends them on a political rather than any military level ... Croatia and Slovenia have notably continued problems over the border demarcation, but it [NATO membership] elevates them to the political level”.⁵⁴ The Albanian ambassador described that effect of joining NATO on his country:

“Twenty years ago, Albania was, let us say, a kind of consumer of stability. Now, as a NATO member, our armed forces are contributing to the stability in our region. We have armed forces in Kosovo and Bosnia

43 See Appendix 5.

44 [Q 56](#) (Sir Adam Thomson)

45 [Q 56](#) (Angus Lapsley)

46 See Appendix 5.

47 [Q 69](#) (Fiona McIlwham)

48 Written evidence from Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski ([BUB0005](#))

49 [Q 50](#) (Angus Lapsley)

50 [Q 52](#) (Angus Lapsley)

51 [Q 5](#) (General Sir Michael Rose)

52 [Q 52](#) (Angus Lapsley)

53 [Q 52](#) (Dr Jonathan Eyal)

54 [Q 54](#) (Dr Jonathan Eyal)

as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are contributing through our navy to the GLC to control of the refugee influx.”⁵⁵

41. General Sir Michael Rose warned that NATO countries must “maintain the high standards that we require them to achieve before they join”.⁵⁶ Sir Adam Thomson noted that it was in NATO’s interests for prospective members to meet its requirements: “what still drives the organisation is a concern for stability, security and, to a degree, prosperity in the western Balkans ... it is not driven by a concern simply to get these countries into the fold.”⁵⁷
42. **NATO membership and cooperation could enhance the peace and stability of the region. We agree with the Government’s continuing support for the membership ambitions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Providing they meet the requirements for membership, their accession would be a welcome step towards greater stability in the region.**
43. **The Government should support measures to help Macedonia join NATO, with or without a solution to the name issue.**

EU accession

Timetable for accession and support in the region

44. All six Western Balkan countries have ambitions to join the EU. Each is at a different stage in the accession process (see Box 2). In 2003 in Thessaloniki the heads of state at the EU–Western Balkans Summit declared “The future of the Balkans is within the European Union.”⁵⁸

Box 2: EU membership status of Western Balkan countries

- Albania: candidate country since 2014
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: potential candidate status
- Kosovo: potential candidate status
- Macedonia: candidate country since 2005
- Montenegro: candidate country in 2010, negotiations began in 2012
- Serbia: candidate country since 2012, negotiations began in 2014

Source: European Commission, ‘European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement’, 6 December 2016: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/check-current-status_en [accessed 21 December 2017]

45. However, in 2014 in his inaugural address to the European Parliament as President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker suggested a halt to EU enlargement for the term of the Commission as no candidate countries would be ready in that time. He said “This applies especially to the Western Balkans.”⁵⁹

55 Q 26 (HE Qirjako Qirko)

56 Q 5 (General Sir Michael Rose)

57 Q 52 (Sir Adam Thomson)

58 European Commission, Press Release: *EU-Western Balkans Summit*, (21 June 2003): http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-03-163_en.htm [accessed 28 November 2017]

59 Jean-Claude Juncker, Opening Statement to the European Parliament plenary session, 15 July 2014: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-567_en.htm [accessed 28 November 2017]

46. On 13 September 2017 Mr Juncker sent a letter of intent to the President of the European Parliament and the chairperson of the Council of the EU. In it he listed a number of initiatives “to be launched with a 2025 perspective”, which included a “Strategy for a successful EU accession of Serbia and Montenegro as frontrunner candidates in the Western Balkans, with a particular emphasis on the rule of law, fundamental rights and the fight against corruption and on the overall stability of the region.”⁶⁰ Bulgaria have since announced that the Western Balkans will be a priority for their presidency of the Council of the European Union. They are calling for “a clear action plan with each of the countries, without creating unrealistic expectations, but with concrete steps.”⁶¹
47. Mr Juncker’s statements and a perception that EU membership is an increasingly distant prospect have created disillusionment in the region with the accession process. During our visits to the region we were told that after the Thessaloniki Summit enthusiasm for EU membership had been high. Since Mr Juncker’s statements, though still relatively high, support had dropped.⁶² The FCO echoed this view:
- “The prospect of EU membership still unifies divided countries/communities and a divided region. But it is increasingly seen as a distant or abstract prospect by some in the region.”⁶³
48. Nikola Dimitrov, Macedonian Foreign Minister, said that there was a sense of his country, and others in the region, being “locked in the waiting room” of accession. This made it hard for governments to pursue the difficult reforms necessary for EU membership and to maintain public support for them.⁶⁴

Accession process

49. Besides the timetable for membership, the accession process itself was criticised for not leading to genuine reforms. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon described the phenomenon from his time as High Representative:
- “Chris Patten had a lovely phrase. He used to say: ‘The problem with all the Balkans by the way is that they pretend to do what we ask them and we pretend to believe them’.”⁶⁵
50. In Serbia, we were told that reforms required by the EU were made on paper only—their implementation changed nothing. For example, state media companies had been privatised to meet EU requirements but the newly privatised companies had been bought by those close to the ruling party, leaving them effectively functioning as state media.⁶⁶
51. The effect of this approach “diminishes the power of Brussels.”⁶⁷ Dr Andi Hoxhaj, University of Warwick, described the accession process as “a box

60 Jean-Claude Juncker and Frans Timmermans, *State of the Union 2017: Letter of intent to President Antonio Tajani and Prime Minister Jüri Ratas*, 13 September 2017: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/letter-of-intent-2017_en.pdf [accessed 28 November 2017]

61 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union: <https://eu2018bg.bg/en/28> [accessed 7 December 2017]

62 See Appendix 6.

63 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

64 See Appendix 5.

65 [Q 12](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

66 See Appendix 6.

67 [Q 12](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

ticking exercise with no long-lasting impact”, meaning “the process of EU approximation has become unrelated to progress in democratisation in region”.⁶⁸

52. For some, this “box ticking” on the EU’s part is exacerbated by a suspicion that the commitment of local politicians to EU membership is lukewarm. In Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told that although the majority of politicians advocated EU membership, they recognised that combatting fraud and corruption, and establishing a free judiciary and the rule of law, could substantially undermine their ability to exercise power in the way they were accustomed to.⁶⁹ One participant in the roundtable session we held said that every politician in Bosnia and Herzegovina had “around seven sentences” about the EU which they repeated as necessary but their commitment went no deeper.⁷⁰
53. Some witnesses said the EU’s approach to the region had prioritised “stability over democratic values”.⁷¹ This was why the EU, and ‘the West’ more generally, was content to believe progress was genuinely being made. Tena Prelec, LSE, said that the West had supported “stabilitocracy” and this had “been exploited by actors who have presented themselves as beacons of stability while consolidating their patronage networks, ensuring near invincibility at elections in years to come.” She argued that “Cracking down on corruption, ensuring the rule of law, potentiating the education system and stimulating a meritocratic structure in job allocation is much more important than ensuring short-term stability.”⁷²
54. Timothy Less, Nova Europa, saw the situation as “an effective end to the process of EU enlargement” and asked “what on earth do you do with those countries when the remedy that we have been promoting for the last 20 years, stabilisation through integration, appears to have reached a dead end?”⁷³

UK’s support for accession

55. The outcome of the UK’s EU referendum has affected the region’s accession prospects. In addition to Brexit being portrayed by some in the region as a rejection of the values of the EU (see paragraph 14), the UK’s departure from the EU was seen as a blow for two further reasons: “Brexit negotiations are expected to further absorb the much-needed energy for EU’s enlargement policy” and the “UK has been considered as an enlargement-friendly country; hence its exit from the EU is seen as a loss of an important ally within the EU.”⁷⁴
56. To ensure progress towards accession was not weakened by Brexit, Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon said that “In the Balkans, we and Brussels should be *ad idem* in what we are trying to pursue, and we should add our weight to theirs.”⁷⁵ The Government’s *Foreign policy, defence and development: a future partnership paper* stated “The UK will also seek to continue to promote European values through cooperation in regions where we share common

68 Written evidence from Dr Andi Hoxhaj ([BUB0004](#))

69 See Appendix 6.

70 See Appendix 7.

71 Written evidence from Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([BUB0006](#))

72 Written evidence from Tena Prelec ([BUB0007](#))

73 [Q 38](#) (Timothy Less)

74 Written evidence from Foreign Policy Initiative BH ([BUB0025](#))

75 [Q 14](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

objectives, including the Western Balkans”.⁷⁶ Fiona Mcilwham, Head of the Western Balkans and Enlargement Department, FCO, said that this would be done through “some sort of relationship”, yet to be agreed, and through “bilateral spend”.⁷⁷

Alternatives to EU membership

57. Despite the concerns and criticisms, no witnesses proposed any alternative to pursuing EU membership. The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, told us that although membership was the goal, the reforms required by the EU were desirable in themselves—the journey was as important as the destination. Even if the EU ruled out further enlargement for the next 10 years, Serbia would continue to pursue accession in order to tackle corruption, strengthen its public institutions and open its markets.⁷⁸
58. Professor James Ker-Lindsay, St Mary’s University, summarised the impact of aiming for EU membership:

“the EU has been the single most important stabilising influence in the region. The prospect of membership has done more than anything else to prompt the countries of the Western Balkans to engage with one another in a more positive manner as well as address many of the domestic problems they face. ... Overall, the EU has been the key driver of social, political and economic reform in the Western Balkans”.⁷⁹
59. Although the timetable for accession appears to have lengthened, the EU has been consistent in its position of wishing to see the Western Balkan countries join the Union. For example, President Macron of France described enlargement into the Western Balkans as “a key factor of peace and stability on our continent”, ensuring the region does not move “towards either Russia or Turkey, or towards authoritarian powers that don’t currently uphold our values.”⁸⁰
60. **It is concerning that support for EU membership in the Western Balkans has weakened. Statements by senior figures in the EU such as the President of the Commission postponing accession to some distant date in the future are not helpful. This is not in the UK’s interests as EU membership is the most reliable path for Western Balkan countries to achieve security, stability and prosperity. Post-Brexit the UK must continue wholeheartedly to support the accession ambitions of Western Balkan countries.**
61. **The UK remains well-placed to promote the values and institutional standards EU membership requires. This must done in concert with the EU and bilaterally. The Government must not allow our leaving the EU to be presented as a rejection of those values and standards. It is important that the UK and EU do not allow themselves to be played off against one another by local actors with different agendas to our own.**

76 *Foreign Policy, defence and development*, para 69

77 [Q 70](#) (Fiona Mcilwham)

78 See Appendix 6

79 Written evidence from Professor James Ker-Lindsay ([BUB0015](#))

80 President Macron, Speech on Initiative for Europe, 26 September 2017: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/english_version_transcript_-_initiative_for_europe_-_speech_by_the_president_of_the_french_republic_cle8de628.pdf [accessed 14 December 2017]

62. **Although the journey towards membership may be important in its own right, genuine progress to combat corruption, embed the rule of law, ensure freedom of expression and of the press, and achieve other reforms necessary for EU membership must be made. Outside the EU but remaining a champion for accession, the UK should be a critical friend of countries in the region. The Government should speak out when countries in the region fall short of the values and standards required and use its influence to ensure shortcomings are recognised.**

CHAPTER 5: INTERESTS OF OTHER COUNTRIES

63. There is concern about the influence of third countries in the region. The lack of progress towards EU membership has left the region “vulnerable for other competing influence such as Russia, Turkey, Middle Eastern countries and China.”⁸¹

USA

64. The USA was considered an important actor in the region, not least because of its role in ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were two main views about the current role of the USA in the region.
65. One view was that there was uncertainty about the USA’s commitment to the region following President Trump’s election. General Sir Michael Rose said “My worry ... is that President Trump’s isolationist policies and decision to reduce the budgets that are being employed in the western Balkans at the moment will leave a vacuum that might well be filled by the Russians.”⁸²
66. Marko Prelec said:
- “United States foreign policy can now be thought of as a ship without a captain. There is, of course, a President and there is a Secretary of State, but they are not actively engaged, certainly not in this part of the world. They have no demonstrated interest in or knowledge of the Balkans ... In the past, you could always say that things were looking really bad and you would get the Secretary of State or the President involved. That is no longer a plausible option. So we are essentially in housekeeping mode in the United States and are very likely to remain there for the duration of this Administration.”⁸³
67. The other view was more positive. Laza Kekic said there was a “perception that the US has lost interest and withdrawn from the region. On the contrary and quite interestingly, on Macedonia they showed the EU up. It was American intervention that resolved the crisis there. On Montenegro, in the end there was US assent for it to join NATO and [Vice-President] Pence made a stirring visit to Podgorica to underline that. Even in Bosnia, the US has been in the forefront of slapping sanctions on Dodik. So the idea that the US is withdrawing from the region is probably not right.”⁸⁴
68. The Albanian Ambassador took a similar view. He noted Vice-President Pence’s visit to Montenegro, during which he “confirmed the continuing support and engagement of the United States in the region, along with US support for the integration of the region into the European Union and NATO.”⁸⁵ The Ambassador said “We had a kind of crisis in Albania before the elections, as did Macedonia and Kosovo. The US Deputy Assistant Secretary for the region, Hoyt Brian Yee, was very active in this process and everything was resolved in the three countries. That was thanks to the contribution of the United States. It is actively involved in the region, and we welcome its presence very much.”⁸⁶

81 Written evidence from Dr Andi Hoxhaj ([BUB0004](#))

82 [Q 3](#) (General Sir Michael Rose)

83 [Q 23](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

84 [Q 41](#) (Laza Kekic)

85 [Q 31](#) (HE Qirjako Qirko)

86 [Q 31](#) (HE Qirjako Qirko)

Russia

69. The influence of Russia in the region was the topic on which we received most evidence. Dr Andi Hoxhaj, University of Warwick, wrote that the UK and others should be concerned about “the increase of Russian influence meddling in the Western Balkans.”⁸⁷
70. This influence was seen by many as malign. Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski, LSE, thought Russia considered the Western Balkans as Europe’s “soft underbelly. This is where Russia seeks the opportunities to exploit differences by playing the anti-Western card. It uses it in its relations to undermine the Western model and its achievements in the region”.⁸⁸ Many agreed with Dr Wisniewski’s analysis; Kurt Bassuener called Russia an “opportunistic spoiler”.⁸⁹ More specifically, Marko Prelec, Central European University, said that Russia’s interest in the region was to “keep NATO out”.⁹⁰
71. Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe, said Russia had “a very long-standing and complex relationship with the region that takes many forms—historical, cultural, political, and of course the energy influence, as well as through information campaigns and links with politicians”; it had “a broad policy of causing division where it can”.⁹¹
72. Other witnesses disagreed with this view of Russia’s involvement. Uros Delevic said:
- “The influence of the Russian Federation in Balkans is often perceived as negative due to its special relations with Serbia. However, this type of relationship is well known between the UK and the US, and it should not come as a surprise that Russia attempts to maintain military neutrality in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro or FYR Macedonia. NATO has already approached Russian borders and has a strong presence in Balkans, where Albania and Croatia are full members.”⁹²
73. Sir Adam Thomson, ELN, said:
- “The Russians genuinely see it as unfair and inimical to their interests that NATO, in particular, and the EU, to a degree, should be extending their sphere of influence in the Balkans. Russian investment in Serbia, for example, is born of genuine feelings about Serb nationality, and ethnicity to a degree, as well as geostrategic interests.”⁹³
74. Witnesses generally agreed that, whether its intentions were for good or ill, Russia did not provide the region with an alternative prospect for achieving stability and prosperity compared to EU and NATO membership. Dr Wiśniewski said “Russian strategic communications do not offer a coherent alternative to the European Union. Its media outlets may criticise Brussels and wider European politics, but they do not portray the Eurasian Union as a viable alternative for Belgrade.”⁹⁴

87 Written evidence from Dr Andi Hoxhaj ([BUB0004](#))

88 [Q 35](#) (Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski)

89 Written evidence from Kurt Bassuener ([BUB0013](#))

90 [Q 22](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

91 [Q 72](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

92 Written evidence from Uros Delevic ([BUB0014](#))

93 [Q 52](#) (Sir Adam Thomson)

94 Written evidence from Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski ([BUB0005](#))

75. Some witnesses questioned the extent of Russia's influence in the region. For some, particularly those we spoke to in the region, it was extensive. For example, the influence of the pro-Russian news agency Sputnik was significant. Dr Wiśniewski said:

“the main agency sources of news, particularly in Serbia but also in [the Entity of] Republika Srpska and Montenegro, is Sputnik. So among what are considered respectable media outlets in the Balkans, when you look at the source of the information, not always but very often it is Sputnik because it is one of the few agencies in the region with a large number of correspondents or local stringers. Western media have a limited number of stringers and correspondents working in the region, which creates a certain imbalance.”⁹⁵

76. The International Security Institute also saw Russia's role as extensive, including substantial political interference in Macedonia and Montenegro (see Appendix 4):

“Russia's strategic presence also provides political and strategic space to any other illegitimate influence. Russian-backed coups in Macedonia and Montenegro have failed, but Moscow still controls significant political forces in these countries. Russia is undisputed in [the Entity of] Republika Srpska ... In Serbia, Russian political influence is largely represented in the National Assembly and security structures ... Serbia is also one of the exporters of Russian arms, standards and politics in all conflict areas under Russian strategic influence. ... The Russian so-called humanitarian center in Niš [in Serbia] is a concrete institution of strategic partnership and political influence of the Russian government and its promotion of anti-Western and anti-democratic affiliations and political arrangements.”⁹⁶

77. Other witnesses concluded that “talk of a resurgent Russia dominating the region is overblown”.⁹⁷ Timothy Less said that Russians were not “big hitters in the region. The reason why they have any influence at all is solely because of the power vacuum that is opening up as a result of the breakdown of the EU enlargement process and the diminishing authority of the West.”⁹⁸ Laza Kekic, an independent analyst, said that Russia had “suffered some immense setbacks recently”.⁹⁹ He cited Montenegro's accession into NATO and the fall of the Gruevski government in Macedonia as examples of Russia's interests being directly thwarted. He also noted that Russia was not a significant investor in the region; “in economic trade and investment terms, Russia is so small. It has 5% or 6% of these countries' trade and investment, so compared to the EU it is a very small player.”¹⁰⁰ The Albanian ambassador said there had been “zero investment in Albania from Russia in the last 27 years.”¹⁰¹

78. Dr Wiśniewski concluded:

“When it comes to the Balkans, Western leaders have often underestimated what Russia is doing there. At the same time, Russia

95 [Q 36](#) (Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski)

96 Written evidence from the International Security Institute ([BUB0002](#))

97 Written evidence from Behar Sadriu ([BUB0010](#))

98 [Q 35](#) (Timothy Less)

99 [Q 35](#) (Laza Kekic)

100 *Ibid.*

101 [Q 32](#) (HE Qirjako Qirko)

should not be overestimated; it wants us to believe that its involvement in the region is bigger than it really is. There is a fine balance between what Russia is actually doing, what we think it is doing and the projection that it has in the region.”¹⁰²

79. Regardless of how much influence Russia genuinely has in the region, the perception of it show that it is having some success. Tena Prelec, LSE, said that “The EU is by far the most prominent investor in the region, but in spite of this, survey evidence suggests that a majority of Serbs think that Russia is still their biggest donor.”¹⁰³ Dr Wisniewski saw a similar trend in Serbia: “Far more Serbian citizens say they would prefer to be allied with Russia (67.2 percent in favour and 18.8 percent against) than say they would like to join the European Union (50.9 percent for to 38.8 percent against).”¹⁰⁴
80. Russia has genuine influence, in Serbia at least, on the issue of Kosovo. Russia has repeatedly vetoed the recognition of Kosovo in the UN. The International Security Institute wrote that in “normalising relations between Serbia and Kosovo and concluding a compromise under the auspices of the EU, Russia loses political importance for Serbia”.¹⁰⁵ Witnesses, particularly those in the region, saw little prospect of a resolution of the Serbia–Kosovo issue. The ‘internal dialogue’ launched by President Vučić in Serbia to air the arguments about Kosovo and perhaps reach a national consensus was seen by many as insincere.¹⁰⁶ However, Marko Prelec thought attitudes in Serbia towards Kosovo were slowly shifting:

“The extent to which people really care about this is now, I think, quite diminished. Serbia has neglected, to the point of contempt, the interests of its former clients among the Kosovo Serbs, and it has paid no significant price in popularity. The public image of the Kosovo Serbs in Serbia is that they are moochers and a drain on the state. There is not so much sympathy for them, and as time has passed people have got used to the idea that they are simply lost to Serbia.”¹⁰⁷

81. Sir Adam Thomson, ELN, said that whatever the actual extent of Russia’s influence and intentions, “if NATO governments dwell too much on a NATO/Russia competition, they are unlikely to be doing any favours to stability in the region ... NATO’s interests ... need to be played in a more nuanced way than a straight black and white West/Russia competition.”¹⁰⁸ Angus Lapsley, FCO, agreed that the UK, and others, needed to engage with Russia. He noted that there were existing formats to do so, including the Peace Implementation Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁰⁹

China

82. China has been investing in the Western Balkans as part of its ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative.¹¹⁰ The Balkans form part of the ‘16+1’ group of countries

102 Q 35 (Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski)

103 Written evidence from Tena Prelec (BUB0007)

104 Written evidence from Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski (BUB0005)

105 Written evidence from the International Security Institute (BUB0002)

106 See Appendix 6

107 Q 22 (Prof Marko Prelec)

108 Q 52 (Sir Adam Thomson)

109 Q 52 (Angus Lapsley)

110 This is a Chinese initiative to build networks of infrastructure and financial cooperation connecting China to markets around the world.

with which China is seeking to improve cooperation.¹¹¹ Witnesses said that China's interests in the area were quite different to Russia's: "unlike Moscow, it does not oppose EU or NATO enlargement (quite the contrary as for the EU)".¹¹² Anthony Monckton, ViennEast, wrote that China saw the region as "a commercial opportunity to use its economic muscle to garner regional influence."¹¹³

83. Chinese investment in the region has largely been welcomed by some. Uros Delevic said that China represented "a factor of peace and stability, it brings economic benefit and does not interfere in the internal political affairs, which is what makes China warmly welcome in all Balkan states."¹¹⁴ Michal Makocki, formerly of EUISS and Mercator Institute for China Studies, said that "given the huge infrastructure deficiency, China's overtures are seen as extremely positive as they may be a boon to the local economies."¹¹⁵ Timothy Less agreed: "if China was not willing to put its money into some of these big infrastructure projects, nobody would, and the Balkans would not have the new railroads, ports, roads, factories and other investments which the Chinese are currently financing."¹¹⁶
84. However, there was concern that, although investment was welcome, China's actions were "undermining the governance reforms that we have been promoting in the Balkans" because, whereas EU funding came with conditions attached, "Chinese companies often operate with less attention paid to standards of corruption. They also operate with lower transparency standards."¹¹⁷
85. Another concern was that China was providing not grants but loans, leading to rising national debt. Michael Makocki said:
- "in Montenegro, one project amounted to a quarter of Montenegro's GDP. It was also a loan, established in US dollars, which meant that with the currency exchange rate the amount of that loan to Montenegro suddenly increased by 25% ... The IMF and the World Bank have already engaged all the countries in the region on the issue of Chinese lending. Serbia has also become extremely cautious in taking up other projects from China because of a warning from the IMF that its indebtedness is already reaching its ceiling."¹¹⁸
86. He therefore argued that, because of the need for investment in the region, "we have to work with China in a way that addresses all the different concerns and deficits of its investment model, so that we get the best of its attention to the region".¹¹⁹ Andrew Page, Western Balkans Summit Co-ordinator, FCO, described conversations he had had with representatives of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) who were "looking at how it can work with China, for instance, through the Asian Infrastructure

111 The 16 countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

112 Written evidence from Kurt Bassuener ([BUB0013](#))

113 Written evidence from Anthony Monckton ([BUB0009](#))

114 Written evidence from Uros Delevic ([BUB0014](#))

115 [Q 33](#) (Michal Makocki)

116 [Q 34](#) (Timothy Less)

117 [Q 33](#) (Michal Makocki)

118 [Q 34](#) (Michal Makocki)

119 [Q 33](#) (Michal Makocki)

Investment Bank and whether the EBRD can come in as a partner with China on long-term infrastructure investment. When the EBRD comes in, that brings in a level of rigour to due diligence and conditions attached to its lending.”¹²⁰

87. Most witnesses thought China saw cooperation with the Western Balkans as a long-term investment in countries that would one day be in the EU. China saw EU membership for the Western Balkan countries “as absolutely critical to the stability of the region” and took the view that “one day there will be six more friendly pro-Chinese countries represented in the EU institutions, which will lobby for Chinese political interests.”¹²¹

Turkey

88. The influence and intentions of Turkey in the Western Balkans were mentioned by some witnesses. One view was that “Turkey and Middle Eastern theocracies are attempting to control the Balkan Muslims.”¹²² Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, LSE, had similar concerns about Turkey’s influence extending “into other spheres in areas where Muslims are in a majority. This reinforces an image of ‘silent islamisation’ in some of the communities, which is a source of concern for the non-Muslim population, and works against peace and reconciliation in the region.”¹²³
89. One way Turkey had been seen to exert its influence was in funding new mosques or repairs to those that had fallen into disrepair. For example, the Namazgâh Mosque in Tirana, funded by Turkey, is expected to be the largest mosque in the Balkans once completed. Another source of influence had been through educational organisations, particularly Gülen schools. However, since 2013 Turkey’s attitude towards them has changed: “Turkey is now going around the world putting pressure on Governments to close down these institutions”.¹²⁴
90. Some saw Turkey as hoping to “renew its traditional political and economic presence in the region as a growing regional power.”¹²⁵ Dr Michael Taylor, Oxford Analytica, described this as “a kind of neo-Ottomanism” with Turkey attempting to exert influence in countries where there might still be the “nostalgia for the Ottomans which the Turks had”. However, he thought Turkey had “found that it made quite a mistake there, generating antagonism among them by running that policy.”¹²⁶
91. Laza Kekic questioned how extensive Turkish investment in the region was: “even in a country such as Bosnia where there is a predisposition to welcoming Turkey, as we heard, the sum total of Turkish investment is €200 million. That is hardly anything.”¹²⁷ However, he expected the potential for Turkish influence to grow in the future if the region was unable to achieve greater Euro–Atlantic integration because of the likely demographic change in the region: “If you look at the projections for 2030 or 2040, the amount

120 [Q 72](#) (Andrew Page)

121 [Q 40](#) (Timothy Less)

122 Written evidence from the International Security Institute ([BUB0002](#))

123 Written evidence from Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic ([BUB0027](#))

124 [Q 37](#) (Dr Michael Taylor)

125 Written evidence from Jelica Minić; Milena Lazarević; Lejla Ramić-Mesihović ([BUB0025](#))

126 [Q 37](#) (Dr Michael Taylor)

127 [Q 37](#) (Laza Kekic)

of people in the region who are Muslims will be very large and I suspect that they will look towards countries like Turkey for cultural education.”¹²⁸

Table 2: Muslim population of the Western Balkans

Country	% Muslim population
Albania	57%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51%
Kosovo	96%
Macedonia	33%
Montenegro	19%
Serbia	3%
Western Balkans total	35%

Source: Figures derived from CIA, World Factbook Library 2017: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/> [accessed 21 December 2017]

92. Turkey’s geopolitical role in the region was also unclear. Though formally an EU candidate country, Timothy Less said that he could not be sure “whether ... Turkey will definitely support the integration of the western Balkans into the EU.”¹²⁹ Although Turkey is already a NATO member its “relationships with America are very strained at the moment. It is the same with a number of NATO members, most obviously Germany”,¹³⁰ not least because of its purchase of the S-400 ground-to-air missile system from Russia.

Saudi Arabia and Gulf states

93. A number of witnesses referred to Saudi Arabia exporting radical Islamism in the region. Anthony Monckton said that Saudi Arabia (and Iran) were “effectively funding a growth in Wahhabism”.¹³¹ Timothy Less thought the Saudi influence was less clear-cut. While Saudi investment might promote “a culture that is enabling radicalisation ... I certainly would not want to go so far as to allege that anyone in Saudi Arabia is actively promoting terrorism in the region. I just do not think the evidence supports that.”¹³²

94. Evidence about investment from the Gulf States focused more on their economic ambitions. Tena Prelec, LSE, said that “starting from 2007, the UAE began to make commercial investments, first in Montenegro and then (from 2014) in Serbia. While they profess their government to be ‘geographically agnostic’, UAE officials do not hide a geopolitical interest (in terms of ‘making friends around the globe’) and stress the long-term character of the investments, in the hope of securing a foothold in the Balkan region before it joins a larger (EU) market.”¹³³

95. Marko Prelec said:

“There has been a lot of talk in the Gulf mainly about influxes of populations in the form of people buying property ... It is true that

128 *Ibid.*

129 Q 37 (Timothy Less)

130 Q 39 (Timothy Less)

131 Written evidence from Anthony Monckton (BUB0009)

132 Q 37 (Timothy Less)

133 Written evidence from Tena Prelec (BUB0007)

whole communities in Bosnia have been bought up by Gulf Arabs. My understanding is that this is simply people seeking comfortable and relatively cheap European property with a pleasant summer climate, unlike that of the Gulf, and a culturally welcoming Islamic population. There does not seem to be anything especially nefarious about it.”¹³⁴

Croatia

96. Croatia was not much raised by witnesses despite it being an influential actor in the region. Croatia is an EU member state (since 2013) and a member of NATO (since 2009).
97. Diplomatic relations between Croatia and Serbia have been tense since the end of the wars of the 1990s. For example, both countries filed suits against one another with the International Court of Justice on charges of genocide (both of which were dismissed in 2015). In 2016, Serbia accused Croatia of preventing a chapter in their EU accession process being opened. Despite some periods of improved relations, such as Croatian President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, attending Serbian President Vučić’s inauguration, relations remain difficult. President Vučić has postponed indefinitely his scheduled trip to Croatia citing a lack of mutual trust between the nations and Croatia has objected to the erection in Belgrade of a statue of Milan Tepic (a Serb soldier who blew himself up in an ammunition warehouse in Croatia during the war in 1991, killing 11 Croatian soldiers).
98. Croatia’s influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is also significant. Croatia has a policy of allowing any Croats who are citizens of other countries to claim Croatian citizenship, thus giving them access to the rest of the EU. In Bosnia and Herzegovina 15% of the population are Croat¹³⁵ and two of the cantons of the Federation which border Croatia, Livno and West Herzegovina, have Croat majority populations (see Figure 3 in Appendix 4).
99. General Sir Michael Rose said that if the Entity of Republika Srpska were to vote for independence from Bosnia and Herzegovina, “We would end up with the Croatian element moving across and joining Croatia, and Europe having to sustain a tiny, unworkable Muslim state in the middle”—something he described as “unthinkable”.¹³⁶
100. In his 2017 report to the Secretary-General of the UN, the High Representative, Dr Valentin Inzko, referred to Croat politicians advocating reorganising the country along ethnic lines, including the creation of a Croat Republic of Herzeg-Bosna.¹³⁷ The issue of self-rule for the Bosnian Croats has resurfaced several times since the signing of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. Some Bosnian Croat politicians have sought to make a case for a Croat-majority ‘third entity’ within Bosnia. Dragan Čović, the president of the HDZ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has argued that the current two-entity system means that Bosnian Croats are deprived of their basic rights and subject to assimilation within the Federation (one of Bosnia’s two entities).

134 [Q 24](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

135 CIA, ‘World Factbook’: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html> [accessed 29 November 2017]

136 [Q 4](#) (General Sir Michael Rose)

137 Office of the High Representative, *52nd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN* (11 June 2017): http://www.ohr.int/?p=98165#_edn1 [accessed 28 November 2017]

101. Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović has also caused controversy in Bosnia and Herzegovina by claiming that thousands of Islamist fighters were returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina from Iraq and Syria. Marko Prelec described such statements as part of “a long and well-documented history of exaggerating, if not inventing, an Islamic threat”.¹³⁸ He saw such activity from Croatia as being driven by the fact that Bosnian Croats were eligible to vote in Croatia elections.
102. **The countries discussed all have different interests in the region and different ways of pursuing them. Any involvement in the region which undermines progress towards stability, security, good governance and prosperity should be of concern to the UK. Post-Brexit the UK must work closely with international partners to ensure as little space as possible is provided for others to act against those objectives.**
103. **Russia’s influence in the region is a factor of particular concern. Its effect has been to slow progress towards good governance and the region emerging as fully democratic. While the extent of Russian interference might still be a matter of debate, the potential for it destabilising the region should not be underestimated.**

138 [Q 19](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

CHAPTER 6: STATE CAPTURE

104. Many witnesses, particularly in the region, were concerned that “previous governance progress has been reversed”.¹³⁹ An increased trend towards state capture was apparent.
105. Witnesses described the features of state capture in various ways. The Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis spoke of “strong Government meddling” which imposed “party control over employment policies at all administrative levels” leading to “clientelism and nepotism in the administration, since employment is often perceived as a reward for achievements and work for political parties and their interests.”¹⁴⁰ A similar scenario was described to us in Macedonia, where under the previous government even cleaners were vetted by the ruling party and there was a widespread phenomenon of fake jobs with people being paid for jobs within the state administration while, in fact, delivering nothing.¹⁴¹
106. The FCO summarised the phenomenon of state capture as one where “Powerful individuals, political parties, executive branches, and state-run companies dominate institutions in much of the region. In many cases media are controlled by, or beholden to, those in power.”¹⁴² In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told that the influence of the government and of the ruling parties also limited civil society and went as far as constituting “society capture”.¹⁴³

Authoritarian leadership

107. The European Council on Foreign Relations thought that “the return of ‘strongman leadership’” was the Western Balkan’s “single greatest political and governance challenge” They said the rule of such leaders “has done much to undermine healthy democratic politics, good governance, and freedom of the media. This method of governance provides the semblance of stability but creates underlying instability in the long run.”¹⁴⁴ This concern was reflected during our visit to Serbia: President Vučić was criticised for subverting the constitution (his ‘freezing’ of his party political office while holding the presidency was cited as an example of this).¹⁴⁵
108. During our visits we were told about UK activity to support future leaders and to promote a different concept of political leadership. In Sarajevo we met a number of participants in the British Embassy Fellowship Programme.¹⁴⁶ The Fellowship Programme brings together young professionals in Bosnia and Herzegovina to expose them to British approaches to policy making and civil society, including a three week study visit to London. The aim is to create an ongoing network of people who will become the country’s future leaders with a background in more open, collaborative and democratic politics.

139 Written evidence from Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([BUB0006](#))

140 Written evidence from Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis ([BUB0019](#))

141 See Appendix 6.

142 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

143 See Appendix 6.

144 Written evidence from the ECFR ([BUB0020](#))

145 See Appendix 6.

146 *Ibid.*

Political parties

109. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy referred to problems with the nature of political parties in the region: “standards of political party debate, behaviours and structures fall well short of those expected in a genuinely democratic society. The use of tear gas in the Assembly of Kosovo throughout 2015 and 2016, serves as an extreme example.”¹⁴⁷

Box 3: Political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Each country in the region has many political parties. Often these parties have an ethnic basis. For example, prominent parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina include:

- Party of Democratic Action (SDA): Bosniak
- Stranka za Bolju Buducnost (SBB): Bosniak
- Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD): Serb
- Serbian Democratic Party (SDS): Serb
- Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH): Croat
- Democratic Front (DF): Multi-ethnic
- Naša Stranka: Multi-ethnic

110. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon told us that ethnic divides were carried into daily politics (see Box 3); this was “driven by the politicians at the top who want to preserve the specificities of their ethnicity because it helps them to control power.”¹⁴⁸ George Stamkoski, Volatile Media, saw this in Macedonia where the former ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE, had “linked people’s frustration and dissatisfaction to historical grievances ... to nurture a sense of victimisation and fear of a loss of identity. This has served to keep it in power for over a decade with the promise of protection”.¹⁴⁹

Freedom of expression

111. The FCO was concerned about “increased backsliding on freedom of expression in some countries in the region. This includes political interference in the work of public broadcasters, a lack of transparent public funding of media and intimidation of journalists.”¹⁵⁰ The Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index ranks 180 countries according to the level of freedom available to journalists. Although only Serbia’s ranking has got worse since 2016, all of the countries in the region included in the index score poorly (see Table 3).

147 Written evidence from Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([BUB0006](#))

148 [Q 13](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

149 Written evidence from George Stamkoski ([BUB0024](#))

150 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

Table 3: Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index

	2017 ranking	2016 ranking	2015 ranking
Albania	76	82	82
Bosnia and Herzegovina	65	68	66
Macedonia	111	118	117
Montenegro	106	106	114
Serbia	66	59	67

Source: Reporters without Borders, 2017 World Press Freedom Index: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking#> [accessed 21 December 2017] (No ranking for Kosovo given)

112. The freedom of the press was raised repeatedly during our visits to the region. In Serbia we were told that although the legislative framework allowed for freedom of the press, outlets that were critical of the government could, for example, expect to receive a crippling number of tax audits. In the case of a local weekly publication, *Vranjske novine*, this had led to its closure; the owner, Vukasin Obradovic, went on hunger strike in protest. We were told of a survey of the coverage political leaders received on the front pages of newspapers. 97% included coverage of President Vučić, all of which was positive; 3% included coverage of opposition leaders, all of which was negative.¹⁵¹
113. The Prime Minister of Serbia did not recognise this scenario. She felt that she received plenty of critical media coverage. However, she noted that, whether accurate or not, a perception of a biased media was of concern.¹⁵²
114. In Serbia we heard about the BBC World Service’s plans to establish an online Serbian language service. There was disappointment that the service would be online only, with concerns that this would limit its reach and influence. Others were more hopeful that it would provide an alternative open news source to the likes of Sputnik.¹⁵³

Civil society

115. The role of civil society groups and NGOs varies across the region. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy wrote that “Civil society across the region report their access to parliaments and government institutions has diminished, often resulting in a confrontational relationship between legislators and citizens.”¹⁵⁴ In Macedonia, however, civil society groups were more influential: “mass anti-corruption protests have facilitated a radical change in the country’s leadership”.¹⁵⁵
116. Two civil society issues that emerged, especially during our visits to the region, were women’s engagement and participation in civil and political life; and education systems in the region.

151 See Appendix 6.

152 *Ibid.*

153 *Ibid.*

154 Written evidence from Westminster Foundation for Democracy (BUB0006)

155 Written evidence from Tena Prelec (BUB0007)

Women in civil society

117. There were two connected themes on the role of women in civil society: the legacy of sexual violence from the wars of the 1990s and women's participation in political and civil life generally.
118. Dr Denisa Kostovicova, LSE, described the legacy of sexual violence from the wars:
- “the post-conflict violence against women cannot be dissociated from war-time sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo that took place en masse, overwhelmingly against Bosnian Muslim and Albanian women ... Stigma that surrounds war-time rape, and isolation of victims in their local environments and in their families, stops them from coming forward. Women in many cases struggle to provide for their families in silence (many have lost husbands and other male family members during the war), or are economically dependent on their husbands (and unable to leave abusive relationships).”¹⁵⁶
119. A similar picture of women economically and culturally restricted from participating in civil society was painted by groups we met in Kosovo: the Kosovo's Network (KWN) and the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT).¹⁵⁷
120. In Kosovo we were told that many of the crimes committed against women during the wars could not be brought to justice because evidence of them, and other war crimes, were held by the EU's rule of law mission, EULEX. One person described these testimonials as a “Pandora's Box”. The non-recognition of Kosovo by some EU countries meant EULEX could not act on these testimonials and charges could not be brought. Domestic violence was also not being addressed. KWN told us that in Kosovo legislation existed to combat such violence but it was not properly implemented. There was therefore a rise in the incidence of domestic violence, exacerbated by the harshness of sentences given to women for acts of self-defence compared to men for acts of domestic violence.¹⁵⁸
121. The legacy of sexual violence and the stigma attached to the victims of it is one factor in the low participation rates of women in the region. According to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy “women are underrepresented at all level of governance in Western Balkans”.¹⁵⁹ There are no women heads of state in the region, only one women Prime Minister (Ana Brnabić, Serbia) and only 28.6% of seats in the region's parliaments are held by women.
122. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy considered that “The UK is well placed to lead on supporting initiatives that ensure fair participation of women in public life”.¹⁶⁰
123. The UK has a good track record on this issue in the region. For example, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are two priority countries for the Government's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. The FCO highlighted work in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

156 Written evidence from Dr Denisa Kostovicova ([BUB0012](#))

157 See Appendix 6.

158 See Appendix 6.

159 Written evidence from Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([BUB0006](#))

160 *Ibid.*

“Since the start of our work in 2013 in BiH, there has been a marked increase in prosecuting conflict-related sexual violence cases from the nineties. BiH courts have now completed 116 cases involving charges of conflict-related sexual violence against 162 defendants. This is more than any other country in the world. Following a landmark ruling in June 2015, courts in BiH have provided financial compensation to victims of sexual violence in six cases, to be paid by the perpetrators. TRIAL, the NGO that provided legal support to the survivors, was part-funded by the UK Government.”¹⁶¹

124. KWN and KRCT praised the work of the British embassy in Pristina on their gender equality work and efforts to improve understanding, legislation and victim support services.¹⁶²
125. The UK also participates in international bodies active in gender equality. The OSCE has missions throughout the region; gender equality is a priority for each of them. In Macedonia we spoke to the OSCE mission, who said that community leaders did not always represent the rights of women and children, particularly in a patriarchal society, so the OSCE made particular efforts to engage with young people and women.¹⁶³

Education

126. The principal issue with education in many Western Balkan countries is that it is still ethnically segregated. The Macedonian Foreign Minister, Nikola Dimitrov, noted this as a serious issue for his country.¹⁶⁴ In Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told about the ‘two schools under one roof’ system where Bosniak and Croat children would be taught in the same school as Serb children but either in distinct parts of the building or at different times of the day, ensuring they never mixed. Throughout the region there was concern that children were being taught “Rewritten and biased histories”,¹⁶⁵ particularly about the wars of the 1990s. Drawing on their experience of working in Northern Ireland and the Balkans, Early Years said that such segregation deepened any “existing problem of exclusion and intolerance of differences”.¹⁶⁶ Anthony Monckton believed that the segregated education system had created “a generational divide with some Yugo-nostalgia in the older generation while the young know only the recent nationalist past”, both views making “many of the divisions between communities more entrenched.”¹⁶⁷
127. This educational system which embedded tensions between communities was seen by some in the region as another element of state capture. It ensured that young people were indoctrinated into an ethnically divided view of the region and were therefore ripe to become, as one person described it, “soldiers of fortune for the elites”. However, in the region we were also told of civil society efforts to bring children together. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told about a multi-ethnic music group for young people in Srebrenica.¹⁶⁸

161 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

162 See Appendix 6.

163 *Ibid.*

164 See Appendix 5.

165 Written evidence from Anthony Monckton ([BUB0009](#))

166 Written evidence from Early Years ([BUB0026](#))

167 Written evidence from Anthony Monckton ([BUB0009](#))

168 See Appendix 6.

128. The UK has educational links with the region. Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, LSE, spoke of the UK's "long tradition of educational and cultural exchange with the countries in the region which can be stepped up—both by bringing people to the UK on educational grants as well as supporting directly local educational and cultural institutions."¹⁶⁹ Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe, noted the value of such links. He referred to the Chevening scholars scheme, saying that the numbers would be increased, and encouraging students from the Western Balkans to study in the UK was one of the "tangible outcomes that we want to secure" from the Western Balkans Summit.¹⁷⁰
129. **The features of state capture described in the evidence are the opposite of the stable, prosperous democracies we would wish to see in the region. State capture, enabled by corruption, press restrictions and a lack of rule of law, prevents countries from progressing to EU and NATO membership and provides the space for disruptive external actors.**
130. *The UK must continue to support political capacity building, strengthening the rule of law, gender equality, women's participation and post-conflict reconciliation. In these areas the UK can use its soft power and add value to the actions of others in the international community working through organisations like the British Council and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.*
131. *The UK's support for the pursuit for justice for those against whom crimes were committed during the wars of the 1990s must continue. This must include working to ensure the evidence of crimes currently held by EULEX is safeguarded. The UK's work to combat present day domestic violence must also continue and should include providing training and support for the police and judiciary.*
132. *The UK should continue to support freedom of expression in the region. The return of the BBC World Service to Serbia is welcome but it should be complemented by funding and support for local independent media outlets to counter-balance more partisan and biased reporting. Diplomatic pressure should also be brought to bear in countries where freedom of expression is restricted.*
133. *We note the work in the region to support future leaders. The Government should invest more in this by, for example, expanding the Chevening Scholarships scheme. It should also encourage the promotion of the UK as a destination for higher education students from the Western Balkans and should cease treating international students, from there or elsewhere, as economic migrants.*
134. *The system of two schools under one roof can only perpetuate social tensions. The Government should put pressure on governments in the region to end this system and should provide funding and support to civil society projects which bring children together across ethnic divides.*

169 Written evidence from Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic ([BUB0027](#))

170 [Q 73](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

135. *The Western Balkans Summit should be used clearly to demonstrate of the UK's support for freedom of the press, the rule of law and the role of NGOs and civil society groups in an open democracy.*

CHAPTER 7: CORRUPTION AND ORGANISED CRIME

136. One witness said “All countries in the region suffer from the same disease, which is killing their economic potentials—endemic corruption and organised crime.”¹⁷¹

Corruption

137. Dr Andi Hoxhaj, University of Warwick, said that “the people in the Western Balkans rank corruption as the most important problem facing their countries”.¹⁷² It was a problem recognised by many during our visits to the region, including the Prime Minister of Serbia. In Kosovo we were told that private companies were related to the political system, the awarding of public tenders was a matter of political favour and businesses could be bankrupted by the party system. In Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told that the justice system was corrupt, with judges having been arrested and state prosecutors having to resign because of corruption charges.¹⁷³
138. Unemployment in the region is high. The World Bank estimate that across the region the unemployment rate is around 21% with young people and women particularly affected.¹⁷⁴ The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) linked corruption to this high unemployment rate as it undermined “the positive effect of economic reforms on the business environment” and prevented job growth.¹⁷⁵ In Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told that corruption and organised crime were features of state capture and supported a bloated public sector and grey economy, retarding private sector, and therefore employment, growth. There had also been instances of people paying to be employed in the public sector.¹⁷⁶
139. This situation is reflected in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, which ranks 176 countries and scores them out of 100 for transparency—the lower the score, the more corrupt the country is perceived to be (see Table 4).

Table 4: Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index 2016

	2016 Rank	2016 Score	2015 Score	2014 Score
Albania	83	39	36	33
Bosnia and Herzegovina	83	39	38	39
Kosovo	95	36	33	33
Macedonia	90	37	42	45
Montenegro	64	45	44	42
Serbia	72	42	40	41

Source: Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2016* : https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016 [accessed 21 December 2017]

171 Written evidence from Uros Delevic (BUB0014)

172 Written evidence from Dr Andi Hoxhaj (BUB0004)

173 See Appendix 6.

174 World Bank Group, *Western Balkans Labor Market Trends 2017*, April 2017: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/289221491270732309/pdf/113922-REVISED-PUBLIC-Regional-Report-Western-Balkan-Labor-Market-Trends-2017-FINAL-A4-Logo-WB-neu.pdf> [accessed 13 December 2017]

175 Written evidence from the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) (BUB0021)

176 See Appendix 6.

140. The Albanian Ambassador recognised corruption as a problem for his country and gave examples of work to combat it. He cited efforts to make public tenders an online-only system, cutting out the opportunity for corruption because “no contract can be made through people.” Similarly, there were reforms to adopt “e-consulate” services, monitor the traffic police and vet judicial candidates better.¹⁷⁷ The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, also spoke of using “e-government” to reduce the opportunities for corruption.¹⁷⁸ However, in Macedonia, where system of e-procurement had been introduced, some people said that ways of circumventing the new systems had already been discovered.¹⁷⁹

Organised crime

141. Linked to corruption is organised crime. Professor James Ker-Lindsay, St Mary’s University, described the region’s economic underdevelopment and levels of corruption as creating a “breeding ground for organised crime”.¹⁸⁰

142. Organised crime in the region has a direct impact on the UK. For example, the FCO stated that:

“Albanian crime groups have established a high-profile influence within UK organised crime, and have considerable control across the UK drug trafficking market, with particular impact and high-level influence on the cocaine market. Criminals from the Balkans are increasingly expanding their network of influence, forming direct relationships with cocaine suppliers in Latin America. Serbian crime groups dominate high-volume maritime cocaine logistics.”¹⁸¹

143. In Bosnia and Herzegovina we were told that after the end of the war large amounts of weapons disappeared and were now being traded elsewhere in Europe, including in the UK, by organised criminal groups.¹⁸²

144. Another form of organised crime prevalent in the region is human trafficking. Peter van der Auweraert, International Organisation for Migration, said that trafficking in the Western Balkans “remained the issue that it was before the migration crisis.”¹⁸³ He spoke of children, especially Roma children, being “moved from one place to another to engage in begging or the sex industry” within the region and in the EU.¹⁸⁴ This scenario was also described by La Strada, a Skopje-based NGO, who said that nearly all of the victims of trafficking were under 18 years old.

145. A barrier to tackling human trafficking identified by witnesses was a “lack of proper implementation of an existing legal framework”. This arose from a “lack of understanding of the international human rights standards and case-law in this area” which affected “the performance of the judiciary and other institutions and a comprehensive, multidisciplinary and victim-oriented approach to human trafficking has yet to be developed. Training and support were therefore needed to improve “the knowledge and skills of

177 [Q 28](#) (HE Qirjako Qirko)

178 See Appendix 6.

179 *Ibid.*

180 Written evidence from Prof James Ker-Lindsay ([BUB0015](#))

181 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

182 See Appendix 6.

183 [Q 46](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

184 *Ibid.*

relevant professionals to enable them to effectively assist and protect victims of trafficking, and to ensure traffickers receive adequate convictions.”¹⁸⁵ Peter van der Auweraert thought this was an area where the UK could provide valuable support.¹⁸⁶

146. The FCO and Sir Alan Duncan referred to the Government’s National Security Strategy for the Western Balkans which focused on, among other things, “combating the impact from serious and organised crime and terrorism and building resilience within the region to tackle its own problems”.¹⁸⁷ The case for continued security co-operation with the EU post-Brexit was made in the Government’s *Security, law enforcement and criminal justice: a future partnership paper*.¹⁸⁸ Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe, said that combatting organised crime was “a key focus” for the UK and one which “ties together all the interests that we need to work on between Western Balkan countries and us.”¹⁸⁹
147. ***The UK must continue to support efforts to combat corruption and organised crime in the region. Close operational links between the UK and the EU after Brexit on all aspects of Justice and Home Affairs Agenda will be essential if the UK’s own internal security is not to be jeopardised.***
148. ***The Western Balkans Summit should focus on what technical support the UK working in partnership with the EU can provide to agencies and governments in the region to combat human trafficking, corruption, organised crime and radicalisation. In particular, this should include providing training to judges, prosecutors and police.***

185 Written evidence from AASTRA Anti Trafficking Action ([BUB0003](#))

186 [Q 46](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

187 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

188 HM Government, *Security, law enforcement and criminal justice: a future partnership paper* (September 2017): https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/645416/Security_law_enforcement_and_criminal_justice_-_a_future_partnership_paper.PDF [accessed 28 November 2017]

189 [Q 73](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

CHAPTER 8: TRADE AND INVESTMENT

149. The UK's trade with and investment in the Western Balkans is modest. Professor James Ker-Lindsay, St Mary's University, described the UK's trading relationship with the region as "negligible".¹⁹⁰ Figures from the Office of National Statistics bear this out (see Table 5).

Table 5: UK trade with the Western Balkans

	Imports	Exports
Albania	£4m	£24m
Bosnia and Herzegovina	£57m	£57m
Kosovo	£0m	£3m
Macedonia	£51m	£770m
Montenegro	£0m	£22m
Serbia	£204m	£169m
Total	£316m	£1.045bn

Source: Office for National Statistics, *Who does the UK Trade with?*, 21 February 2017: <https://visual.ons.gov.uk/uk-trade-partners/> [accessed 21 December 2017]

150. Professor James Ker-Lindsay explained this low level saying:

"British companies have been much more focused on wealthier European markets, or have wanted to pursue trade with Commonwealth countries, where there are often established links. Few want to explore opportunities in the Balkans, especially as the entire population of the six countries is less than 20 million people."¹⁹¹

151. However, the British–Serbian Chamber of Commerce saw substantial scope for increased UK investment in Serbia. It cited relatively low wages, low corporate profit tax, high levels of English proficiency and, given the high level of unemployment, an easily recruited workforce.¹⁹² Jonathan Mitchell, Fox Marble, said "the Western Balkans is a huge potential investment market for the UK".¹⁹³ Michael English, London Southside Chamber of Commerce, said that there were opportunities in financial services, IT, education, mining, organic food and tourism.¹⁹⁴ The Albanian ambassador summarised the opportunities Albania presented: "The country is rich in natural resources such as petroleum, gas, chromium, copper, iron and nickel, and there is significant potential for the production of sustainable energy such as hydro, wind and solar. There are huge opportunities for investment in roads, infrastructure, airports, marinas and tourism."¹⁹⁵
152. Although witnesses saw substantial potential for individual businesses, the region itself did not present a large market for the UK. Jonathan Mitchell said "The immediate benefits to the UK economy are probably not going

190 Written evidence from Prof James Ker-Lindsay (BUB0015)

191 *Ibid.*

192 Written evidence from British–Serbian Chamber of Commerce (BUB0011)

193 Q 60 (Jonathan Mitchell)

194 Q 65 (Michael English)

195 Q 27 (HE Qirjako Qirko)

to be enormous. As markets, these countries, even collectively, never mind singly, are tiny.”¹⁹⁶

153. Businesses were not taking advantage of opportunities in the Western Balkans partly because of crime and corruption (see Chapter 7). The Jamestown Foundation said the investment climate of the region was “heavily affected by corruption and a weak judiciary”.¹⁹⁷ Jonathan Mitchell described corruption as “a drag on business”.¹⁹⁸ He said, “trying to do business [in Kosovo] ... is extremely difficult. It is who you know, not what you know.”¹⁹⁹
154. However, Jonathan Mitchell thought corruption itself was not a barrier to doing business in the region: “If you know it exists and you have the appetite to manage it ... there is ample scope to work in the region”.²⁰⁰ He added that few businesses were willing to manage the risk. In his view, “if you are looking to invest, the principle of intervening opportunities applies. You would probably rather invest in Croatia than Kosovo ... The reason why there is not more British business is because British business feels that ‘there be dragons’”.²⁰¹
155. A further factor cited as making business with the region more difficult was the visa regime local businesses had to go through to come to the UK. Michael English said “It is very difficult to get a visa. The length and cost of the process that you have to go through make it very difficult. If you want to sell something, invariably, the buyer will want to come to the UK, and it is very difficult to get a visa.”²⁰² This issue was raised during our visits to the region and in the roundtable we held with young people.²⁰³ Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe, recognised this complaint and described it as “a major problem of international reputation for the United Kingdom.”²⁰⁴
156. Regardless of the size of the Western Balkan market, some witnesses advocated more UK investment in the region. The Jamestown Foundation argued that “the most effective way of promoting political stability is to develop economic prosperity. This would involve strengthening national economies, promoting trade between them and, crucially, improving their ability to sell goods and services to advanced and sophisticated customers in export markets.”²⁰⁵
157. To do this, Jonathan Mitchell and Michael English said that greater support from the Department for International Trade (DIT) was required. Jonathan Mitchell said that although he received “a heck of a lot of support from the Foreign Office in Kosovo”, his experience was that “the DIT is completely non-existent”.²⁰⁶ He saw greater scope for UK representatives advocating UK investment in the region and cited Italy, Germany and Austria who were “much more aggressive and interested in identifying businesses

196 [Q 66](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

197 Written evidence from The Jamestown Foundation ([BUB0017](#))

198 [Q 61](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

199 [Q 60](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

200 [Q 61](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

201 [Q 67](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

202 [Q 67](#) (Michael English)

203 See Appendix 6 and 7.

204 [Q 73](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

205 Written evidence from The Jamestown Foundation ([BUB0017](#)). The FCO made a similar point ([BUB0018](#)).

206 [Q 64](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

opportunities than the UK”.²⁰⁷ He said the “one thing that HMG should do now and categorically have to do after Brexit ... is to do much more to promote investment in the region.”²⁰⁸

158. DIT detailed their work in the region, which included “three DIT staff in Serbia and two in Bosnia”, as well as “a network of FCO Prosperity Officers that cover that region”.²⁰⁹ They gave examples of support they had provided, including for a “bid for a £10m tender for Montenegrin national broadcasting company.”²¹⁰ They would be “playing an active role in the [Western Balkans] Summit, using this opportunity to highlight HMG’s expertise and looking for ways to bolster the trade relationship between the UK and the Western Balkans.”²¹¹
159. The EU has granted autonomous trade preferences to all the Western Balkans which allows nearly all exports to enter the EU without customs duties or limits on quantities. Jonathan Mitchell said it was important the UK retained the same access to the region’s markets as the EU after Brexit.²¹² Sir Alan Duncan thought it likely that the UK would, as “most countries would like a seamless transition to us on similar terms when we leave”.²¹³
160. **The Western Balkans is likely to remain a small market for UK businesses. However, economic prosperity is key to long-term stability.**
161. *The Western Balkans Summit should be used to encourage trade and investment in the region from UK businesses. It is essential that the present free trade relationship between the UK (as a member of the EU) and the countries of the Western Balkans does not lapse when the UK leaves the EU. The Department of International Trade must get a grip of this issue urgently, as it does not seem to have done hitherto.*

207 [Q 67](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

208 [Q 63](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

209 Written evidence from the Department for International Trade ([BUB0030](#))

210 *Ibid.*

211 *Ibid.*

212 [Q 66](#) (Jonathan Mitchell)

213 [Q 74](#) (Sir Alan Duncan MP)

CHAPTER 9: EXTREMISM AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC NATIONALISM

Islamist radicalisation

162. There is concern about Islamist radicalisation in the region.²¹⁴ The International Security Institute referred to the “proliferation of radical Islam in the Western Balkans”.²¹⁵ Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, LSE, wrote:
- “The presence of Wahhabi and Salafists, particularly in parts of Serbia’s Sandzak and Bosnia and Herzegovina, has grown over the last 25 years, and their reach extends beyond the religious sphere. They provide a variety of public services ... Their presence is also influencing social norms. Manifestation of this is visibly greater number of women following an Islamic dress code, an alcohol ban operating in many public venues, and the importance of public display of respect for religious rituals such as daily call for prayer.”²¹⁶
163. Concerns about radicalisation and fighters returning from Syria and Iraq were raised in our visits to the region and during the roundtable meeting with young people.²¹⁷
164. Other witnesses noted these concerns but counselled caution about being overly swayed by “hyperbolic predictions”²¹⁸ and “sensationalist commentaries”.²¹⁹
165. Addressing the phenomenon of fighters going to support Islamist forces in Syria and Iraq, the FCO said that “900–1,000 foreign fighters travelled to Syria and Iraq from the region, from a combined population of just twenty million”.²²⁰ Others noted similar figures; Behar Sadriu concluded “the prevalence of people joining the Syria War, for example, [is] lower in relative terms to that of France, Belgium and indeed the UK. In fact, considering the high density of Muslim-majority populations in the Balkans, it is interesting to note the low numbers that have gone to fight abroad”.²²¹
166. On extremist communities in the region, Marko Prelec, Central European University, said:
- “you have, for want of better words, little pockets of Salafi or Wahhabi practice of several different kinds throughout the western Balkans—in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and, to a lesser extent, Albania. These tend to freak people out because they are very different; these are ways of living that are at odds with traditional ways of living, to do with the segregation and covering of women. Some of these people practise isolationism in out-of-the-way villages in Bosnia, where they live by

214 In this report we use the term “Islamist” to refer to the extreme, anti-democratic and repressive doctrines typically associated with concepts of global jihad. Witnesses to the Committee have used various other terms: Wahhabism, Salafism, and radical Islam. We do not interpret any of these terms to apply to Islam generally.

215 Written evidence from the International Security Institute ([BUB0002](#))

216 Written evidence from Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic ([BUB0027](#))

217 See Appendix 6 and 7.

218 Written evidence from Behar Sadriu ([BUB0010](#))

219 Written evidence from Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic ([BUB0027](#))

220 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

221 Written evidence from Behar Sadriu ([BUB0010](#))

themselves and are hostile to outsiders ... However, there does not seem to be a correlation between these groups and violent extremists.”²²²

167. Marko Prelec concluded that much of the talk about the dangers of Islamist radicalisation was part of a “long and well-documented history of exaggerating, if not inventing, an Islamic threat”²²³ for political purposes. For example, he saw Croatian warnings about Islamist radicalisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina stemming from a desire to encourage “suspicion of Bosnian political actors.”²²⁴
168. Regardless of their views of the prevalence of Islamist doctrines, witnesses agreed that it should be taken seriously. The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) said that it was necessary to understand “the impact it could potentially have on the democratic processes, which are still frail.”²²⁵
169. Lord Ashdown Norton-sub-Hamdon said “If you look at the recruiting sergeants for ISIS, for instance, you will still find that Bosnia and the Bosnian war are high up the agenda among them. This is important to them and it ought to be more important to us.”²²⁶

Other forms of extremism

170. Islamist radicalisation was not the only form of extremism cited in evidence. Several witnesses referred to a growth of extreme nationalism and “the emergence and tolerance of nationalistic, i.e. illiberal and far-right, civil society groups.”²²⁷ For some this was a more destabilising influence than Islamist radicalisation because for “the more hard-core nationalists in the Balkans the borders that were settled on following wars in the 1990s are far from inviolable.”²²⁸
171. In his report to the UN Secretary-General, the High Representative, Dr Valentin Inzko, warned that in Bosnia and Herzegovina “political leaders have already shifted their focus away from economic reforms towards divisive, nationalistic issues”. An example of this was the support from the Croat People’s Assembly, a political organisation of Croat parties in the country, for a concert in support of six people convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).²²⁹ Other examples include Vladimir Lazarević, convicted by the ICTY of war crimes in Kosovo, being invited to lecture at Serbia’s military academy after his release from prison in 2015.
172. A number of extreme right-wing groups are active in Serbia—though some, such as National Alignment, Obraz (Honour) and Tsar Lazar Guard have been formally disbanded. Both National Alignment and Obraz were banned by the Serbian government in 2012. Others, such as Serbian Action—a neo-fascist movement which glorifies Milan Nedić, the leader of the fascist puppet government in World War 2—remain active.

222 [Q 18](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

223 [Q 19](#) (Prof Marko Prelec)

224 *Ibid.*

225 Written evidence from the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) ([BUB0021](#))

226 [Q 8](#) (Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon)

227 Written evidence from Dr Denisa Kostovicova ([BUB0012](#))

228 Written evidence from Behar Sadriu ([BUB0010](#))

229 Office of the High Representative *52nd Report*

173. Perhaps the most widely-known of the groups still active in Serbia is the nationalist 1389 Movement (their name derived from the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 against an invading Ottoman army). Though 1389 define themselves as anti-fascist, they are strongly opposed to the normalisation process or continuing dialogue with Kosovo. They are equally opposed to Serbia's integration into the EU and NATO, instead advocating closer relations with Russia. Self-styled patriotic groups such as Serbian League are also active, normally through internet portals such as Srpska.tv.
174. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the Bosnian Movement of National Pride, formed in 2009, is a nationalist and secular organisation whose ideology is underpinned by a belief in the superiority of Bosniaks and a belief that they alone should rule Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other extremist groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina include the Ravna Gora Chetnik movement in the Entity of Republika Srpska and Croat extremists in Western Herzegovina. Similar tendencies also exist in Croatia which, as an EU Member State, fell outside the scope of our inquiry. The reaction in Croatia, including in in mainstream politics and media, to the suicide in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia of Slobodan Praljak, a former Bosnian-Croat General, demonstrates the pervasiveness of such nationalism.²³⁰
175. In Macedonia, a number of self-styled patriotic movements exist, with the most widely-known being 'The Lions'. Members of this organisation were involved of the storming of the Macedonian parliament in April 2017, during which several SDSM officials were physically assaulted. They are believed to have links with the VMRO-DPME party.
176. The extreme right are often linked with football supporters or 'Ultras', a characteristic that is common throughout the Western Balkans. Football stadiums are often the fora for manifestations of extreme nationalism. Violence at domestic fixtures is commonplace—sometimes with tragic outcomes. In October 2009, a member of one 'Ultra' group was killed during clashes between two Bosnian football teams: FK Sarajevo (mostly supported by Bosniaks) and Siroki Brijeg (mostly supported by Croats). International matches can be particularly problematic. In October 2014, a football game between Serbia and Albania had to be abandoned after a drone with a flag of 'Natural Albania' (depicting all of areas Albanian nationalist claim should be incorporated into a larger Albanian state) appeared above the pitch during play. This led to a pitch invasion by a number of Serbian fans and a number of violent incidents inside and outside the stadium.
177. Many of the extreme right-wing groups in the region have been connected with groups volunteering to fight with pro-Russian forces in the Donbass region of Ukraine. Estimates of how many fighters from the region have volunteered vary. The Ukrainian government have estimated around 300 Serbian mercenaries have fought in the Donbass. Although it became illegal in 2014 for Serbian citizens to fight in foreign wars, only a handful of cases

²³⁰ For example, there were candle-lit tributes to Slobodan Praljak in Zagreb and a minute's silence was held in the Croatian parliament following his death, and before his sentence was confirmed, Croatia's President praised his role in the war and hoped for his, and other Bosnian Croats, acquittal.

have been brought against alleged mercenaries.²³¹ There have also been reports on Croatia citizens fighting as part of Ukraine's Azov Battalion.²³²

178. The consequence of such extreme nationalism would be “a return, at some stage, to conflict, increased migration and marginalised communities.”²³³ The FCO recognised this threat: “Nationalistic posturing and extremist rhetoric by political leaders exacerbates tense ethnic relations within and between countries of the region, and contributes to instability.”²³⁴
179. **The threat to the region from radical Islamist ideology should not be overestimated. Too often it has been portrayed as more prevalent than our evidence suggests. This is counter-productive, particularly when used to heighten ethnic tensions for political gain.**
180. **However, in a region where the rule of law remains weak and tensions between communities can be high, any form of anti-democratic extremism is destabilising and must be combatted.**
181. *The UK should continue to provide training and advice to agencies in the region responsible for combatting terrorism and for de-radicalisation.*

231 Balkan Insight, Russia ‘Using Serbia to Destroy Europe’, Ukraine Ambassador, 1 November 2017: <https://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/russia-using-serbia-to-destroy-europe-ukraine-ambassador-10-31-2017> [accessed 11 December 2017]

232 Balkan Insight; ‘Croatia Tells Fighters to Return from Ukraine’, 13 February 2015: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-calls-citizens-to-return-from-ukraine> [accessed 11 December 2017]

233 Written evidence from Anthony Monckton (BUB0009)

234 Written evidence from the FCO (BUB0018)

CHAPTER 10: MIGRATION

Migration crisis and the Western Balkans route

182. In 2015 and 2016, at the height of the migrant crisis, the Balkans increasingly became a route for those travelling into western Europe (see Table 6). There was concern that this had put “economic, logistical and political strain on the region”.²³⁵

Table 6: Illegal border crossings on the Western Balkans route

Year	Number of illegal border crossings
2016	122,779
2015	764,038
2014	43,360
2013	19,950
2012	6,390
2011	4,650
2010	2,370
2009	3,090

Source: FRONTEX, *Western Balkan Route Frontex*, 2017: <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/western-balkan-route/> [accessed 21 December 2017]

183. The 2016 agreement between the EU and Turkey reduced the numbers travelling through the region significantly. According to Peter van der Auweraert, IOM, the numbers travelling through the Balkans had changed “from a situation of a large transit population to a situation of much smaller numbers”.²³⁶ This reduction in number has come about because the western Balkans route is now largely closed, in some cases with the help of EU border guards. Those still travelling on the route are either crossing borders where small numbers are allowed each day or with illegal people smugglers.²³⁷
184. Despite the strain the crisis and its aftermath had created, countries in the region had responded “in a rather organised and humane manner.”²³⁸ Peter van der Auweraert, IOM, described how Serbia was managing the “fallout from the 2015 to 2016 large streams” which had left around 3,500 migrants stranded in that country, unable to return home or continue into western Europe:

“Governments’ attitudes across the western Balkans and specifically in Serbia have been to increase their migrant accommodation capacity. The Serbian Government in particular has to be commended for increasing capacity and for dealing with stranded migrants with full respect for their basic human rights and for taking a number of helpful measures. For example, despite the fact that they have irregular status, migrant children are increasingly allowed access to Serbian schools”.²³⁹

235 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

236 [Q 42](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

237 [QQ 42](#) and [45](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

238 Written evidence from Foreign Policy Initiative BH ([BUB0025](#))

239 [Q 45](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

185. It is not clear that Western Balkan countries could meet the challenges of any new migrant crisis. The Jamestown Foundation wrote, “If Turkey reneges on its agreement with the EU, the Balkans could be overwhelmed with millions of refugees that are currently residing in Turkey. The region is unprepared for large refugee inflows”.²⁴⁰
186. Concern is not limited to migration through the region. Some noted the possibility of increased migration from the Western Balkans to Western Europe. Andreja Bogdanovski warned that “Any escalation of violence in the region can create an influx of refugees all across Europe including the UK. The UK has been the home of number of refugees coming from the region as a result of the 1990s wars.”²⁴¹
187. The FCO said that since October 2015:
- “the UK Government has provided £17m in humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants moving through and stranded within the Balkans (the six countries, plus Croatia and Slovenia). This support has provided life-saving assistance such as food, water, hygiene kits and infant packs, as well as more than one million emergency interventions, such as psychosocial support to refugees and migrants.”²⁴²

Brain drain

188. There was “an accelerating trend of emigration of young and educated people” from the region, which constituted “a serious brain drain”.²⁴³ This meant, for example, “if you want a good Bosnian heart surgeon you go not to a hospital in Sarajevo but to one in Berlin, Zurich or Geneva, because that is where they are being employed.”²⁴⁴ This issue was raised during our visits to the region and in the roundtable meeting we held with young people from the region. Kurt Bassuener said “The clearest indicator of popular sentiment regarding the future is the accelerating brain drain from the region. Even those with decent and secure employment are choosing to emigrate for the sake of their children. A more damning indictment of local leaderships, economies, and by implication our policies, can scarcely be imagined.”²⁴⁵ One attendee at the roundtable meeting described it as a quiet protest against the stagnant economy, the influence of national and ethnic issues and the role of political parties.²⁴⁶
189. **Illegal migration increases the risk of instability in the region and has a direct impact on the UK. It is therefore in our interests for the UK to continue to provide training and financial support to countries in the region.**
190. **The brain drain is a symptom of other challenges countries in the region face. By supporting efforts to instil good governance, combat crime and corruption, and create better economic opportunities for people in the region the UK can help to reduce the numbers of young and skilled people emigrating.**

240 Written evidence from The Jamestown Foundation ([BUB0017](#))

241 Written evidence from Andreja Bogdanovski ([BUB0008](#))

242 Written evidence from the FCO ([BUB0018](#))

243 Written evidence from Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic ([BUB0027](#))

244 [Q 43](#) (Peter van der Auweraert)

245 Written evidence from Kurt Bassuener ([BUB0013](#))

246 See Appendix 7.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Impact of Brexit on the UK in the region

1. The UK does not exert its influence only through the EU. We are concerned that the UK's role in the region could negatively affected by Brexit. We believe that the UK is still well placed—particularly in its role as a security provider—to play a valuable role in promoting democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in the Western Balkan countries and in preventing an outbreak of violence or war. (Paragraph 20)
2. Giving effect to the intentions the Government has expressed in its Brexit negotiating papers and in evidence to us will depend largely on the cooperation of the remaining 27 EU Member States. The Government's expressions of commitment will need to be matched by new ways of working with the EU and bilateral partners after Brexit. (Paragraph 21)

Regional stability

3. The region still suffers from the legacy of the wars of the 1990s. Some political leaders are pursuing the aims of those wars by different, political and diplomatic, means including calls for redrawing national borders and secessionism. Any such act would be regressive, dangerous and destabilising for the region. Progress cannot be taken for granted. Without sustained, co-ordinated and consistent engagement from the region's international partners there is a risk of the progress made in the region towards establishing functioning democracies and the rule of law stagnating or going into reverse. Such engagement must take a regional view. We therefore welcome the Government's decision to host the Western Balkans Summit in 2018. (Paragraph 30)
4. *We would urge the Government to use the occasion of the Western Balkans Summit to set out in detail, and for a substantial period ahead, the contribution that Britain is prepared to make, in partnership with the EU, to support stability, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in the Western Balkans. This initiative, coming at an important stage of the Brexit negotiations, would demonstrate that the Government is indeed not leaving Europe when it leaves the EU.* (Paragraph 31)

Euro–Atlantic integration

NATO

5. NATO membership and cooperation could enhance the peace and stability of the region. We agree with the Government's continuing support for the membership ambitions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Providing they meet the requirements for membership, their accession would be a welcome step towards greater stability in the region. (Paragraph 42)
6. *The Government should support measures to help Macedonia join NATO, with or without a solution to the name issue.* (Paragraph 43)

EU accession

7. It is concerning that support for EU membership in the Western Balkans has weakened. Statements by senior figures in the EU such as the President of the Commission postponing accession to some distant date in the future are not helpful. This is not in the UK's interests as EU membership is the most reliable path for Western Balkan countries to achieve security, stability and

prosperity. Post-Brexit the UK must continue wholeheartedly to support the accession ambitions of Western Balkan countries. (Paragraph 60)

8. The UK remains well-placed to promote the values and institutional standards EU membership requires. This must be done in concert with the EU and bilaterally. The Government must not allow our leaving the EU to be presented as a rejection of those values and standards. It is important that the UK and EU do not allow themselves to be played off against one another by local actors with different agendas to our own. (Paragraph 61)
9. *Although the journey towards membership may be important in its own right, genuine progress to combat corruption, embed the rule of law, ensure freedom of expression and of the press, and achieve other reforms necessary for EU membership must be made. Outside the EU but remaining a champion for accession, the UK should be a critical friend of countries in the region. The Government should speak out when countries in the region fall short of the values and standards required and use its influence to ensure shortcomings are recognised.* (Paragraph 62)

Interests of other countries

10. The countries discussed all have different interests in the region and different ways of pursuing them. Any involvement in the region which undermines progress towards stability, security, good governance and prosperity should be of concern to the UK. Post-Brexit the UK must work closely with international partners to ensure as little space as possible is provided for others to act against those objectives. (Paragraph 102)
11. Russia's influence in the region is a factor of particular concern. Its effect has been to slow progress towards good governance and the region emerging as fully democratic. While the extent of Russian interference might still be a matter of debate, the potential for it destabilizing the region should not be underestimated. (Paragraph 103)

State capture

12. The features of state capture described in the evidence are the opposite of the stable, prosperous democracies we would wish to see in the region. State capture, enabled by corruption, press restrictions and a lack of rule of law, prevents countries from progressing to EU and NATO membership and provides the space for disruptive external actors. (Paragraph 129)
13. *The UK must continue to support political capacity building, strengthening the rule of law, gender equality, women's participation and post-conflict reconciliation. In these areas the UK can use its soft power and add value to the actions of others in the international community working through organisations like the British Council and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.* (Paragraph 130)
14. *The UK's support for the pursuit for justice for those against whom crimes were committed during the wars of the 1990s must continue. This must include working to ensure the evidence of crimes currently held by EULEX is safeguarded. The UK's work to combat present day domestic violence must also continue and should include providing training and support for the police and judiciary.* (Paragraph 131)
15. *The UK should continue to support freedom of expression in the region. The return of the BBC World Service to Serbia is welcome but it should be complemented by funding and support for local independent media outlets to counter-balance more*

partisan and biased reporting. Diplomatic pressure should also be brought to bear in countries where freedom of expression is restricted. (Paragraph 132)

16. *We note the work in the region to support future leaders. The Government should invest more in this by, for example, expanding the Chevening Scholarships scheme. It should also encourage the promotion of the UK as a destination for higher education students from the Western Balkans and should cease treating international students, from there or elsewhere, as economic migrants. (Paragraph 133)*
17. *The system of two schools under one roof can only perpetuate social tensions. The Government should put pressure on governments in the region to end this system and should provide funding and support to civil society projects which bring children together across ethnic divides. (Paragraph 134)*
18. *The Western Balkans Summit should be used clearly to demonstrate of the UK's support for freedom of the press, the rule of law and the role of NGOs and civil society groups in an open democracy. (Paragraph 135)*

Corruption and organised crime

19. *The UK must continue to support efforts to combat corruption and organised crime in the region. Close operational links between the UK and the EU after Brexit on all aspects of Justice and Home Affairs Agenda will be essential if the UK's own internal security is not to be jeopardised. (Paragraph 147)*
20. *The Western Balkans Summit should focus on what technical support the UK working in partnership with the EU can provide to agencies and governments in the region to combat human trafficking, corruption, organised crime and radicalisation. In particular, this should include providing training to judges, prosecutors and police. (Paragraph 148)*

Trade and investment

21. *The Western Balkans is likely to remain a small market for UK businesses. However, economic prosperity is key to long-term stability. (Paragraph 160)*
22. *The Western Balkans Summit should be used to encourage trade and investment in the region from UK businesses. It is essential that the present free trade relationship between the UK (as a member of the EU) and the countries of the Western Balkans does not lapse when the UK leaves the EU. The Department of International Trade must get a grip of this issue urgently, as it does not seem to have done hitherto. (Paragraph 161)*

Extremism and anti-democratic nationalism

23. *The threat to the region from radical Islamist ideology should not be overestimated. Too often it has been portrayed as more prevalent than our evidence suggests. This is counter-productive, particularly when used to heighten ethnic tensions for political gain. (Paragraph 179)*
24. *However, in a region where the rule of law remains weak and tensions between communities can be high, any form of anti-democratic extremism is destabilising and must be combatted. (Paragraph 180)*
25. *The UK should continue to provide training and advice to agencies in the region responsible for combatting terrorism and for de-radicalisation. (Paragraph 181)*

Migration

26. Illegal migration increases the risk of instability in the region and has a direct impact on the UK. It is therefore in our interests for the UK to continue to provide training and financial support to countries in the region. (Paragraph 189)
27. The brain drain is a symptom of other challenges countries in the region face. By supporting efforts to instil good governance, combat crime and corruption, and create better economic opportunities for people in the region the UK can help to reduce the numbers of young and skilled people emigrating. (Paragraph 190)

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members

Lord Balfe
 Baroness Coussins
 Lord Grocott
 Lord Hannay of Chiswick
 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
 Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
 Lord Jopling
 Lord Purvis of Tweed
 Lord Reid of Cardowan
 Baroness Smith of Newnham
 Lord Wood of Anfield

Declarations of interests

Lord Balfe
None relevant to inquiry

Baroness Coussins
Provided with administrative and policy assistance by the British Council as Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages

Lord Grocott
None relevant to inquiry

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Member of the Advisory Board, Centre of European Reform

Baroness Helic
Former citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina (until 2002); retains the right to reapply for citizenship.

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
Previously monitored elections in Macedonia and Albania

Lord Howell of Guildford
None relevant to inquiry

Lord Jopling
*Member of UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
 Special Rapporteur, Committee of Civil Dimension of Security, NATO
 Parliamentary Assembly*

Lord Purvis of Tweed
None relevant to inquiry

Lord Reid of Cardowan
None relevant to inquiry

Baroness Smith on Newnham
None relevant to inquiry

Lord Wood of Anfield
None relevant to inquiry

During the consideration of the report the following Members declared an interest:

Lord Balfe
*Member of the UK Delegation to the Council of Europe and its Legal affairs
 Committee*

Lord Hannay of Chiswick

UK Ambassador to the United Nations (1990–1995)

Joint Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the register of Lords' interests:
<http://parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests/>

Specialist Adviser

Professor Kenneth Morrison

None relevant to inquiry

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

Evidence is published online at <http://www.parliament.uk/uk-and-the-balkans> and available for inspection at the Parliamentary Archives (020 7219 3074).

Evidence received by the Committee is listed below in chronological order of oral evidence session and in alphabetical order. Those witnesses marked with ** gave both oral and written evidence. Those marked with * gave oral evidence and did not submit any written evidence. All other witnesses submitted written evidence only.

Oral evidence in chronological order

- * General Sir Michael Rose KCB, CBE, DSO, QSM, Former Commander of the United Nations Protection force in Bosnia-Herzegovina [QQ 1–15](#)
- * The Rt Hon. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon GCMG, KBE, CH, Former High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina
- * Professor Marko Prelec, Director of Applied Policy Projects, Central European University [QQ 16–32](#)
- * HE Mr Qirjako Qirko, Ambassador to the Republic of Albania in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- * Mr Laza Kecic, Former Economist Intelligence Unit and Independent Analyst [QQ 33–41](#)
- ** Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski, Visiting Fellow, London School of Economics
- * Mr Timothy Less, Director, Nova Europa
- * Dr Michael Taylor, Senior Analyst, Oxford Analytica
- * Mr Michal Makocki, Formerly of EUISS and Mercator Institute for China Studies
- * Mr Peter Van Der Auweraert, Western Balkans Sub-Regional Coordinator and Head, Land, Property and Reparations Division, International Organisation for Migration [QQ 42–49](#)
- * Dr Jonathan Eyal, Associate Director, Strategic Research Partnerships and International Director, Royal United Services Institute [QQ 50–67](#)
- * Sir Adam Thomson KCMG, Director, European Leadership Network
- * Mr Angus Lapsley, Director Defence, International Security and Southeast Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- * Mr Jonathan Mitchell, Consultant, Fox Marble
- * Mr Michael English, London Southside Chamber of Commerce

- * The Rt Hon. Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Foreign and Commonwealth Office [QQ 68–75](#)
- * Ms Fiona Mcilwham, Head, Western Balkans and Enlargement Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- * Mr Andrew Page, Western Balkans Summit Co-ordinator, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Alphabetical list of all witnesses

- * The Rt Hon. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon GCMG, KBE, CH, Former High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina ([QQ 1–15](#))
- AASTRA Anti Trafficking Action [BUB0003](#)
- Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) [BUB0021](#)
- Mr Kurt W Bassuener, Senior Associate and Co-founder, Democratization Policy Council and PhD Candidate/Fulbright Scholar, University of St Andrews (submitted in personal capacity) [BUB0013](#)
- Dr William Bartlett, Visiting Senior Fellow, London School of Economics (submitted in personal capacity) [BUB0031](#)
- Mr Christopher Bennett, Political and Communications Advisor to Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor [BUB0022](#)
- Mr Andreja Bogdanovski, Security Analyst/PhD Student [BUB0008](#)
- Dr Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Associate Professorial Research Fellow, Civil Society and Conflict Resolution Unit, London School of Economics [BUB0027](#)
- The British Council [BUB0029](#)
- The British-Serbian Chamber of Commerce [BUB0011](#)
- Cambridge Judge Business School (Simon Stockley) [BUB0017](#)
- Mr Uros Delevic, Research Fellow, Dunning Institute of Economics [BUB0014](#)
- Department for International Trade [BUB0030](#)
- Early Years [BUB0026](#)
- * Mr Michael English, London Southside Chamber of Commerce ([QQ 50–67](#))
- European Council on Foreign Relations (Joanna Hosa; Fredrik Wasslau) [BUB0020](#)
- European Policy Centre (Milena Lazarević) [BUB0025](#)
- * Royal United Services Institute (Dr Jonathan Eyal) ([QQ 50–67](#))

- ** Foreign and Commonwealth Office (The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP; Mr Angus Lapsley; Ms Fiona McIlwham; Mr Andrew Page) ([QQ 50–67](#)) ([QQ 68–75](#)) [BUB0018](#)
- Foreign Policy Initiative BH (Lejla Ramić-Mesihović) [BUB0025](#)
- Forum for International Relations of the European Movement in Serbia (Jelica Minić) [BUB0025](#)
- Dr Andi Hoxhaj, Teaching Fellow in European Law, University of Warwick [BUB0004](#)
- Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis [BUB0019](#)
- * International Organisation for Migration (Mr Peter Van Der Auweraert) ([QQ 42–49](#))
- International Rescue Committee UK [BUB0028](#)
- International Security Institute [BUB0002](#)
- The Jamestown Foundation (Margarita Assenova; Matt Czekaj; Glen Howard; Simon Stockley; Brigadier Charles Le Gallais) [BUB0017](#)
- * Mr Laza Kekic, Former Economist Intelligence Unit and Independent Analyst ([QQ 33–41](#))
- Professor James Kerr-Lindsay, Professor of Politics and Policy, St Marys University [BUB0015](#)
- Mr Vladimir Kicošević [BUB0001](#)
- Dr Denisa Kostovicova, Associated Professor in Global Politics, London School of Economics [BUB0012](#)
- * Timothy Less, Director, Nova Europa ([QQ 33–41](#))
- * Mr Michal Makocki, formerly of EUISSS and Mercator Institute for China Studies ([QQ 33–41](#))
- * Mr Jonathan Mitchell, Consultant, Fox Marble ([QQ 50–67](#))
- Mr Anthony Monckton, Former British Diplomat and COO, Vienneast Ltd. [BUB0009](#)
- * Professor Marko Prelec, Director of Applied Policy Projects, Central European University ([QQ 16–32](#))
- * Oxford Analytica (Dr Michael Taylor) ([QQ 33–41](#))
- Ms Tena Prelec, Research Associate, London School of Economics and Doctoral Candidate, University of Sussex [BUB0007](#)
- * HE Mr Qirjako Qirko, Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ([QQ 16–32](#))
- * General Sir Michael Rose KCB, CBE, DSO, QGM, Former Commander of the United Nations Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina ([QQ 1–15](#))

	Mr Behar Sadriu, Teaching Fellow, SOAS (submitted in personal capacity)	BUB0010
	Mr George Stamkoski, Managing Director, Volatile Media Ltd UK	BUB0024
*	Sir Adam Thomson KCMG, European Leadership Network (QQ 50–67)	
	Westminster Foundation for Democracy	BUB0006
**	Dr Jarosław Wiśniewski, Visiting Fellow, London School of Economics (QQ 33–41)	BUB0005

APPENDIX 3: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The International Relations Committee of the House of Lords is launching an inquiry into the UK and the Balkans. The primary focus of the inquiry will be on UK policy towards those countries of the Balkans not in the European Union. In particular, it will focus on the UK's approach beyond Brexit. The report will be published in preparation for the Western Balkans Summit, which is due to take place in London in mid-2018.

The Committee's inquiry will examine the following questions:

- What are the UK's interests—direct and indirect—in the Balkans? How are those interests likely to evolve in the near future? What political, social, economic and security trends in the region will affect UK policy?

Geopolitical context

- How is the geopolitical context evolving? How are longstanding actors, such as the US, working in the region? Are new actors, such as Russia, Turkey, Middle Eastern countries and China, seeking to make their influence felt in the region and to what end? What are the consequences for the region and for UK influence?
- Once the UK has left the EU, which countries and multilateral agencies (including the EU) should it work most closely with in the region?
- Are some countries of the region building closer military-industrial links with Russia? If so, what are the consequences for NATO?

Political, security and economic challenges

- What are the key political and governance challenges facing the countries of the Balkans, and what policy options are open to the UK to support stability in the region?
- Has there been a radicalisation of Islam in the region? If so, what have been the driving forces, and what are the consequences for the region? How can UK policy respond?
- What are the consequences of rising nationalism for relations within and between countries of the region and for international relations? How should external parties, such as the UK, respond?
- What are the patterns of migration through and from the region? What have been the consequences for the region and what are the implications for the UK?
- What action should the UK take to support efforts against corruption and organised crime in the region? What impact is corruption and organised crime in the region having in the UK?
- Youth unemployment is extremely high in most countries of the Balkans. How is this manifested amongst young people? How can the UK engage most effectively, and to what end, with young people of the region?
- What are the key economic challenges facing the countries of the region? Is there a constructive role to be played by the UK? What are the commercial interests of the UK in the region?

- How successful have post-conflict resolution efforts been since the end of the Balkan conflicts? What progress has been made on resolving inter-ethnic tensions?
- How are these challenges different to those the region faced at the end of the 1990s?

UK beyond Brexit

- What are the implications of Brexit for UK policy, influence and standing in the Balkans? What other effects has the UK's decision to leave the EU had on the region? How should UK policy-makers respond?
- Where, and in what fields, can the UK play the most effective role? What should the UK's priority be, particularly beyond Brexit? How effective is the UK in the region currently?
- After Brexit, what relationship should the UK seek with countries of the region? Does the UK currently have the right interlocutors in the region?

APPENDIX 4: COUNTRY BRIEFS AND MAPS

The collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav wars

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

1. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) emerged from the ashes of the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1945, Yugoslavia had been dismembered and occupied by Germany, Italy (until 1943), Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. The 1941–45 war was a complex affair. There were numerous resistance groups fighting the occupiers and each other, the largest of which were the Communist-led Partisans and the Serb (Royalist) Chetniks. The Partisans, with (from 1943) the support of the Allies, emerged victorious from a brutal four year war.
2. The SFRY consisted of six socialist republics,²⁴⁷ though power was concentrated firmly with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito. After the horrors of the Second World War, the new communist authorities sought to deal harshly with those deemed collaborators, while more broadly promoting reconciliation and ‘brotherhood and unity’ between Yugoslavia’s nations and nationalities. They also embarked upon an energetic campaign of post-war reconstruction.
3. In the early post-war years, Yugoslavia was closely allied to the Soviet Union, but in 1948 Tito’s persistence in following a foreign policy independent of the Soviet Union led to the ‘COMINFORM Crisis’, whereby Yugoslavia was expelled from COMINFORM. What followed was an internal purge of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and those that were alleged to be ‘for Stalin’ were arrested and jailed on the Croatian island of Goli Otok.
4. The split with the Soviet Union determined that Yugoslavia had to re-align with the United States (US). Economic aid (and, to a lesser extent, military aid) from the US began soon after the Tito-Stalin split, though Yugoslavia did not become overly-dependent on US aid. Yugoslavia adopted a neutral position during the Cold War, becoming the de facto head of the ‘Non-Aligned Movement’ (NAM). It punched above its weight in foreign affairs and, though neutral in the Cold War, built a strong Yugoslav Army (JNA).
5. Internally, the Yugoslav leadership embarked upon fundamental reforms from the early 1950s. These included greater decentralisation of the political system and the forging of its own form of communism, underpinned by ‘workers’ self-management’, a system that allowed for workers to control both production and profits. Political reforms followed too, with the scaling-down of the state bureaucracy and the party. The Communist Party was renamed the ‘League of Communists of Yugoslavia’ (LCY), with a separate ‘league’ in each republic.
6. In the 1960s liberal and conservative wings of the LCY clashed over the issue of greater decentralisation. The former were in the ascendency and throughout the decade the process of economic development and liberalisation continued. The conservative wing of the LCY was further weakened by the political downfall of the head of Yugoslav State Security

247 Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia

(UDBA), Aleksander Rankovic, and the expulsion of some of his closest allies from the LCY in 1966.

7. Economically, Yugoslavia thrived throughout the 1960s. Living standards increased and far outstripped those of other Central and Eastern European communist states, though this caused increasing levels of disparity—one of the central grievances conveyed by striking students during the June 1968 student demonstrations.
8. In 1971, during the ‘Croatian Spring’, further demands were made, both from elements within the League of Communists of Croatia and from non-party actors, for greater decentralisation (i.e. more power to the republics). Though the Croatian League was purged of those calling for such reforms in the immediate aftermath of the Croatian Spring, Tito and the LCY began to implement reforms that met these demands. The 1974 constitution, in particular, made wide-ranging changes and granted each republic greater levels of autonomy. The two autonomous regions of Serbia (Kosovo and Vojvodina) acquired many of the powers of the republics, a development that deeply aggravated Serbs.
9. Tito died on 4 May 1980 having failed to groom an obvious successor. Instead, a system in which a chair of a collective presidency (a role that would rotate annually between republics) was introduced. This presidency had to deal with a worsening economic situation in which the country was becoming burdened by significant fiscal debt. The economic crisis intensified throughout the 1980s, and saw many state enterprises close and unemployment grow, while inflation increased and standards of living dropped significantly.
10. Just a year after Tito’s death, protests in Kosovo (during which demonstrators called for Kosovo to be granted the status of republic) led to a violent crackdown. By the mid-1980s, the issue of Serbs in Kosovo, who claimed they were being persecuted by Kosovo’s Albanians, came to widespread attention. In 1987, Slobodan Milošević, using the issue of the Kosovo Serbs as a vehicle, outmanoeuvred his erstwhile friend and colleague, Ivan Stambolić, to take control of the Serbian League of Communists. Upon taking power he promised to revise the 1974 constitution and end the ‘counter-revolution’ in Kosovo. Accordingly, he abolished Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989 and used street protests (the so-called ‘anti-bureaucratic revolution’) to undermine the leaderships in Vojvodina and Montenegro and replace them with loyalists.
11. While his centralising ‘reforms’ were greeted with great enthusiasm by many Serbs, there was little enthusiasm outside Serbia and in areas in other Yugoslav republics where Serbs lived. In January 1990, the Slovenian delegation of the LCY walked out of the plenary session (and thus the party), followed by the Croat delegation. Multi-party elections were then held later in the year in Slovenia and Croatia, both bringing parties favouring independence to power. The election of the pro-independence ‘Croatian Democratic Community’ (HDZ) in the parliamentary elections in Croatia was not well received by Croatia’s Serb community. In the late summer of 1990 the Croatian Serbs, with the backing of Milošević, began blockading Serb-majority areas and armed clashes between them and Croatian police and paramilitaries led to full-scale war.

Slovenia

12. On 25 June 1991, Slovenia declared independence, effectively ending the existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Slovenia's declaration triggered an intervention by the JNA, which turned into a short armed conflict between Slovenian forces and the JNA. The JNA withdrew with their forces and equipment after ten days.

Croatia

13. Croatia also declared independence on 25 June 1991. While the war in Slovenia ended quickly, the war in Croatia was longer and deadlier. The sizeable Serb minority in Croatia refused to recognise the declaration of independence, arguing that they must stay in Yugoslavia. With the assistance of the JNA and Serb paramilitary groups, Croatian Serbs seized almost a third of Croatia's territory and ethnically cleansed the areas they controlled of non-Serbs. The latter part of 1991 saw heavy fighting, the destruction of the city of Vukovar and the shelling of the UNESCO-protected city of Dubrovnik.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

14. In September 1991, Macedonia declared independence after an independence referendum. Their separation from the SFRY was peaceful. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SFRY's most multi-ethnic republic, multi-party elections in November 1990 brought a coalition of nationalist parties together in government. As the war in Croatia raged, Bosnia was faced with an unenviable choice: remain in a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia or opt for independence. Broadly, the Bosnian Serbs, led by Radovan Karadzic, wanted to remain in the SFRY (or what remained of it), while the majority of Muslims and Croats chose to pursue independence. In March 1992, in a referendum largely boycotted by Serbs, 60% of those who cast their votes opted for independence. Bosnia's slide to war began soon after the referendum, and in April 1992 the Bosnian Serbs, with the help of the JNA and Serb paramilitaries, began a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing and persecution of non-Serbs.

Kosovo

15. In Kosovo, ethnic-Albanians sought independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—the state proclaimed on 27 April 1992 comprising only Serbia and Montenegro. This struggle became violent in 1998 when the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) came out in open rebellion against Serbian rule. The police and army were deployed. In the course of the hostilities Serb forces shelled civilian targets, forcing the ethnic-Albanian population to flee. After international attempts to broker a peace failed, NATO began a 78 day campaign of air strikes against Serb targets in Kosovo and Serbia. The Serb forces under Slobodan Milošević were withdrawn and in June 1999, Serbia agreed to the international administration of Kosovo.

Montenegro

16. On 21 May 2006, Montenegro held an independence referendum. This was approved by 55.5% of voters and a formal declaration of independence was made on 3 June 2006. As a result of this Serbia declared itself the legal and political successor to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had become).

Death toll and war crimes

17. The number of people killed or forcibly displaced in the course of these conflicts remains disputed, often for political purposes. The International Centre for Transitional Justice has estimated a total death toll of 140,000 people and four million displaced in the conflicts of the 1990s.
18. In Bosnia and Herzegovina it is estimated that over 100,000 people were killed and two million people, more than half the population, were forced to leave their homes as a result of the war. The single worst atrocity being the execution of over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica by Serb forces. In addition, there were thousands of cases of sexual violence against women. In Kosovo more than 100,000 Serbs (around half of Kosovo's Serb population at the time) fled fearing violence.
19. In 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established under the auspices of the UN. It has since charged over 160 people, including heads of state, prime ministers, army chiefs-of-staff, interior ministers and many other high- and mid-level political, military and police leaders.

Albania

20. Albania is an important country in the Western Balkans, not least because of the sizeable ethnic Albanian populations outside the country's borders—in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Greece. The country was essentially isolated during the four-decade rule of Enver Hoxha and has experienced significant internal political flux since the collapse of the communist regime in 1990. It has had deeply strained relations with Serbia over the issue of Kosovo.

Figure 2: Map of Albania

21. Albania has passed through a difficult transition since the collapse of communism, with power generally rotating between the Democratic Party (PDS) and the Socialist Party (PSS). In 1990, after four decades of isolation

and one-party rule, independent political parties were formed and the first multi-party elections scheduled. In these multi-party elections, the Communist Party retained power and the party's leader, Ramiz Alia, was elected as President and Fatos Nano as Prime Minister.

22. New democratic freedoms were granted to Albanian citizens, including the right to travel abroad, which was impossible under the communist regime. As a consequence, thousands fled the country, including many illegally attempting to cross the Adriatic Sea to Italy in commandeered ships.
23. Albania struggled economically in the immediate post-communist period. In 1991, Albania's Prime Minister, Fatos Nano resigned after protests over poor economic conditions. The Democratic Party (PDS) won the elections in March 1992. Sali Berisha became President, with Aleksander Meski as Prime Minister.
24. The PDS also won the 1996 elections. However, during their first term in government, the party leadership had encouraged Albanian citizens to invest in Ponzi (pyramid banking) schemes that eventually collapsed in late 1996. Subsequent protests turned violent in February 1997 and, though the government initially responded with a violent crackdown, the police and elite 'republican guard' deserted their posts soon after. Albania came close to civil war as armed groups loyal to different political parties clashed with each other. The security vacuum was filled by armed militias and criminal gangs who looted government arms depots. The Prime Minister, Aleksander Meksi, resigned in March 1997. He was replaced by Fatos Nano, who had been released from prison after a general amnesty, having been sentenced on corruption charges.
25. In April 1997, a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force led by Italy ('Operation Alba') arrived in Albania with the objective of evacuating foreign nationals and stabilising the country. However, while the UN forces achieved their stated objective, many of the arms looted from depots during the instability of February 1997 found their way across the border to Kosovo, where they were purchased by the nascent Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). During the subsequent war in Kosovo, thousands of Kosovo Albanian refugees sought refuge in Albania.
26. In July 1997, after stability had been consolidated by UN troops, Sali Berisha resigned as President, to be replaced by Rexhep Mejdani. Subsequent parliamentary elections were won by the Socialist Party (PSS). Just over a year into their term, the prominent PDS politician, Azem Hajdari, was killed by unknown assailants, leading to violent anti-government protests. As a consequence, Fatos Nano resigned as Prime Minister and a former student activist, Pandelj Majko, replaced him—only to be replaced by Ilir Meta in October 1999.
27. The PSS retain power until the 2005 parliamentary elections, which were won by Sali Berisha's PDS. Berisha served two terms as Prime Minister before his PDS party lost the parliamentary elections in June 2013. Edi Rama of the PSS, who ran on a reform platform that committed his party to tackle organised crime, revive the economy and revitalise the country's EU accession process, was elected as Prime Minister. Berisha's second term had been marked by alleged electoral irregularities and violent anti-government protests. The EU closely monitored the June 2013 poll, cautioning that it was a crucial test of the country's political maturity and for Albania's EU accession.

28. Since the 2013 elections, Rama's government has pursued a European integrationist agenda and committed to their stated goal of EU membership within the next ten years. Rama has also sought to improve relations with Serbia, but during a visit to Belgrade in November 2014, he and the then Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksander Vučić, publicly argued over their different positions on Kosovo.
29. On 25 June, at the end of Rama's first term, parliamentary elections took place in the midst of a political crisis in which the opposition launched protests calling for the resignation of the government. In the elections, Edi Rama won a majority of 74 seats, increasing his party's majority. After a protracted process (and four rounds of voting), the former leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), Ilir Meta, was elected President, taking over from President Nishani on 24 July 2017. The opposition boycotted the vote.
30. Albania was identified as a potential candidate for EU membership during the Thessaloniki European Council summit in June 2003. The country opened talks on a Stability and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in the same year and signed the SAA in 2006. Albania submitted its formal application for EU candidate status in April 2009 but it was rejected by the European Commission (EC) in November 2010. In October 2012, however, the Commission recommended that it be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform and revision of the parliamentary rules of procedures. In November 2013, the EU and Albania held the first meeting of the High Level Dialogue on Key Priorities and in June 2014 Albania was granted formal candidate status.
31. Rule of Law remains a key issue in Albania, and progress on EU accession may depend upon their success in five key areas: public administration reform, judicial reform, an improvement of human rights and the tackling of corruption and organised crime. Demonstrable progress in these areas is required before the European Council will agree to open accession negotiations. In July 2016, a comprehensive package of justice reform was finally agreed and voted through parliament.
32. Albania is a member of NATO. It signed a Partnership for Peace (PfP) agreement with NATO in 1994 and received a Partnership Action Plan (PAP) in 1999. Albania became a full member of the military alliance in April 2009.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

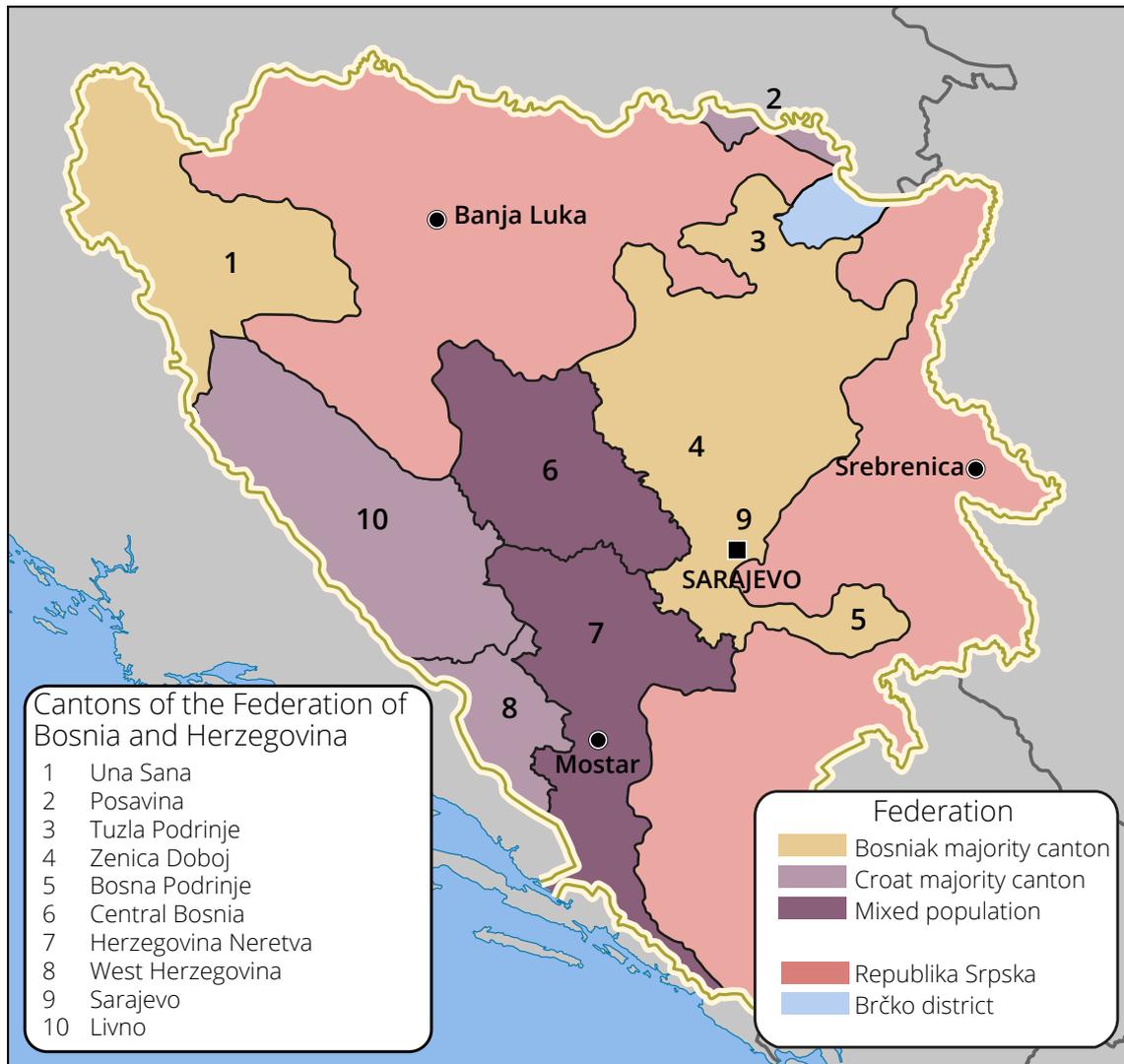
Dayton Peace Agreement and political structure

33. The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed in November 1995, creating 'Dayton Bosnia', with three levels of government—state, entity and canton. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the state but is divided into two entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Federation is divided into ten cantons (see Figure 3). The city of Brčko was given the status of a 'free city' and remained under direct international administration until May 2012.
34. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a bicameral legislature (House of Representatives and House of Peoples) and a three-member presidency comprising a member of each of the country's three 'constituent peoples': Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats. The DPA also provides for equal political representation

for each constituent people. The presidency has a member drawn from each of the three constituent peoples.

35. The Republika Srpska entity is primarily ethnically Bosnian Serb (with small Bosniak and Bosnian Croat minorities) while the Federation entity is ethnically mixed—primarily Bosniak (Muslim) and Bosnian Croat (with a small Bosnian Serb minority). Each entity has its own government and administration.

Figure 3: Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Office of the High Representative

36. The additional element in political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the international community presence. The DPA requested the designation of a High Representative (currently the Austrian diplomat, Dr Valentin Inzko), to be the arbiter or “supreme interpreter” of the civilian implementation of the DPA. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) remains a significant, if diminished presence. The OHR represents the 55 countries involved in the implementation of the DPA through the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). The Steering Board of the PIC comprises the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, the United States, the Presidency of the European Union, the European Commission and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (represented by Turkey).

37. In 1997, the PIC agreed to invest the OHR with additional powers—the ‘Bonn Powers’—which allowed the OHR fully to implement the DPA without being delayed or obstructed by nationalist politicians. These have been used in the past, but their use has to be approved by the PIC, within which there is rarely a consensus.
38. In 2008, the PIC established the conditions for the closure of the OHR, but these conditions have not been met and its mandate remains indefinite. Between 2002 and 2011 the OHR also served as the European Union Special Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUSR), though this was discontinued in 2011, when the EUSR post was merged with that of the Head of the EU Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Criticisms of the Dayton Agreement and constitutional reform attempts

39. The political settlement created by the DPA has been criticised. When he stepped down from his role as High Representative, Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon described it as “a superb agreement to end a war, but a very bad agreement to make a state.” The principal criticism has been that the multi-layered political structure which embeds ethnic considerations into the constitution is too prone to inertia and providing too many choke points at which politicians at state and entity level can prevent progress. For example, attempts to implement the European Court of Human Rights’ judgment in the case of *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* have failed. Similarly, there has been no progress in implementing the constitutional court’s ruling on the electoral arrangements for the city of Mostar, where there have been no elections since 2008.
40. There have been attempts at constitutional reform but none has made any substantial progress.
41. The most ambitious attempt to reform the Dayton constitution was in 2006, in an initiative led by the United States. The so-called ‘April Package’ envisaged the three-member presidency being replaced by an indirectly elected president, with most executive powers being transferred to the prime minister. It was also envisaged that the House of Peoples would be abolished and its competencies transferred to the House of Representatives. Though coming close, the proposed changes did not materialise. A subsequent proposal for reform, known as the ‘Prud Process’, which was launched in 2008, but enthusiasm quickly dissipated.

Euro–Atlantic integration

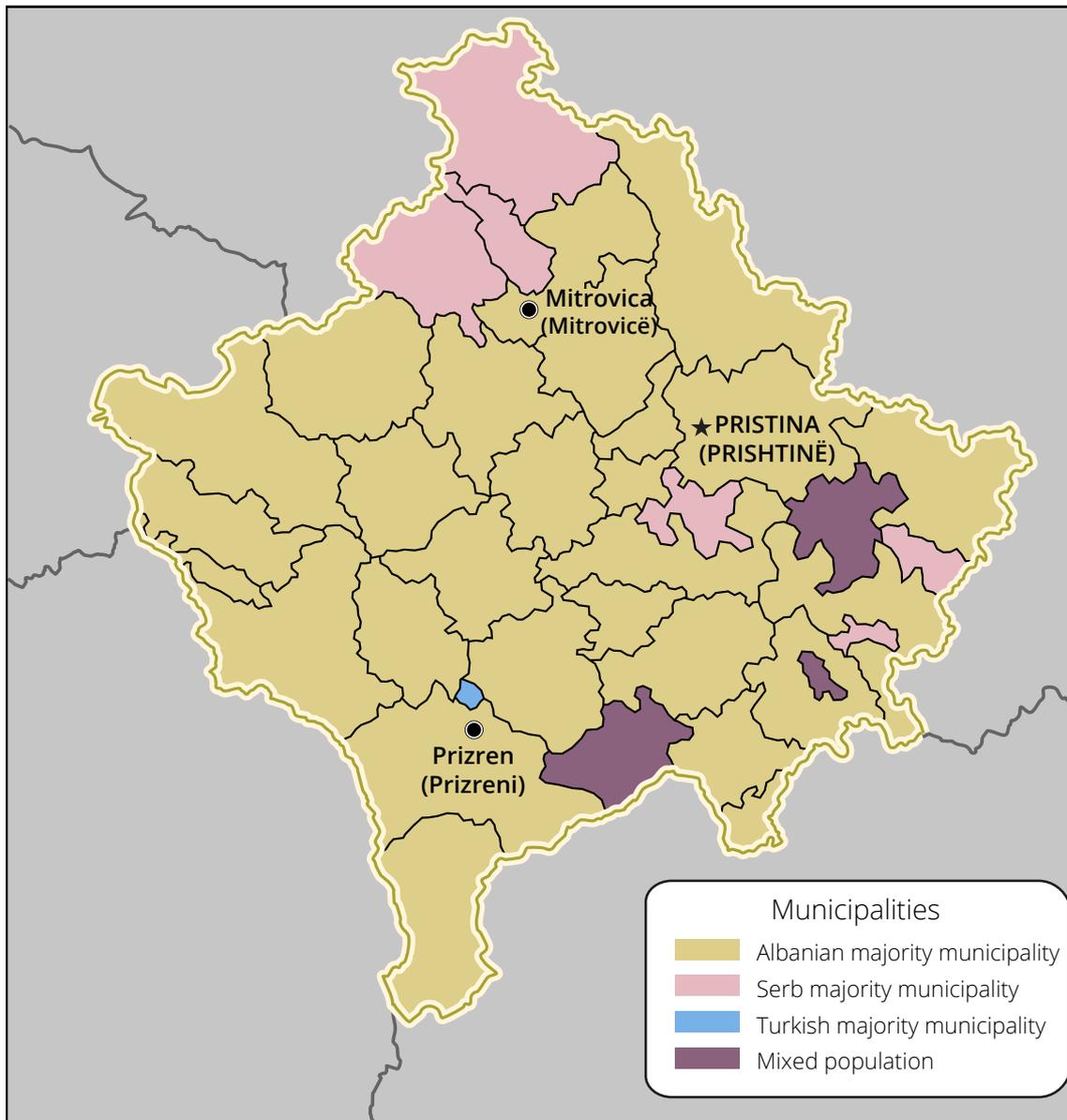
42. While there is a broad consensus on becoming an EU member, the issue of NATO membership is more problematic, and while support for it is relatively strong in the Federation, it remains negligible in Republika Srpska. Bosnia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in December 2006 and has been engaged in a dialogue with NATO on its membership aspirations and related reforms since 2008. Bosnia has been a candidate for NATO membership since April 2010, when the country received a Membership Action Plan (MAP). However, NATO members have agreed that it will only be able to implement this once official registration of state property (for use by the Bosnian Ministry of Defence) has been completed.
43. Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently a potential candidate for European Union membership. The UK and Germany launched an initiative in 2014, subsequently endorsed by the EU, to inject momentum into Bosnia’s EU

accession path by implementing urgent socio-economic reforms. The country's political leaders signed a written undertaking that committed them to a programme of reforms (known as the Reform Agenda) in consultation with the EU and International Financial Institutions. In return EU member states voted to bring a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU into force in April 2015. In February 2016 Bosnia submitted its EU application and the Council Conclusions of September 2016 invited the European Commission to submit an Opinion on the country's application for EU membership.

Kosovo

44. Kosovo was part of Serbia during the existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). However, throughout the 1960s, the Yugoslav League of Communists gradually introduced reforms that gave Kosovo (and Vojvodina in the north of Serbia) greater autonomy. Wide-ranging constitutional reforms in 1974 gave Kosovo relatively high levels of autonomy, giving it similar powers to a Yugoslav republic.

Figure 4: Map of Kosovo



45. In 1981, one year after the death of Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslav Army (JNA) troops were sent to Kosovo to suppress disorder in the province, during which Albanian separatists made demands for Kosovo to be formally recognised as a republic.
46. Throughout the 1980s, relations between the majority ethnic Albanians and Serbs became increasingly unstable. Their cause was embraced by nationalist intellectuals, but was regarded as toxic (and thus a matter that required sensitivity) by the Serbian League of Communists. However, in April 1987, Slobodan Milošević, then the deputy to the Serbian President, Ivan Stambolić, was sent to Kosovo to assess the situation. On the second of his visits, he took a significant political gamble by openly supporting the Kosovo Serbs, who claimed they were subject to persecution by Kosovo's Albanians.
47. Milošević rose to power using the issue of the Kosovo Serbs and by 1989 he had revoked the autonomy that Kosovo was granted in the 1974 constitution. By 1990, following a declaration of independence by Albanian leaders, Belgrade had dissolved the Kosovo government and had imposed direct rule. Thereafter, the Kosovo Albanians established parallel institutions but retained a policy of peaceful resistance against Serb rule. But this policy, promoted by Ibrahim Rugova, the President of the self-proclaimed republic.
48. Throughout the early and mid-1990s, as war raged in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic tensions in Kosovo were acute, though there was no armed conflict. But the more radical elements within Kosovo became impatient with the policy of peaceful resistance and instead began small-scale attacks against Serb police in the province.
49. These attacks, initiated by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), intensified throughout 1998 and led to a crackdown by the Serb police and military. As the violence worsened, civilians were driven from their homes in increasing numbers. By September 1998, NATO gave an ultimatum to the Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević, warning that a failure to stop the Serb crackdown in Kosovo would lead to military intervention.
50. Following the breakdown of peace talks, NATO launched, in March 1999, a bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), the federation of Serbia and Montenegro that had been created in April 1992. The bombing campaign lasted 78 days. Much of Serbia's military and (some) of its civilian infrastructure (such as bridges) was destroyed, while ethnic Albanians were forcibly expelled by Serb forces, many being temporarily accommodated in refugee camps in Macedonia and Montenegro.
51. In June 1999, Milošević agreed to withdraw Serb forces from Kosovo. NATO forces arrive in large numbers and the KLA agree to disarm. However, this didn't stop revenge attacks against Serb civilians. The United Nations (UN) established the Kosovo Peace Implementation Force (KFOR) to oversee the post-war transition. While the situation stabilised, inter-ethnic relations remained tense and occasionally led to violence. In March 2004, clashes between Serbs and Albanians in Mitrovica led to the deaths of nineteen people.
52. In February 2006, the UN sponsor discussions focused on the future status of Kosovo. One year later, the UN envoy Martti Ahtisari announces a plan

that establishes a clear path towards Kosovo's independence. The so-called 'Ahtisarri Plan' is welcomed by Kosovo's Albanians but rejected by Kosovo's Serbs and by the Serbian government.

53. After months of failed negotiations, Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008 and on 22 July 2010 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) published its advisory opinion that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law. On 10 September 2012 the International Steering Group (ISG) officially ended the supervised independence of Kosovo because the Community Stabilisation Programme (CSP) was substantially implemented.
54. Currently, 110 of 193 United Nations member states recognise Kosovo (see Boxes 4 and 5). The country is also a member of international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In 2015 Kosovo's bid to become a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was unsuccessful. Kosovo is not a full member of the UN.

Box 4: UN Members that recognise Kosovo

Afghanistan	Croatia	Iceland
Albania	Czech Republic	Ireland
Andorra	Denmark	Italy
Antigua and Barbuda	Djibouti	Japan
Australia	Dominica	Jordan
Austria	Dominican Republic	Kiribati
Bahrain	Egypt	Kuwait
Bangladesh	El Salvador	Latvia
Belgium	Estonia	Lesotho
Belize	Fiji	Liberia
Benin	Finland	Libya
Brunei Darussalam	France	Liechtenstein
Bulgaria	Gabon	Lithuania
Burkina Faso	Gambia	Luxembourg
Burundi	Germany	Macedonia
Canada	Ghana	Madagascar
Central African Republic	Grenada	Malawi
Chad	Guinea	Malaysia
Colombia	Guyana	Maldives
Comoros	Haiti	Malta
Costa Rica	Honduras	Marshall Islands
Côte D'Ivoire	Hungary	Mauritania

Micronesia	Portugal	Sweden
Monaco	Qatar	Switzerland
Montenegro	Republic of Korea	Tanzania
Nauru	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Thailand
Netherlands	Saint Lucia	Timor-Leste
New Zealand	Samoa	Togo
Niger	San Marino	Tonga
Norway	Saudi Arabia	Turkey
Oman	Senegal	Tuvalu
Pakistan	Sierra Leone	United Arab Emirates
Palau	Singapore	United Kingdom
Panama	Slovenia	United States of America
Papua New Guinea	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Peru	Somalia	Yemen
Poland	Swaziland	

Box 5: UN Members that do not recognise Kosovo

Algeria	Chile	Indonesia
Angola	China	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Argentina	Congo	Iraq
Armenia	Cuba	Israel
Azerbaijan	Cyprus	Jamaica
Bahamas	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Kazakhstan
Barbados	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Kenya
Belarus	Ecuador	Kyrgyzstan
Bhutan	Equatorial Guinea	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Bolivia	Eritrea	Lebanon
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ethiopia	Mali
Botswana	Georgia	Mauritius
Brazil	Greece	Mexico
Cabo Verde	Guatemala	Mongolia
Cambodia	Guinea Bissau	Morocco
Cameroon	India	Mozambique

Myanmar	Sao Tome and Principe	Trinidad and Tobago
Namibia	Serbia	Tunisia
Nepal	Seychelles	Turkmenistan
Nicaragua	Slovakia	Uganda
Nigeria	South Africa	Ukraine
Paraguay	South Sudan	Uruguay
Philippines	Spain	Uzbekistan
Republic of Moldova	Sri Lanka	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of
Romania	Sudan	Vietnam
Russian Federation	Suriname	Zambia
Rwanda	Syrian Arab Republic	Zimbabwe
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Tajikistan	

55. In terms of domestic politics, Kosovo has experienced a number of difficulties in recent years. In May 2014, early elections were called after Serb-minority MPs boycotted parliament over a plan to transform the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a formal Army of Kosovo. Subsequent elections in June 2014 produced an inconclusive result that led to a six-month deadlock before a government was formed. However, in May 2017, the governing coalition of Isa Mustafa's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and former Prime Minister Thaçi's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Srpska List and other minority communities, was dissolved due to a vote of no confidence. New elections in July 2017 resulted in the PAN coalition (which included the PDK Party of President Hashim Thaçi) securing 39 seats. The biggest single party was Vetevendosje, which won 32 seats.
56. Hashim Thaçi was elected president of the Kosovo Republic on 26 February 2017, after 71 of the 120 members of the assembly voted in favour of his nomination. A legal challenge by opposition parties about the election of Thaçi as President was dismissed by the Constitutional Court which ruled that there was no violation of procedures or the constitution during the voting.
57. Kosovo is a potential candidate for European Union (EU) membership, though relations with the EU are complicated by the fact that five EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) do not recognise Kosovo. This means the EU has to take a status-neutral stance vis-à-vis Kosovo. However, there has been tangible progress on Kosovo's EU path. The EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) entered into force on 1 April 2016 and, on the ground, the EU advises and assists the Kosovo Government through its Rule of Law mission (EULEX) and the EU Special Representative (EUSR) to Kosovo, who advises on the initial political process towards European integration.
58. Kosovo also has aspirations to join NATO but it currently remains a 'consumer' of security provided by NATO. The alliance's biggest mission (KFOR) is in Kosovo. The KFOR mission was deployed in June 1999 and

currently stands at approximately 5,000 troops and is mandated by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1,244. Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) has recommended a gradual downsizing of KFOR to an ‘End State Deterrent Presence’ of 1,500 troops. They have recommended a new model for adjusting troop size and capability, devolving decision making power to Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) based on a thorough assessment of conditions on the ground and with no immediate reduction.

Serbia-Kosovo relations

59. Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008. This declaration was vehemently opposed by Serbia and a process whereby Serbia sought to block Kosovo’s recognition began. Initially, the Serbian government withdrew ambassadors from countries that had recognised Kosovo, though these were gradually reinstated. In July 2010, after protracted arguments and lobbying by the governments of Serbia and Kosovo, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued its opinion that Kosovo’s declaration of independence did not violate international law. Serbia continues to claim Kosovo as its territory. The EU has made a normalisation of Serbia-Kosovo relations a requirement of EU membership.
60. In 2011, following a period during which relations between Belgrade and Pristina were hostile, the EU brokered an agreement that established a pathway to ‘normalisation’ of relations. Discussions centred around three key areas: regional cooperation, freedom of movement and rule of law. In October 2012, the Prime Ministers of Serbia and Kosovo (Ivica Dačić and Hashim Thaçi) met in Brussels—the first time that direct political dialogue between the two governments had taken place since Kosovo’s declaration of independence. The two governments concluded the ‘Brussels Agreement’ in April 2013, which was hailed as a significant step forward toward the normalisation of relations. Discussion began on a number of different issues such as telecommunications and the free movement of people.
61. Negotiations slowed throughout 2014, and though some progress was evident in 2015, with the signing of agreements in a number of key areas, it has been limited since. However, the progress made was deemed sufficient to allow Serbia to progress in membership negotiations with the EU. Kosovo is also permitted to opening talks on a Stability and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU.
62. The Serbian government remains opposed to Kosovo’s membership of United Nations agencies, including UNESCO. Relations between Belgrade and Pristina worsened in January 2017 when a train painted in the colours of the Serbian flag and with the words ‘Kosovo is Serbia’ written in large letters on its exterior was prevented from entering Kosovo. A war of words between Serbia and Kosovo ensued, and both deployed military forces along the Serbian-Kosovo border.
63. Relations were further strained by the arrest of the current prime minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, in France on the basis of an arrest warrant issued by Serbia. Haradinaj, then part of the opposition, was accused of war crimes dating back to the 1998–99 war in Kosovo. However, in July 2017, the Serbian President, Aleksander Vučić met with his Kosovan counterpart, Hashim Thaçi, during an informal meeting with the EU’s High

Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini. It was agreed at this meeting that a new, more dynamic phase of the normalisation process would begin. President Vučić announced in August 2017 that Serbia would embark upon an ‘internal dialogue’ on Kosovo that would include state institutions, academics, civil society and the public. President Thaçi announced that a similar process would take place in Kosovo.

Macedonia

64. Macedonia declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in September 1991—three months after Slovenia and Croatia had done so. Macedonia, led by President Kiro Gligorov, was spared the inter-ethnic violence that accompanied the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The country’s main political difficulty was, and remains, the ‘name dispute’ with its neighbour, Greece. Greece refuses to recognise Macedonia arguing that its name implies territorial ambitions toward the northern Greek region of Macedonia. As a consequence Macedonia is still referred to as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) at the United Nations. 26 years after its declaration of independence from the SFRY, efforts to solve the name dispute continue. Talks between both countries under United Nations auspices, chaired by the American diplomat Matthew Nimetz (the UN’s Special Representative for the Name Dispute), have failed to produce a mutually acceptable solution. After a three-year stalemate, however, fresh talks on the name dispute were scheduled for December 2017 and are ongoing.

Figure 5: Map of Macedonia



65. Relations between Macedonians and the country’s large ethnic Albanian minority, who are concentrated predominantly in the western part of Macedonia, were strained though generally stable during the years marked by the violent disintegration of the SFRY. Nevertheless, Macedonia’s internal stability remained tenuous and the country was exposed to the instability emanating from its neighbours. In March 1995, the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) was deployed in Macedonia. Its mandate was to monitor border areas to ensure that the country’s territorial

integrity remained intact and to ensure that local disputes could be mediated quickly and effectively. UNPREDEP withdrew from Macedonia in 1999, a time when the region was facing significant instability. Macedonia was significantly affected by the 1998–99 war in Kosovo and the subsequent NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Estimates vary, but approximately 350,000 ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo were accommodated in refugee camps in Macedonia during the conflict.

66. In 2001 Macedonia came close to civil war. Ethnic Albanian rebels, known as the National Liberation Army (NLA), launched an armed insurgency against the Macedonian government in January 2001. The insurgency was strongest in the Albanian-majority areas near the Kosovo border, around Tetovo and Kumanovo. The NLA's demands included greater political, cultural and linguistic rights for the ethnic Albanian minority. As armed clashes intensified throughout the spring of 2001, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO mediated throughout the conflict and a ceasefire agreement signed in July 2001 paved the way for the signing of the Ohrid Agreement in August 2001 (though the NLA did not participate in the Ohrid negotiations). The agreement established the basis for an increase in Albanian rights in a number of spheres.
67. Inter-ethnic relations have improved significantly since the signing of the Ohrid Agreement, through tensions resurface on occasion. In May 2015, for example, armed clashes in the northern town of Kumanovo left eight police and 14 gunmen dead. The ruling VMRO-DPME (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) government blamed the unrest in Kumanovo on ethnic Albanian 'terrorists' from Kosovo.
68. Macedonia has passed through an acute political crisis which, though going back to 2012, intensified in 2015 when a wiretapping scandal revealed deep weaknesses in Macedonia's rule of law, confirming concerns about electoral malpractice, political dialogue and manipulation of the media and judiciary by the ruling VMRO-DPME. The opposition SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) estimated that up to 20,000 people had been illegally wiretapped. Consequently, Nikola Gruevski stepped down as Prime Minister in January 2016, in a deal brokered by the EU, to be replaced by an interim Prime Minister, Emil Dimitriev of VMRO-DPME.
69. Early elections scheduled for June 2016 were, however, postponed due to ongoing political turmoil (in the form of opposition protests dubbed the 'Colourful Revolution' and counter-rallies by VMRO-DPME supporters). Elections were held in December 2016. VMRO-DPME, while winning the most seats, did not have enough to form a majority. On 31 May 2017, after a protracted period of political crisis—which included the storming of parliament by VMRO-DPME supporters during the vote to elect an ethnic Albanian (Talat Xhaferi) as Parliamentary Speaker in April 2017—Zoran Zaev of the SDSM took office. He has formed a coalition with the ethnic Albanian parties forming a slim parliamentary majority of 62 of 120 MPs.
70. Nikola Gruevski, leader of the VMRO-DPME, held power in Macedonia from 2006–2016 but is now in opposition. The party's reputation has been severely damaged by the wiretapping scandal and allegations of high level corruption. There is a possibility that Gruevski will face criminal charges from the investigations by the Special Prosecutor, an office set up as part of

the so-called ‘Przino Agreement’ between the four main political parties in July 2015.

71. Under the new SDSM-led government, Macedonia continues to pursue EU membership, though this is complicated by the long standing impasse with Greece over Macedonia’s name. Greece has consistently blocked Macedonia’s path to both NATO and EU accession. A Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Macedonia came into force in 2004, and the country submitted a formal application for EU membership in the same year. Following the European Commission’s positive recommendation, the European Council decided on 16 December 2005 to grant Macedonia candidate status. Since 2009, the Commission has given six successive recommendations for the opening of accession negotiations, but Greece has blocked further movement due to the failure to resolve the name issue. In the meantime the European Commission’s recommendation was increasingly overshadowed by ‘backsliding’ on reform during the mandate of the VRMO-DPME government.
72. Macedonia aspires to join the NATO alliance but has been blocked by Greece from doing so, most notably at the Bucharest Summit in 2008. Macedonia does, however, provide support to NATO operations in Kosovo and the EU’s peacekeeping mission (EUFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also contributes medical personnel to the ‘Resolute Support Mission’ in Afghanistan.

Montenegro

73. Montenegro, the smallest of the former republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), has a population of 633,000 people. According to the 2011 population census, 45% are Montenegrins, 28.7% Serbs, 8.6% Bosniaks (3.3% declare themselves ‘Muslims’), 4.9% Albanian and 0.9% Croats.

Figure 6: Map of Montenegro



74. Montenegro had been an internationally-recognised independent state between 1878 and 1918, first as a Principality and (from 1910) as a Kingdom under the leadership of Prince (later King) Nikola Petrović. Montenegro was occupied by the Austrians between 1916 and 1918, and King Nikola fled the country (he died in exile in France in March 1921). At the end of the First World War, Montenegro was absorbed into Serbia in November 1918 before becoming incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). At the end of the Second World War, which took a considerable toll on Montenegro, it became one of six republics in the SFRY. Montenegro, as the smallest and one of the poorest Yugoslav republics, benefited from Yugoslav federal funds and its infrastructure was developed significantly.
75. In 1989, during the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', Montenegro's ageing communist elite were replaced by younger party members loyal to Slobodan Milošević. The League of Communists of Montenegro won Montenegro's first multi-party elections in December 1990; the party subsequently changing its name to the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). They generally aligned with Serbian government policy and were closely allied to Serbia during the wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Montenegro largely avoided the armed conflicts that accompanied Yugoslav disintegration, though Montenegrin units of the Yugoslav People's Army and Montenegrin irregulars participated in the attack on the Dubrovnik region in late 1991.
76. In April 1992, as the SFRY formally disintegrated, Montenegro opted to remain in union with Serbia in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), a rather asymmetrical federation comprising only two republics. Relations between ruling elites in Serbia and Montenegro remained relatively positive until a split within Montenegro's ruling party, the DPS, in 1997. The split was initiated by the then Prime Minister, Milo Djukanović, who gave an interview for the Belgrade-based weekly, *Vreme*, in which he described Milošević as 'an obsolete politician'. Djukanović became increasingly critical of the policies of Milošević and these criticisms led to bitter political conflicts within the DPS, personified by those between Djukanović and the then Montenegrin President, Momir Bulatović, who continued to support Milošević.
77. In the summer of 1997, Djukanović's faction wrested control of the DPS, began to construct an anti-Milošević coalition and set Montenegro on a more independent path. Djukanović won the presidential elections, after the second round, in October 1997 and was inaugurated in January 1998. Thereafter, the Montenegrin government developed a separate economic policy, adopting the Deutsche Mark and later the Euro as its currency. The Montenegrin government also declared neutrality during the NATO bombing of the FRY in 1999 (though some targets were bombed in Montenegro).
78. Tensions between Montenegro and Serbia remained high until the fall of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000. Thereafter, the Montenegrin government continued to pursue independence, but in 2002 agreed to sign the European Union-brokered 'Belgrade Agreement', which dissolved the FRY and created a looser union known as the 'Joint State of Serbia and Montenegro'. The agreement allowed for Montenegro to hold a referendum three years after the ratification of the agreement and in May 2006 Montenegrins voted in an independence referendum that was overseen by the EU. The threshold was set at 55%, on the basis that Montenegro was a deeply divided society and on referendum day 55.5% voted in favour of independence while 44.5% voted in favour of preserving the union with Serbia.

79. Since the formal re-instatement of the country's independence in June 2006, the Montenegrin government's core objective has been Euro-Atlantic integration. Montenegro became a candidate for EU membership in November 2010 and has made steady progress since. The country appears to be on track to join the EU in 2025 or soon thereafter. Montenegro became a formal member of NATO alliance in June 2017.
80. Domestically, Montenegro has been in a political crisis that stemmed from street demonstrations led by the Democratic Front (DF) in October 2015 and the controversy surrounding the October 2016 parliamentary elections, during which it is alleged that the DF, with the support of Russians with links to the Russian Security Services, plotted to overthrow the government in a coup d'état. The trial of those alleged to be behind the plot is ongoing. The DF has continued with a selective boycott of parliament and their leadership has called for further anti-DPS demonstrations
81. There has never been a change of government through the mechanism of democratic elections since the first multi-party elections were held in 1990. The DPS, a party that is the successor to the League of Communists of Montenegro, has been dominant for almost three decades. Political change in Montenegro has emanated from 'within' the DPS, as a consequence of internal splits. Milo Djukanović has been either prime minister or president almost continuously (with two short breaks) between 1991 and 2016. The current president is Filip Vujanović, whose term expires at the end of 2017, and the current prime minister is Duško Marković. Milo Djukanović remains the chairman of the DPS and may run for president again in 2018.

Serbia

82. Serbia was the largest republic in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the larger of the two republics in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which was created in April 1992. As the largest country in the Western Balkans, Serbia's regional role was, and remains, of significant importance.

Figure 7: Map of Serbia



83. After the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in November 1995, Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević, was briefly heralded as a peacemaker and United Nations sanctions against the FRY were lifted. But during the winter of 1996–97 large anti-Milošević demonstrations took place in Belgrade that indicated the Serbian president's growing unpopularity. Moreover, relations with Serbia's partner in the FRY, Montenegro, worsened and Milošević's government faced an armed insurgency in Kosovo from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The subsequent crackdown against the insurgency caused thousands to flee their homes as fighting escalated.
84. In March 1999, following the breakdown of peace talks, NATO launched a bombing campaign against FRY. The bombing campaign lasted 78 days. Much of Serbia's military and some of its civilian infrastructure (such as bridges) were destroyed, while ethnic Albanians were forcibly expelled by Serb forces. In June 1999, Milošević agreed to withdraw Serb forces from Kosovo. As part of the Kumanovo Agreement, Serb forces withdrew and Kosovo became a UN protectorate, though it remained *de jure* part of Serbia.
85. After the NATO bombing had ended, the opposition and the Otpor (Resistance) group began to gain momentum. In September 2000, Milošević was accused by the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) of rigging the parliamentary elections. This led to street demonstrations and his eventual overthrow on 5 October 2000. Thereafter, Vojislav Koštunica became president of the FRY and Zoran Djindjić became, after parliamentary elections, prime minister.
86. Relations were initially cordial between Koštunica and Djindjić but became increasingly strained over the fate of Milošević. Upon Milošević's arrest in April 2001, the two men adopted different positions—Koštunica argued that Milošević should be tried in Serbia; Djindjić argued that Milošević should be sent to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. In June 2001, Djindjić over-ruled the Serbian Constitutional Court and authorised the extradition of Milošević to the ICTY. The extradition, actioned without Koštunica's consent, caused a bitter split. Two months later, Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) pulled out of the governing coalition, and in June 2002, deputies from the DSS walked out of parliament.
87. In the meantime, the European Union (EU) brokered an agreement (known as the 'Belgrade Agreement') to dissolve the FRY and replace it with a looser state union of Serbia and Montenegro. The agreement allowed for Serbia or Montenegro to hold a referendum on independence three years after its ratification.
88. In March 2003, Djindjić was assassinated outside the parliament building in Belgrade by members of the Red Berets (or Unit for Special Operations), a special forces police unit created by a merger of Serbian paramilitary groups that had operated in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and controlled by Serbian State Security. The assassination initiated a government crackdown known as 'Operation Sabre' to arrest those connected with Djindjić's murder. The Red Berets are disbanded in the same month.
89. In December 2003, parliamentary elections were held but the results were inconclusive. New elections in March 2004 brought a centre-right coalition to power, with Vojislav Koštunica as prime minister. In June 2004, Boris

Tadić, the leader of the Democratic Party (DS), defeated the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) candidate, Tomislav Nikolić, to become president.

90. In March 2006, Slobodan Milošević was found dead in his cell in The Hague, where his trial was ongoing. His body was returned to Serbia soon after and he was buried in his home town of Pozarevac. Three months later, Serbia became an independent state following Montenegro's vote to leave the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro in May 2006.
91. Relations with Kosovo remained extremely difficult and a genuine source of tension (see paragraphs 59–63). These worsened after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008, a declaration Serbia argued was illegal. In the same month DS leader, Boris Tadić was re-elected president though disagreements over Serbia's policy toward the European Union (EU) led to the scheduling of early parliamentary elections. In the first round no party won a majority but in the second a DS-led coalition gained enough seats in parliament to form a government. There were some successes for the government. In March 2012, for example, Serbia formally gained candidate status for EU membership. But just two months later, Tadić was defeated by Tomislav Nikolić of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). In parliamentary elections the SNS also won the largest share of seats. A coalition government comprising SNS and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) was subsequently formed with Ivica Dačić as prime minister.
92. Early parliamentary elections in April 2014 end with a landslide victory for the SNS. Though the SNS-SPS coalition remained intact, Aleksandar Vučić becomes prime minister. These elections mark the beginning of a period of ongoing dominance for the SNS. In parliamentary elections in April 2016, the SNS and Vučić remained prime minister. However, he stood and won in the presidential elections April 2017. He thereafter appointed Ana Brnabić as the new prime minister in June 2017.
93. The EU accession process has remained the government's key strategic goal. Serbia embarked upon the process of EU accession by signing a Stability and Association Agreement (SAA) in April 2008. The government submitted its application for EU membership in December 2009 but was not granted candidate status in March 2012. This was achieved following progress against EU requirements, notably full compliance with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and on improving relations with Kosovo, including through engagement in an EU-facilitated dialogue. Accession talks formally began in January 2014.
94. EU accession remains a priority for the current government, but the process is complicated by the additional requirement for Serbia to normalise relations with Kosovo before joining the EU. Since opening two chapters in December 2015, Serbia has now opened a total of ten chapters. Among EU member states, the UK, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden have been the most insistent on the bar not being lowered for Serbia, particularly with regard to Chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights), 24 (justice, freedom and security) and 35 (other issues).
95. While there is popular support for EU accession, the issue of NATO membership is more problematic. The Serbian government has made it clear that it has no intention of becoming a NATO member. However, the country is a member of Partnership for Peace (PfP), a signatory to the Stability Pact

for Southeast Europe and was offered an ‘Intensified Dialogue Program’ by NATO in 2008. Serbia also signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IAP) in 2015. But NATO remains unpopular with the Serbian public since its bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (which then comprised Serbia—including Kosovo—and Montenegro) in 1999. Serbia maintains a policy of military neutrality and full NATO membership is unlikely to be pursued by the government.

APPENDIX 5: SUMMARY OF MEETING WITH NIKOLA DIMITROV, MACEDONIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

New government: domestic priorities

1. Macedonia had just emerged from a “crisis of democracy” but this had mobilised the whole country across political and ethnic divides to build a “real European democracy”. The new government (led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)) had been in place for the last 100 days. Its priorities were to build a system of checks and balances, combat corruption, ensure the independence of the judiciary and protect the freedom of the media. It had a 3–6–9 domestic reform agenda (setting benchmarks of reforms to be achieved in 3, 6 and 9 months). The opposition divided itself into 10 parliamentary groups, in an unprecedented attempt to filibuster the work of Parliament.
2. Combating corruption was a key priority of the new government. There had been considerable corruption in the previous government, as revealed by the wire-tapping scandal. The public revolt against these practices had brought the SDSM to power. The SDSM led government coalition had put forward legislative proposals, some of which had been delayed in the legislature. For example, it had taken many months to remove the Chief Public Prosecutor, who had been connected to the previous scandals. The Minister recognised that there was some dissatisfaction amongst the grass-root supporters who wanted faster progress but the approach of the Government had to be strictly within the judicial and legislative processes. Combating corruption was not only about legislative reform but was also a “matter of changing the attitudes”. For example, members of the new government would disclose their financial details.

Inter-ethnic relations

3. In a multi-ethnic country like Macedonia, the work of promoting good inter-ethnic relations could never be considered complete: it must always be looked to. The wire-tapping scandal had been a unifying force as protest against corruption had crossed ethnic and political divides. The political landscape was now slowly changing, with ethnically based parties beginning to see the need to offer a broader platform in order to garner wider support. Moving to an ethnically integrated education system would be a great step forward.

Foreign policy priorities

4. In foreign policy, the three main priorities were: NATO accession; EU accession; and building good neighbourly relations. As a result, the Foreign Minister had already visited Greece, Bulgaria—where a Treaty of Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Cooperation was signed—and Albania, to agree and announce the first ever joint government session, planned to be held by the end of this year. There was a sense of urgency about warming relations between countries of the region, within the region. The region had seen an increase in geopolitics, with third countries playing an increasing role.
5. The broader approach in foreign policy was to give the international community reasons to support Macedonia. For example, Macedonia currently spent 1% of its GDP on defence and the new Government had pledged to increase that spend as well as its engagement internationally.

Greece

6. The largest challenge remained Greece's opposition to the constitutional name of the country—the Republic of Macedonia. The approach undertaken by the Minister was to build a positive relationship. It was not in the interests of either side to begin a blame game; Macedonia had to see Greece “as an ally”. The approach of the Minister on his visit to Athens was to point out that Macedonia was a neighbour and to ask the question: “What kind of country would you like as a neighbour in a decade?”
7. It was unhelpful for the issue of the name to be raised so frequently. Domestically, the Macedonian approach was try and take it out of daily political discourse. The challenge for Macedonia was that for Greece “there is nothing to lose and little to gain with a solution”, leading to an imbalance of power between the two parties. The lack of a resolution on the name issue had regional implications, and it “discredits the accession process” which was based on countries being rewarded for progress. Macedonia was sharing the responsibilities of the EU without any of the advantages.

NATO

8. There was a high level of popular support for NATO accession (over 70% in the wider population). The value for Macedonia was that NATO membership “proves that Macedonia is here to stay and within these boundaries”. A similar outcome would be delivered by EU accession.

Europe

9. The UK was a friend of the region but Brexit had been a concern to Macedonia. However, the UK's hosting of the 2018 Berlin Process Summit was an appreciated and encouraging signal of the UK's intention to remain involved in the Region.
10. EU membership remained the principal foreign policy objective for Macedonia. The challenge was that the EU was “not self-confident”. Perhaps the Western Balkans was an opportunity to demonstrate how the EU could make a difference. It was in the EU's interests to do so: the migration crisis had shown how essential the Region was to European security. In the matter of border protection, this was not an issue that could be handled by the countries of the Western Balkans alone and the deal between EU-Turkey was critical in this regard.
11. The approach of the EU could be to view the Region through a security prism, as an ally against the migration crisis. However, too often in recent years the EU and others had prioritised short-term stability in the Region rather than long-term support for building effective governance. This was an approach of diminishing returns. The view that strong men provide more stability was mistaken; that form of governance continuously relies on crises to maintain power. The Region needed a credible prospect of EU membership. Public support for EU accession was high, above 60%. EU membership was seen as a route to prosperity and stability. However, it was difficult to countries who are “locked in the waiting room” of accession to pursue the necessary reforms and maintain public support.
12. Paradoxically, the migration crisis had demonstrated more international cooperation was required but the instinctive reaction in many countries had been to become more national and to build more walls. In such an interconnected world, more international cooperation was needed, not less.

APPENDIX 6: VISIT NOTES FROM THE REGION

1. In the course of its inquiry, Members of the Committee made two trips to the Western Balkans, visiting four countries (Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Many meetings were held under Chatham House Rule.

Kosovo

2. Baroness Coussins and Lord Grocott visited Kosovo on 19–20 September. They were accompanied by the Policy Analyst and the Specialist Adviser.
3. In the course of the visit they met:
 - BONEVET, local NGO
 - Lumir Abdixhiku, Former Riinvest director, now MP from LDK party
 - Nataliya Apostolova, Head of EU Office/EUSR
 - Albert Avdiu, UNDP, Anti-Corruption Project Manager
 - Agim Bahtiri, Mayor of South Mitrovica
 - Visar Bivolaku, National Policy Officer/Human Rights & CVE Focal Point, EU Office
 - Bekim Blakaj, Executive Director, HLC
 - Luigi Brusa, Head of Cooperation Section, EU Office in Kosovo
 - Martin Cunningham, Head of Strengthening Division at EULEX Kosovo
 - Major General Giovanni Fungo, Commander KFOR
 - Nora Latifi Jashari, GAP institute, Executive Director
 - Dalibor Jevtic, Deputy Prime Minister
 - Tatjana Lazarević, KoSSev (Media Outlet), Executive Director
 - Boyd Mckechnie, Senior Adviser on Political Affairs / North and Communities, EUSR
 - Cezary Michalczuk, Head of Rule of Law & Legal Section, EU Office in Kosovo
 - Ehat Miftaraj, KLI, Legal Researcher
 - Dušan Radaković, Advocacy Centre for Democratic Culture (ACDC), Executive Director
 - General Rahman Rama, Commander of the Kosovo Security Force
 - Naim Rashiti, Balkans Group, Executive Director
 - Igballa Rogova, KWN, Executive Director
 - Feride Rushiti, KRCT, Executive Director
 - Petrit Selimi, National Coordinator of Millennium Challenge Corporation Kosovo
 - Ricardo Serri, Head of Political, Economic, and EU Integration Section
 - Besa Shahini, Education Plenum, Executive Director
 - Edita Tahiri, the former minister for dialogue

- Rozafa Ukimeraj, Ministry of Local Government Administration, Permanent Secretary
 - Ruud Vermeulen, IMF, Country Representative
4. The delegation visited Kosovo two weeks after a new government had been formed (9 September) ending a political deadlock that had persisted since elections on 11 June. The PAN governing coalition includes the Democratic Party of Kosovo, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo and the Initiative for Kosovo as well as the main Serbian party in Kosovo—Srpska Lista. The new government has a narrow majority of 61 seats in a 120-seat legislature. Kosovo is a multi-ethnic society with Albanians forming 93% of the majority, and Serbs the most significant minority.

Current political context

5. The political context, the EUSR explained has been very difficult with a snap election, three months of political deadlock and now local elections are planned. The new government has a very slim majority. This means that many EU reforms are challenged as they will require a 2/3 majority—the votes of the Serbian coalition partners would be critical.
6. Many witnesses informed us that the Serbian coalition partners—Srpska Lista—were united and navigated by President Vučić of Serbia. Witnesses informed us of the situation whereby on the day of the opening of parliament, business was delayed while parliamentarians from Srpska Lista returned from Serbia “taking their orders from President Vučić”.
7. The clear political demand, witnesses informed, was the state-building project which was as yet incomplete. However, beyond the practicalities of building the political state, witnesses were unclear on their loyalty and identification to the Kosovan state. Few witnesses identified themselves as Kosovan purely. Most notably, young people at BONEVET—an NGO—did not identify themselves as Kosovan but rather Kosovo-Albanian, Albanian or Serbian. There was also very little or no intermingling amongst young people: one young Kosovo-Albanian noted that his only contact with Serbians was the “old woman at my local shop”.

Economic situation

8. The economic condition, the EU office informed was, extremely challenging. The IMF has stopped its programme and the EU programmes, which constitute some 80 million Euros, are now threatened. This was the real problem, said Mr Lumir Abdixhiku, former Reinvest director and Member of Parliament. There was far too much focus on the Serbian-Kosovan Dialogue but that “is not what people talk about around the table”. The real problem is unemployment, with unemployment rates at 56% and only 19% of women participate in the labour force. The private sector is weak and there is a bloated public sector. The public administration increases with every government. It is easy to hire but hard to fire.
9. The economy is growing at 3.5%, but as the IMF as noted, to bring 30% unemployment needs a higher growth rate.
10. The IMF judged that the current economic growth model is not sustainable being entirely dependent on remittances and spent on consumables. This was not adding to the productive capacity of the country. Remittances

amounted to 600–700 million Euros, which was 12–13% of GDP. During the financial crisis, countries continued to send remittances, which buffered Kosovo during that period. The diaspora community was also buying real estate but again this was not creating productivity. Kosovo is a small landlocked country with geopolitical disadvantages and must at least create the conditions for higher growth.

11. Two recommendations were proposed by the IMF:
 - Wage restraint. Wages have increased around elections as much as a 30–50% increase. However, as the country has a massive public sector, these successive increases mean that Kosovo, while having low labour costs, is still pricing itself out of the market. The current wage increases, the IMF has stressed are out of line with productivity levels.
 - Structural. Kosovo needs better infrastructure investment, better roads and infrastructure, which would require increasing the government's revenues. Currently tax revenues amount to only 27% of GDP. Economy is growing at 3.5 percent but to bring 30 percent unemployment needs a higher growth rate.

Corruption

12. Mr Abdixhiku noted the extent of political and economic corruption, Firms are related to the political system, the awarding of public tenders is a matter of political favour, businesses can be bankrupted and criminal prosecutors are appointed by the by party system. Nora Latifi Jashari, GAP institute, added that the state budget is used to support political aims and sectors. She did note that the civil society is putting on more pressure.

Kosovo-Serbian relations

13. Edita Tahiri, the former minister for dialogue, said that the critical challenge was to draw Serbia away from the Russian orbit. In the north of Kosovo, Serbia offers a parallel loyalty. The Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue has helped remove of the Serbian meddling and parallel institutions, such as the parallel police. In the north, there have not been any inter-ethnic killings, functioning authorities, it is now possible to register companies and in 2013, elections for the northern municipalities were held.
14. The only real option is mutual recognition: “Sustainable peace is mutual recognition and there is no alternative”

North Kosovo

15. The city of Mitrovica, in the north of Kosovo, is divided between two administrative units with a Serb-majority municipality in the municipality of North Mitrovica and Kosovo-Albanians in South Mitrovica. The Committee visited South Mitrovica.
16. The mayor of South Mitrovica, Agim Bahtiri, pointed to the notable decrease in inter-ethnic conflict in the city. The incidents of inter-ethnic violence have reduced to seven incidents in the last four years. The mayor noted that KFOR and the UK had been helpful partners but also a clear policy of promoting economic development had gone a considerable way to easing conditions. He stressed that he was a businessman and he had urged people not to think about borders and ethnicities but to focus on business

and economic opportunities: he had found a receptive audience amongst the Serbs in the north.

17. The security situation and relations between Kosovo-Serbia was under control. The mayor was in touch with his counterpart and citizens crossed the bridge connecting the two municipalities, Serbs and Albanians work on either side and the barricades have been taken down. He was confident that there would be no more ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, there was an effective policing programme and Mitrovica was now the safest city in Kosovo, he added.

International Organisations

18. Multiple international organisations are active in Kosovo, including NATO, EU, IMF, OSCE and various bodies of the UN. Under the Chatham House Rule, we were informed that there was no alternative to international organisations and many witnesses could not see a future for Kosovo without considerable and extensive international support factored in.
19. Witnesses informed us of the risk of donor dependency noting the sense that could be present that international donors will step in and fix things and also that when the conditionality was too onerous, there was always another international actor ready to step in. The key focus for the international community, witnesses informed us, was to integrate Kosovo into NATO and then into EU structures. Both of these projects would complete the state building project.
20. On the other hand, there was a note of optimism. In the interim period where there was no government in place, the public administration had functioned and ministries had run. This was a qualitative change. The administration was moving despite the lack of government and state consolidation was progressing.

EU

21. The EU Special Representative (EUSR), Ms Nataliya Aposotolova, and her team, explained the work of the EU in Kosovo. The EU office in Kosovo is a double-headed—EUSR and EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX)—but not a fully-fledged one as there are five non-recognisers of Kosovo amongst the EU member states. The office consists of 130 staff and covers the remit of rule of law, health and economic issues. There are also special EU programmes to improve life in the Serb dominated municipalities, in the north of Kosovo.
22. The cost of EU commitments have been 1.2 billion Euros for EULEX since its inception and the Instrument for Pre-Accession funding is about 70–90 million for 2007–13.
23. There are three main components to the EU role:
 - The role of the EUSR is to advise the government on the functions of rule of law, embedding experts in judicial functions and preserve and guard ownership of Kosovo.
 - The EULEX mission consists of 800 people. The mission has an executive mandate with judges and prosecutors embedded in the system, it advises on criminal prosecution, trains the Kosovo police and its LRM helps the government shape and draft legislation, engage with the international

institutions, embassies and send the opinion, participate assembly session so that legislation adheres to EU *acquis* and best European perspectives. Finally, it facilitates exchanges between EU and Kosovan administrators.

- The Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue was judged to be a vulnerable exercise, the EU was not guiding but only facilitating the dialogue. In Serbia, the shift of the Dialogue to the presidential level could endanger it. President Hashim Thaçi might try to mirror the same steps. In the north of Kosovo, the situation is tense: the EU is often containing situations on the ground. Serb politicians are being pushed and pulled by EU and Serbia. Belgrade cannot sustain their financial engagement, but most people do not feel Kosovan.
24. The benefits of the Dialogue are not clear to the people. There are benefits—security, multi-ethnic society - but for the people to feel invested they will have to have real economic prospects from Kosovo—the “milk train from Belgrade will have end” and people in the north will have to accept something that they would rather not accept.
 25. In the short-term, key EU programmes are visa-liberalisation, and the long-term plan is EU accession. However, progress on reforms has been halting. Key challenges are corruption, organised crime and reforming the rule of law sector. In these sectors there has been little progress, the track rate for cases is poor: “We do not see what we were supposed to see for the money we have put in”.
 26. New “Special Chambers” are being set up which may reach to the highest political level. These new chambers will be hybrid, an international court but set up within the Kosovo legal system and the Kosovo Assembly. Funded by the EU, Norway and US with a US special prosecutor.
 27. EU popularity has diminished in the region. The challenge there has been no movement on recognition amongst those non-recognising member states and in the political vacuum, reforms have slowed down.

NATO and KFOR

28. The NATO mission, KFOR was “not a sleeping beauty mission” said Major General Giovanni Fungo, Commander of the mission. The mission has now increased to nine battalions. The mission has improved its situational awareness and is now more effective at gathering information about jihadis and the flow of foreign fighters. The fighters who have returned are likely to be released from prison in the next few months and the risk is that they will return to their communities more radicalised. The mission was also doing monitoring of the radicalisation. Within communities, KFOR scores highly in surveys of trust of institutions.
29. The region is seen as a whole, KFOR has been evolving but the strategy is not time driven but rather based on goals, currently in deterrence posture and would like to move to minimal posture. The strategic aim is to provide stability in Kosovo and to spread that outwards.
30. There was strong support for NATO membership, which was seen as a key part of the state building project. Ms Tahiri said that the goal for Kosovo is to be in the EU and NATO, but the first priority was NATO. General Rrahman Rama, Commander of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), stressed that transforming the KSF was an important step for Kosovo’s own sovereignty but also a step in its Euro-Atlantic/NATO integration.

31. The KSF was currently in the process of being transformed into the Kosovo Armed Force (KAF), which would include an increase in its numbers and its cost but the transformation also had a particularly important symbolic aspect of Kosovo having its own army. A move opposed strongly by Serbia. The KSF was taking steps to ensure that it was a multi-ethnic force with recruitment aimed at Serbians and other minorities as well. 50% of the KSF were women; the highest rank held by a woman was a colonel soon to be a general. The highest rank held by a Serb was major. The UK had an officer embedded within the KSF and was also involved in training. The KSF took part in NATO regional exercises as well as regional activities and had signed Memorandums of Understanding with defence ministries of the region. However, we were warned not to underestimate the complexities of deeper integration in the absence of full state recognition.

Russia

32. Witnesses were divided on Russian influence. Some witnesses suggested to us that there was evidence of Russian money in North Mitrovica. There are paramilitary organisations, so-called hunters and others who continue to receive Russian money. There is also evidence of Russian penetration into civil society and in the media, with fake news. There was little penetration of Russian influence amongst the Kosovo-Albanians. The main approach of the Russians in Kosovo was via covert influence, supporting fake media, acting via humanitarian agencies and NGOs.
33. Political analysts informed us that the current context of opaqueness, authoritarianism and corruption is the ideal operating ground for Russians. Russia was exploiting the situation and the focus should not be on the Russians but rather on the systemic weaknesses. Under the Chatham House Rule, witnesses told us that the Russians had no plan for the Western Balkans or Kosovo, they only sought to create disorder, to prove that Russia was right, the west was wrong. Others informed us that an economically unsuccessful dictatorship does not want a successful democracy on its border.
34. The Commander of KFOR, the NATO mission, Major General Giovanni Fungo, was sanguine. The Russians are present but they are not active militarily. The main approach was intelligence related activities.

UK and Brexit

35. Witnesses repeatedly stressed the high standing of the UK in Kosovo; a historic legacy, a political supporter of Kosovo's independence and an active political and financial supporter of good governance, civil society particularly women's rights, anti-corruption and young people.
36. The EU office informed us that the country was shocked by Brexit, which left a question mark hanging on the UK's role but some member states will have an active interest—Italians are engaged and German engagement is likely to increase.
37. Edita Tahiri, the former minister for dialogue, said that the role for the UK once it leaves the EU is to remain close to US. The triangular relationship that mattered was UK-EU-NATO. Ms Tahiri further encouraged the UK to increase its engagement. There are major challenges which Kosovo cannot manage alone, such as radicalisation. "Kosovo is not ready as yet (to manage alone), maybe never"

Sexual violence in conflict

38. The Committee met two NGOs working in the field sexual violence in conflict; the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) and the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT). Ms Feride Rushiti, KRCT explained their work; KRCT, founded in 1999, in the aftermath of the war which saw massive rape and genocide. KRCT consists of 23 activists working to provide rehabilitation for victims of torture and rape, support their legal rights, protect them from violence and working at the legislative level on the legal and political rights. There is also a pastoral role undertaken to support the victims with income and treatment.
39. Ms Igballa Rogova, KWN explained that in a patriarchal society, victims can be stigmatised, isolated, rejected by their families. The KWN was set up to address this isolation. Ms Rushiti and Ms Rogova explained that there had been some progress. A State Council for Rape Victims was set up and there was now legal recognition of the sexual violence suffered. The Kosovo Parliament moved in 2014 to recognise victims of sexual violence as war victims, entitling them to a state pension. However, despite the law being in place, the budget has not been signed off which means that victims were still financially insecure with compensation remaining unpaid. Ms Rogova and Ms Rushiti stressed the importance of timely resolution of this issue; each day the situation is postponed, the problem regresses and the vulnerability of the victims continues.
40. Specific legal and political issues were an obstacle:
- Kosovo legal basis was that prosecutions could not happen in the absence of the defender, which meant that under the current legal system many perpetrators remained out of reach.
 - International non-recognition of Kosovo had an impact. In the aftermath of the war, thousands of testimonies of war crimes were given to the UN mission, and these testimonies had been handed over to EULEX. However, non-recognition at the UN means that there are obstacles to these cases being brought as war crimes. There was a risk that the testimonies - the so-called black box, what Ms Rushiti called the Pandora's Box—would be lost in the bureaucratic and legal minefield and absent those testimonies, there are no war crimes.
 - Ms Rushiti and Ms Rogova discussed the initiation of the Special Chambers, with a Special Prosecutor to consider these cases anew. Here too there were challenges: many of the victims had already testified to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and repeated testifying was particularly challenging for victims, some of whom had been driven to suicide by the process. One victim had testified more than 28 times to the UN mission and seen no response.
41. KWN also worked on the issue of domestic violence. There was a national action plan in place in Kosovo but there was no implementation of existing regulations and laws. In fact, there was a rise of domestic violence and disproportion of sentences meted out to male perpetrators and female perpetrators of self-defence. Both Ms Rushiti and Ms Rogova emphasises that women's economic disempowerment in Kosovo leads to their social disempowerment. The structural organisation and systemic corruption were further barriers. They were not clear that all the EU and international funds had delivered.

42. There was particular praise for the UK's role and for the British Ambassador in Kosovo. It was UK leadership that had put this issue on the international agenda, the UK supported this issue political and financially, directly lobbying parliamentarians to discuss the legislation and the British Ambassador met parliamentarians, victims and raised it in his public announcements.

Macedonia

43. Baroness Coussins and Lord Grocott visited Macedonia on 21–22 September. They were accompanied by the Policy Analyst and the Specialist Adviser.
44. In the course of the visit they met:
- Martin Aleksovski, National Youth Council of Macedonia
 - Teuta Arifi, Mayor of Municipality of Tetovo (DUI)
 - Pavle Bogoevski, SDSM
 - Sashka Cvetkovska, TV Nova
 - Stojna Dimishkovska, La Strada
 - Agron Ferati, Alliance of Albanians
 - Afrim Gashi, BESA
 - Vladko Gjorchev, VMRO-DPMNE
 - Mark Hansell, OSCE
 - Rexhai Ismaili, Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)
 - Zoran Jovanovski, Economy and Business
 - Ivona Krstevska, National Youth Council of Macedonia
 - Magdalena Lembovska, Analytica think tank
 - Hari Lokvenec, SDSM
 - Bujar Luma, Centre for Balkan Cooperation
 - Ilina Mangova, International Republican Institute (IRI)
 - Hristijan Mickovski, VMRO-DPMNE
 - Martin Miloshevski, National Youth Council of Macedonia
 - Antonio Miloshevski, VMRO-DPMNE
 - Sonia Mirakovska, Social Democratic Party (NSDP)
 - Zoran Nechev, IDSCS
 - Dr. Qani Nesimi, Mufti of Tetovo
 - Aleksandar Nikolovski, VMRO DPMNE
 - Emina Nuredinovska, Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation (MCIC)
 - Bujar Osmani, Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs
 - Ljupco Petkovski, Eurothink
 - Uranija Pirovska, Helsinki committee
 - Vasko Popetrevski, 360 Degrees

- Nikola Popovski, VMRO-DPMNE
 - Jasmina Rajkovska, La Strada
 - Ramadan Ramadani, Analyst
 - Ilija Stankovski, National Youth Council of Macedonia
 - Slagjana Taseva, Transparency International ,Macedonia
 - Marija Todorovska, La Strada
 - Tomislav Tuntev, SDSM
 - Maja Varoshlija, La Strada
 - Talat Xhaferi, Speaker of the Macedonian Assembly
 - Fadil Zendeli, BESA
45. The Committee visited Macedonia just over 120 days into the term of the new government, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) led by Zoran Zaev. Local elections were due to take place on October 15. The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia was revising the Albanian Language Law on the day the Committee visited. The law would extend the official use of Albanian to the entire country, where Albanians make up around 25% of the total population of 2.1 million

State capture and corruption

46. State capture was pervasive under the previous administration. Many witnesses explained the extent: under the previous government—the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) even cleaners were vetted and at great cost to the public administration; there was a widespread phenomenon of fake jobs, an entire “shadow administration” whereby people would be paid for jobs within the state administration but, in fact, delivered nothing. Ms Slagjana Taseva, Transparency International, Macedonia, told us that there was “no separation between the state and the people” and often the party was the state.
47. Mr Vasko Popetrevski, 360 Degrees, said that the European Commission shared some responsibility in the extent of the state capture. The Commission was “soft even though the situation was declining”. Often Commission reports did not reflect the situation on the ground, allowing the former government to use this as a certificate vouchsafing their actions.
48. Ms Taseva and Emina Nuredinovska, Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation (MCIC) explained that the “spoil system” permeates the entire political system and discrimination on the basis of political parties remained a serious issue. In a session with the ambassadors of France, Germany, Italy, US and the EU, held under the Chatham House rule, we heard that “everyone has been vetted politically since 2008 and you cannot have illusions about that”. The new government faced a tension between choosing the right person for a role and choosing a political ally. The ambassadors and many other witnesses echoed the concern that one captured state should not be replaced by another.
49. There has been a shift under the new government: NGOs are now invited to meet the new government and there has been more engagement. Key areas for improvement, said Ms Taseva and Ms Nuredinovska, were the

openness, accountability and transparency of the institutions. There was an anti-corruption commission. The real challenge was not that the laws and institutions were not in place but rather the circumvention of both. For example, Macedonia does have an e-procurement system in place but there are ways to circumvent the system, for example tenders are written in a very specific way and an unintended winner can also withdraw. Ilina Mangova, International Republican Institute (IRI) noted that while political power had changed there remained systemic challenges, and the willingness of the government to address these changes remains to be seen. Nothing would move too fast before the elections, she judged.

50. Ms Taseva and Ms Nuredinovska pointed to wider challenges in combating corruption—the lack of a culture of integrity in public service and the economic vulnerability of many people.

New government: 369 reform agenda and the Language Law

51. There was cautious optimism about the new SDSM government. Ms Sashka Cvetkovska, TV Nova noted that the atmosphere under the new government was better. She told us that there was more optimism about the aims and intentions of the new government in the field of the rule of law but it remained the case that the country was lacking skilled people to deliver its programme, and there were different visions between people in the government. For example, in the field of agriculture, there was one view that Macedonia's environmental development should be based on tourism, eco-tourism for example, but in turn there was also a view amongst some members of the government that Macedonia should focus on mining. There were, Ms Cvetkovska noted, controversial businessmen in the government, and competing visions could lead to political deadlock.

369 reform agenda

52. Talat Xhaferi, Speaker of the Macedonian Assembly, introduced the government's 369 reform agenda. Mr Xhaferi pointed to new reforms and legislation adopted by the government: the ministry of justice had just adopted laws on the state of prisons and an amnesty on minor crimes. He informed us that there was more openness and inclusiveness on parliamentary matters. He noted that the reform plan had not been supported by the opposition.
53. Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs, Bujar Osmani explained further: the 369 reform agenda was based on the recommendations of the "Priebe Report" (June 2015). The recommendations were adopted by the new Macedonian government with benchmarks to be achieved within 3, 6 and 9 months. The first set of reforms had been delivered and the second tranche of reforms, on good neighbourly relations and inter-ethnic relations were in progress.
54. The ambassadors noted that the first tranche of reforms were relatively easy to deliver—a "warming up exercise". The next set of reforms to be delivered within 6 and 9 months were much harder and the changes would require a 2/3 majority in parliament, necessitating the cooperation of the previous governing party—the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)—in parliament.

55. Under the Chatham House Rule, we heard, that VMRO-DPMNE had not accepted the loss of power, was in no mood to compromise and remained in a campaigning mood. The party was hedging its bets on the upcoming local elections. The predicted outcomes, a loss for VMRO-DPMNE, could change that calculus.

Language Law

56. Members of Parliamentary Committee on the Parliamentary System and Inter-Ethnic Relations focused on the new Language Law, being debated in the parliament (21 September). Sonia Mirakovska (Social Democratic Party, NSDP) told us that the Language Law would broaden the use of Albanian in official institutions. There was an opportunity for the opposition to shape the law and, Ms Mirakovska saw the law as uniting rather than dividing the country.
57. Rexhai Ismaili, Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) noted that the Language Law was the last remaining provision of the 2001 Ohrid Agreement (the peace deal that ended an armed conflict between Albanian insurgents and Macedonian security forces) and would not only benefit the Albanian minority but also other minorities such as the Roma, allowing them to use their languages in local government. He noted that there was further to go on the matter of representation of minorities in institutions.
58. Mr Afrim Gashi, BESA, told us that since Macedonia gained its independence and the Ohrid Agreement, there has been a sense of not delivering for the Albanians. Macedonia, he said, is a multi-ethnic country but the state is mono ethnic. He added that if the country cannot build a multi ethnic state, then it will continue to be unfair to its Albanian citizens.

Economic conditions

59. Mr Zoran Jovanovski, co-owner, Economy and Business stressed the vulnerable economic conditions. The idea that a free lunch is possible was sold to Macedonians; that irrespective of economic conditions, public salaries and pensions could increase. The subsidies in the agricultural sector are increasing and key political stakeholders are competing to whom can offer more to the people, said Mr Jovanovski. The focus has been short term and extremely deleterious to public finances: public debt doubled between 2008 and 2015 from 23% to 67% and the building project -. Skopje 2014 - is estimated to have cost 700 million Euros. For Mr Popetrevski the challenge was the Macedonia did not have functioning democratic institutions.

Inter-ethnic relations: OSCE in Skopje

60. Mr Jovanovski pointed set out two political and social challenges. First, divided populations with “hate going deep” which was evident amongst football fans and even divisions within families. Second, populism which was on the rise. Other witnesses also raised the issue that loyalty and identification was often along ethnic lines, tribal or familial networks and not towards the Macedonian state.
61. The OSCE in Skopje has been in place since 1992. Their main role is monitoring. The monitoring unit is staffed with 18 mission members in two locations: Tetovo and a headquarters office, staffed with a similar number of

mission members. Tetovo is the mission centre for security issues, working closely with the police development unit.

62. An area of, across the country and the OSCE seek to meet a broad range of people across the ethnic communities, including mayors, community and religious leaders. There was an acknowledgement that the community leaders do not necessarily always represent the rights of women and children, particularly in a patriarchal society, so the OSCE makes efforts particular efforts engage with young people and women.
63. The OSCE tasks include maintaining permanent contact with these local counterparts, but also covers protests, and has undertaken mediation efforts in local disputes, such as in particular example of a mosque being built without planning permission as well as supporting education issues, particularly in mixed schools In the period running up to the election, the OSCE undertook election monitoring and monitored protests, including the attacks on the parliament (27 April).
64. According to their monitoring, inter-ethnic violence has diminished since 2001 but the issues are simmering and used by the political elites. Therefore, issues such as protests about pollution, football related violence—a fairly typical phenomenon—can have an inter-ethnic dimension. They offer an excuse and can trickle down into violence. The OSCE was also on guard against the view that all violence should be seen as inter-ethnic.
65. Reflecting on the parliamentary protests in April, the OSCE explained that there were a variety of groups—nationalists, fringe groups and so-called “hunters”—who protested daily, voicing anti-Albanian rhetoric outside the parliament building while the government was being formed. They seemed to congregate conveniently during the day when the speaker was to be elected and there was a sense that something was to happen. In total there were 19 indictments, some police officers have also been sanctioned and as well as MPs who opened the doors to the protesters.

Trafficking

66. The Committee met with La Strada, an NGO working to combat trafficking working through lobbying, advocacy and prevention. La Strada works on identifying victims, when they are not identified by the state and offer a helpline whereby trafficking can be reported, and rehabilitation programmes for victims and engaging with potential victims of trafficking. Shelters are also provided. Victims can stay in the shelter for six months, if a longer time is needed then a plan is made. There is also a process of integration, which can also be about educating the families about returning the girls to the families.
67. La Strada pointed out that trends within trafficking are changing. Macedonia is now both a transit and destination country, with Romanian, Serbians and Kosovans being trafficked through as well as internal trafficking from central and eastern Macedonia to the west. Around 99% of victims are under 18 years old, the majority are between 16 and 18 years old. According to La Strada, dysfunctional families and poverty are the push factors. Furthermore, they judged that every young person is at risk on the internet on multiple levels (false profiles, luring of victims and as a source of blackmail).

68. There is a challenge of identifying victims. The identification of victims has decreased; only six victims were identified last year but the numbers for neighbouring countries was 150 victims a year. This decrease is due to a number of factors. The nature of the abuse has changed to domestic slavery whereby victims are effectively hidden in domestic and private spaces and sometimes do not recognise themselves as victims of trafficking. Furthermore, the relevant department within the ministry of interior does not have enough capacity, people are rotated and have not been trained to recognise victims of trafficking or to make the distinction between prostitution, migration and smuggling. The official identification has to be done by the state or the police and that official identification is necessary for court cases, which can impede how many case cannot be brought. The Palermo Convention is clear that victims should not pay for their costs and that in cases of trafficking, they are both witnesses and victims. Nevertheless, more training needs to be done in this field.
69. La Strada used to provide training but has been hampered by the lack of funding and understaffing. La Strada does not receive any state funds; its main sources of funding are international organisations such as UNHCR, UNESCO, EU and bilateral partners such as the UK and Switzerland. The NGO does receive funds from the UK's Department for International Development but there is little stability as the funds are given annually.

EU membership

70. Witnesses judged that the EU was a key actor but its capacity to deliver changes was currently limited, as accession negotiations were stalled by the dispute with Greece over the name Macedonia.
71. Mr Zoran Nechev, IDSCS and Ms Mangova said that the EU was still the main actor in the country and Russian influence would narrow if the EU steps up. However, the EU process is not strong enough, and there will still have to be a discussion with Greece. Once negotiations start, Mr Nechev believed, it would act as a strong incentive for reforms. Mr Popetrevski noted that the EU accession process has slowed down, the capacity for the EU to deliver changes was limited and there was not sufficient political will to make such catalyse the political will within the country.
72. Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Bujar Osmani, said that the country had been an EU candidate country since 2005 and used to be leader in reforms but progress had now stalled. The approach of the SDSM government was not to focus on the next election but on the next generation. In the meantime, the government was also trying to build bridge, which including having meetings with the Greek side and considering confidence building measures. Mr Osmani was clear that the country was "returning to EU and NATO". He note that there was a window of opportunity—a year without elections in both countries to make progress.
73. The Deputy Prime Minister added that it was now time for the EU to deliver. The EU, he said, "has to grant us a day to start negotiations, we have earned that". One option to overcome the Greek veto would be to have a parallel process with Greece. Mr Osmani also pointed out the safeguards within the accession process: there are 103 opportunities for Greece to veto Macedonian accession and finally the process of ratification can be halted by a referendum. June 2018 will be a key date when the Commission might

open accession negotiations for both Macedonia and Albania. Mr Osmani stressed that it was important to have some progress, to take advantage of the positive momentum and prevent Moscow from saying nothing has been delivered.

74. The ambassadors (US, France, Germany, Italy and the EU) also noted a new mood in the country and a sense of hope that membership of the EU might progress. The ambassadors judged that Greece was feeling the international pressure, was cognisant that Macedonia was a different country and recognised that there were dangers of leaving it in limbo. The deadline of shifting to membership negotiations by 2018 was a realistic one. There was also caution from the ambassadors, who recognised that the process would be long and painful but agreed that it was necessary to give Macedonia an encouraging sign of openness from the EU. There has been a considerable change in attitude in the country, and it is important to give people the sense that what they do matters, that they can exercise effective sovereignty over their country. This in Macedonia was missing—a country with little history of building and forming their own country.

NATO

75. Both the Deputy Prime Minister and members of the Parliamentary Committee on the Political System and Inter-Ethnic Relations told us that there was unity across the political spectrum on the desirability of NATO membership. For Mr Osmani, the question of NATO was an “existential issue” the absence of which could lead to the further penetration of Russian influence and intelligence into the country.

Regional relations

76. Vasko Popetrevski, 360 Degrees explained that the new government has been putting forward a foreign policy based on long-term partnerships and stable partners. Mr Popetrevski noted a new dynamic of relations in the region. For example, Macedonia and Bulgaria had signed an agreement of good relations. Bulgaria, he noted, had previously supported Greece on the name issue but the new agreement allowed for better relations with both sides. However, he also noted the remaining frictional relations between countries: Greece does not recognise Macedonia, Bulgaria does recognise Macedonia but has concerns about the use of Bulgarian, Serbia does not recognise the Orthodox Church and relations with Kosovo and Albania are fractious.
77. Zoran Jovanovski, Co-owner, Economy and Business magazine, added that the strategic inclinations of countries in the region varied: Some are more western orientated such as Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro while, Bosnia and Herzegovina favoured stronger ties with the Middle East. Into this mix, Russia was selling the idea of a neutral zone.

Russian activity

78. Mr Zoran Nechev, ICDCS and Ms Ilina Mangova, IRI, discussed Russian influence: there is not a lot of cultural affinity and connections between the two sides; there are ebbs and flows of Russian sympathy within the country. In terms of the political activity, no one could say that they will align with the Russians and since no one moved during the crisis then that means no one will move The Russians will act through surrogates and they have

mounted very effective propaganda. Even if they do not have political allies, the propaganda through the media is sufficient.

79. Sashka Cvetkovska explained that there has been considerable press about Russia's intelligence activities. The wiretapping leaks showed the extent of corruption and intelligence activity. Deputy Prime-Minister Bujar Osmani noted that Russia did not have a positive strategic vision for the region and rather sought "latent instability" as well as ensuring that countries do not join NATO. NATO membership, he said, would decrease the risk of geopolitical games, increase stability in the economy, attract more investment and thereby deliver tangible results for the people.

Young people

80. The Committee met with representatives of the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM). NYCM is an umbrella organisation bringing together foundations working with young people. NYCM constitutes 49 organisations including youth organisations, wings of political parties and a union. Membership is irrespective of ethnicity.
81. They informed us that the NYCM, since its establishment in 2013, has been working to build connections with ministries and to include young people in processes at the national and international level, including the Berlin Process and active in the European Youth Forum (the European family of youth organisations). They are currently running programmes on youth engagement on political decision making processes, increase the capacity of youth organisations. They also pointed to a programme, funded by the UK, which offered training for young people from a diverse ethnic backgrounds training skills required by businesses.
82. On political participation, they informed us that they would be interested in joining parliament as it offered an opportunity to make a difference. There was also analysis on how political parties engaged with young people and their view was that more programmes and expertise was required at the political party level. The view was that young people in Macedonia are engaged and want to "be seen as a resource and not a problem". Finally, they pointed to the main concerns of young people from the region: better education, health programmes and jobs.

UK assistance

83. Ms Cvetkovska recommended that the UK should abandon the policy of intervening and focus on the preventative, in particular engaging with young particular. Mr Popetrevski advised the UK to continue to support civil society organisations. Mr Xhaferi said that practical assistance to Macedonia could be provided by supporting the economy, boosting investment ensuring that the economy is able to absorb more foreign direct investment.
84. Vladko Gjorchev (VMRO-DPMNE), member of the Parliamentary Committee on Political Systems and Inter-Ethnic Relations advised the UK to support Macedonian NATO membership which should be a priority, support sustainable economic development and finally, wished to see the programmes by the Westminster Forum for Democracy programmes extended.

85. Representatives from the National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) supported deeper engagement with the British Parliament and valued the work of the British Council.
86. Deputy Prime Minister Bujar Osmani saw the UK as a key strategic partner. The UK was president when Macedonia became a candidate country. On Brexit, Mr Osmani noted that financial support to the country would likely decrease by some 15% from the EU—absent the UK’s contribution to Commission programmes—and noted that the UK’s reform process was dependent on the EU.
87. Mr Bujar Luma, Centre for Balkan Cooperation, advised the UK to support non-state actors as well as ensuring that Russian and Turkish influence should be countered. He urged the UK to integrate civil society into the Western Balkans Summit. Within the Berlin Process, of which the Western Balkans Summit was one aspect, the role of civil society is very weak, there are no concrete projects in place and civil society engagement can appear to be tacked on at the end. Mr Luma noted that Macedonian young people are skilled, consider themselves to be European but have no avenues to engage, and this could be a focus of the Summit.

Serbia

88. Baroness Hilton of Eggardon, Lord Howell of Guildford, Lord Purvis of Tweed and Lord Wood of Anfield visited Serbia on 26–28 September. They were accompanied by the Clerk and the Specialist Adviser.
89. In the course of the visit, members had meetings with:
 - Dejan Anastasijevic, VREME
 - Milan Antonijević, YUCOM
 - Bojana Selakovic, Civic Initiatives
 - Arne Sannes Bjørnstad, Norway Ambassador
 - Miloš Bošković MP, DJB
 - Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of Serbia
 - Gordana Čomić MP, DS
 - Vukosava Crnjanski, CRTA
 - Marko Djurišić MP, SDS
 - Henk van den Dool, Netherlands Ambassador
 - Sonja Stojanović Gajić, BCSP
 - Brankica Janković, Equality Commissioner
 - Saša Janković, PSG
 - Vuk Jeremić, Peoples Party
 - Aleksandar Knežević, MFA
 - Mirjana Kosic, Transconflict
 - Sonja Liht, BFPE
 - Srdjan Majstorovic, Ministry for European Integration

- Vladimir Marinković, Deputy Speaker of the Serbian National Assembly
- Vladimir Medjak, EMINS
- Anita Mitić, YIHR
- Nemanja Nenadić, Transparency Serbia
- Jovana Djurbabic, CRTA
- Žarko Obradović MP, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee
- Marko Ivkovic, NED
- Pavle Petrović, Fiscal Council
- Danilo Ćučić, HR activist, Chevening
- Dejan Radenković MP, SPS
- Milan Pajević, Former SEIO head
- Kyle Scott, US Ambassador
- Zoran Sekulić, FoNet
- Dragan Šormaz MP, SNS
- Ruslan Stefanov, CSD
- Dragan Šutanovac, DS
- Julia Feeney, Australian Ambassador
- Nikola Tomic, NIN
- Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia
- Dragana Žarković, BIRN

Serbia's relationship with other countries

90. A number of witnesses told the Committee that Serbia under President Vučić was attempting to replicate Tito's policy of non-alignment. Though the country was committed to joining the EU, it also wanted to maintain good relations with Russia, China and the Middle East. Some thought that this was unsustainable: Serbia would have to align itself with the EU and the West in due course. For as long as Serbia tried to remain non-aligned, it would be a "playground" for Russian influence.
91. Within the Balkans, Serbia was very keen on increasing regional cooperation. President Vučić had already visited Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Serbia strongly supported the action plan on creating a regional economic area adopted at the Trieste Western Balkan Summit. The government wanted Bosnia and Herzegovina to be a single, stable state: there was no interest in supporting Serb separatists in the Entity of Republika Srpska. There was no indication that President Vučić and President Dodik of the Entity of Republika Srpska were close.

Kosovo

92. It was in the interests of Serbia, Kosovo and Albania to resolve the issue with Kosovo. In Serbia there was a feeling that the country was being diminished, Belgrade having once been the capital of Yugoslavia. Normalising their relations with Kosovo was seen by some of losing yet another part of their country. However, all sides needed to feel they had gained something from

resolving it in order to take any settlement back to their people. Negotiations were ongoing—President Vučić said he saw his Albanian counterpart more often than his wife!—and this was producing results. Hostilities were being diffused and it had been some time since there had been any ethnically-inspired violence.

93. President Vučić had launched a process of “internal dialogue” on the issue of Kosovo (as had the government in Kosovo). This was an attempt to gather views from around the country about how Serbia should approach the issue of Kosovo. Some hoped that President Vučić, as a “reformed extremist”, would be well placed to resolve the Kosovo situation and take public opinion with him. Comparisons were made with De Gaulle in Tunisia and Nixon in China.
94. Many witnesses were critical of this dialogue. The government had not set out its own approach. Without a government proposal to discuss the dialogue could only be a “cacophony of voices” with no constructive outcome. There were also fears that the process was simply being used both to flush out views to be discredited by the government at the end of the dialogue and to provide political cover for whatever the President ultimately decided to do. There was also criticism that a dialogue was being proposed for this issue when debate on other important issues was severely restricted.
95. The issue of Kosovo was being used and abused to create a narrative in which the EU was Serbia’s partner in efforts to resolve the issue and make progress towards accession but Russia was Serbia’s friend, preventing international recognition of Kosovo.
96. In Kosovo, the issue was similarly used for political gain. This had resulted in Kosovo electing an alleged war criminal, Hashim Thaçi, as President. A number of witnesses noted that Kosovo had also not delivered on its side of the Brussels Agreement.

Russia

97. Most told us that Russian influence in Serbia was significant (or, at least, more significant than in any other Western Balkan country). Russia found opportunities to assert its influence where confidence in public institutions was weakened by corruption and where the international community was not coordinated. But there was very little actual financial support for Serbia from Russia. The EU was the country’s most important trading partner and donor—the President said that even Kosovo was a more important trading partner. Russia was presented as being an unconditional friend, whereas the EU required reforms and difficult decisions as the price for its support.
98. Russia’s agenda was not to help Serbia but to make money from its energy sector and to undermine its democracy.
99. Some argued the claims of Russian influence were overstated. For example, we were told that Serbia had 22 military exercises with NATO compared to only two or three with Russia. In most respects Serbia was close to Western Europe; it was only in culture and religion that it was close to Russia. Though Serbia was not hoping to join NATO this was not because of Russian opposition but a legacy of the war.

100. A number of witnesses said that if Serbia and Kosovo were able to normalise their relations, Russia's influence in Serbia would be much reduced.

International community

101. Some witnesses felt let down by the international community. There had been a focus on big-picture issues—Kosovo, EU accession, for example—but ignored real, day-to-day problems like corruption and lack of press freedom. It had taken the attitude that stability in Serbia was more important than progress towards rule of law and creating strong democratic institutions.
102. For example, under the constitution the President can hold no other public office. Rather than resigning the presidency of his political party, President Vučić created a concept of “freezing” his party political office. Despite this being a subversion of the constitution, there had been no protest from the international community. “Strongman” politicians held the country to ransom with the threat of instability. This approach of supporting the strongman for the sake of stability was therefore counter-productive and unsustainable.
103. The Berlin Process had ensure the Western Balkans remained on the agenda, though it was still not given a high enough priority. The process was also undermined by a lack of delivery. The proposed highway from Nis to Pristina was announced in 2016 but construction had still not yet begun. Investment from China was seen as delivering results.

EU

104. Support for EU membership had weakened since accession had been barred until at least 2025. Some were keen to know when accession might happen so that there could be an impetus behind the necessary reforms. Others, including the Prime Minister, argued that though membership was the goal, the reforms required by the EU were good things in themselves—the journey was as important as the destination. Even if the EU decided to rule out any more enlargement for another 10 years, Serbia would still need to tackle corruption, strengthen its public institutions, open its markets, and so forth.
105. There was concern that reforms towards EU membership were being made in name only (such as the privatisation of state media). Witnesses agreed that if Serbia were to join before it was truly ready this would be bad for both Serbia and the EU. One group of witnesses even suggested that Serbia was drifting further away from meeting the requirements for EU membership and that in 10 years' time wouldn't even be an eligible candidate.
106. The UK's support for Serbian accession was questioned in the light of Brexit. The UK had been seen as a strong advocate for enlargement within the EU. Post-Brexit, the UK's support for Serbian accession rang hollow: why would the UK advocate something it was leaving?

Media freedom

107. As part of the accession process the EU had required Serbia to privatise state media. This had been done but media outlets had been bought by companies closely linked to the ruling party. All of the main media outlets were therefore now controlled by the ruling party. They were used to promote the party and Russia. Newspapers that attempted to provide an alternative voice were attacked, subjected to constant tax inspections or simply lost funding and

advertising revenue until they could no longer carry on. The country did not have a free press. The media was used purely as a tool of political control for the government. We were told that an analysis of front pages over a certain time showed that 97% of political coverage was about President Vučić and was positive; the remaining 3% was about leading opposition politicians and was negative. In protest of this on 28 September a number of broadcasters temporarily shut down and newspapers were printed with a black border. One editor of a regional paper had gone on hunger strike. Many described this situation as “state capture”.

108. However, the Prime Minister saw evidence of plenty of criticism of the government and herself. Despite this, she agreed that if the media were perceived to be biased this was cause enough for concern.
109. The party-controlled media was also used to stoke tensions within the country. We were told that in the previous two months there had been nine or ten front pages with headlines about the risk of war with other Balkan countries. This was irresponsible rhetoric designed to solidify support for the government—the risk of a renewed conflict was very low.
110. Much of the Russian influence in the media came from Sputnik—a pro-Russian media agency which provided a lot of free content. This free content was then repeated by other media outlets. Witnesses therefore welcomed the return of the BBC World Service to Serbia. The World Service would be an online-only service. Some were concerned that this would only allow it to reach a small audience: around 60% of Serbians had internet access but in the pro- Vučić and pro-Russian countryside internet use was very limited. Others were hopeful that it would provide an alternative source of free content for others to reuse.

Corruption

111. Corruption was a serious problem in Serbia. One witness said that levels of bribery in the Balkans were three or four times higher than in Central Europe. The Prime Minister recognised the problems of corruption. Part of the solution would involve e-government and digitalisation. This would create systems where clear and auditable processes would have to be followed; there would be no opportunity for corrupt practices. Work towards this was being supported by the UK’s Good Governance Fund and she hoped it would be a focus of the Western Balkans Summit in London in 2018.

Young people

112. There were concerns that young people in Serbia had once been very pro-EU but as accession was delayed until at least 2025 their attitude was turning more nationalistic. They were easy targets for the rhetoric of the pro-Russian press. However, despite this they were less concerned with the regional problems of the past and had no nostalgic memories for Yugoslavia. They needed to be empowered to become the next generation of leaders in the country. The Regional Youth Cooperation Board established during the 2016 Western Balkans Summit needed to be supported and promoted.
113. A number of the young people we spoke to felt let down by the UK. Brexit was cited as one reason for this but the UK’s visa regime for people in the Western Balkans was also cited. It was much more time consuming and expensive to get even a temporary visa to the UK than to most other countries.

114. It was also noted that that the demographic of Serbia made it the second oldest country in the region.

Role for the UK

115. One witnesses said that Serbia's message to the UK was "please come back". The UK's profile in the country was seen as being very low. The UK needed to remain engaged as security in the region affected the UK, as did corruption and organised crime. Although, for better or worse, Serbia appeared stable at the moment, recent events in Macedonia demonstrated how quickly everything could unravel.
116. We were told the UK could usefully play a role in Serbia by focussing its efforts on:
- Combatting corruption and organised crime (particularly by supporting e-government initiatives); and
 - Working closely with civil society organisations, in contrast to the EU which was more usually government-to-government work.
117. The UK had a role of being a critical friend, able to tell Serbia the truth even where that might be uncomfortable. One witness said that UK should be able to say "Dear Serbia, you have a problem." In contrast, the President said that it would be useful if the UK could demonstrate itself support for Serbia by being on its side in at least one important dispute rather than being critical. There was hope that the UK could find a role as an honest broker between Serbia and others.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

118. Baroness Hilton of Eggardon, Lord Howell of Guildford, Lord Purvis of Tweed and Lord Wood of Anfield visited Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on 26–28 September. They were accompanied by the Clerk and the Specialist Adviser.
119. In the course of the visit, members had meetings with:
- Leila Bičakčić, Director, Center for Investigative Reporting
 - Mladen Bosić, 1st Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, BiH Parliament
 - Lidija Bradara, Speaker, House of Peoples, FBiH Parliament
 - Josip Brkić, Deputy Foreign Minister
 - Trifko Buha, Deputy Director OSA
 - Bariša Čolak, Speaker, House of Peoples, BiH Parliament
 - H.E. Maureen Cormack, US Ambassador
 - Nedeljko Čubrilović, Speaker, RS National Assembly
 - Jakob Finci, President of Jewish community in BiH
 - H.E. Christiane Hohmann, German Ambassador
 - Valentin Inzko, High Representative
 - Staša Košarac, Chair, House of Representatives, BiH Parliament
 - Slobodan Krstic, Assistant Director for Organization and Operations, Border Police

- Ivana Marić, political analyst
- Dragan Mektić, Minister of Security
- Lejla Ramić-Mesihović, Executive Director, Foreign Policy Initiative BH
- H.E. Nicola Minasi, Italian Ambassador
- Edin Mušić, Speaker, House of Representatives, FBiH Parliament
- Fadil Novalić, Prime Minister, FBiH
- Sredoje Nović, House of Peoples, BiH Parliament
- Lazar Prodanović, House of Representatives, BiH Parliament
- Dragutin Rodić, House of Representatives, BiH Parliament
- Husejin Smajić, Deputy Grand Mufti
- Safet Softić, 2nd Deputy Speaker, House of Peoples, BiH Parliament
- Aida Soko, Adviser, Office of the Prime Minister of the Federation of BiH
- Nikola Špirić, House of Representatives, BiH Parliament
- Perica Stanić, Director SIPA
- Ognjen Tadić, 1st Deputy Speaker, House of Peoples, BiH Parliament
- H.E. Catherine Veber, French Chargé d’Affaires
- Milica Vučetić

Legacy of Dayton

120. The Dayton Peace Agreement had ended the war but the divisions within society remained. The political system of the country was too deeply layered, with power distributed between the state, the entities and the cantons. Although this had helped to keep the peace, it had also bred dissatisfaction with the political system. It allowed for too many choke-points, where necessary action or reforms could be blocked. In addition, the system of the rotating tripartite presidency meant that there was often not sufficient continuity in policy.
121. Some saw Dayton as now being an obstacle to progress, whereas others (especially Bosnian Serbs) considered it the necessary guarantee of entity rights. Regardless, witnesses agreed that Dayton had provided a lasting peace. Any talk of BiH being a fragile state or at serious risk of resumed conflict was wrong. Such talk simply emboldened those who wished to stir up discontent for their own political aims.

Role of the international community

122. Two broad arguments were made about the role of the international community in BiH. Some took the view that it was time for the international community to take a less interventionist role in the country and encourage Bosnian politicians to take more responsibility for finding solutions to the country’s problems. As long as the international community was seen as a safety net, Bosnian politicians would have no reason to make necessary reforms.
123. Others argued that it was necessary to return to a more prescriptive role (taking Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon’s approach as High Repetitive as a model). The concept of “local ownership” at state and entity level had not

worked. For example, a ruling from the European Court of Human Rights that the requirement of the constitution to reserve the tripartite presidency and membership of the House of Peoples for ethnic Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats violated the human rights of Bosnia's Jewish and Roma citizens had yet to be addressed. Without direction and pressure from the international community, local politicians would only pay lip service to reform. However, the as the international community had moved to a more hands off approach, the powers of the High Representative had been reduced. There was no consensus within the Peace Implementation Council to return to the more robust approach of Lord Ashdown.

124. The international community also had to show results. The Berlin Process had not delivered on its promises whereas funding from other countries was providing for bridges, airports and other infrastructure to be built. Too often the international community had been content to believe that progress was being made as the situation in BiH was simply not high enough up on countries' foreign policy agenda.
125. The international community also needed to show consistency. We were told that judicial reforms had been undertaken following an Anglo-Saxon model, whereas police reforms had followed a German model. We were told, however, that after a period of not being coordinated, the international community were now "on the same page".

Political culture

126. We were told that two features of the political culture of BiH were:
- The dominance of the political parties over society and the economy; and
 - A lack of capability.
127. The links between the political parties and the rest of society were extensive. The culture of clientelism was so pervasive that whereas in other countries there was talk of "state capture", in BiH there was "society capture". We were told that people were too afraid to protest or assert any kind of civil opposition for fear of losing their jobs or risking their families' jobs. The political parties controlled the country to that extent, with each ethnically-based party dominating their areas—the HDZ in Croat areas, the SNSD in the Entity of Republika Srpska and the SDA in Bosniak areas.
128. Many politicians were criticised as simply not being competent. The opposition were described as being divided and "a pale shadow of those in power". Others said that the political elites had relied on the international community to force solutions to problems on them that there was no a culture of politicians taking responsibility for proposing solutions to BiH's problems.
129. This was exacerbated by a lack of general governance capability. Other countries in the region, Montenegro for example, had invested in equipping politicians a civil servants with the skills to provide good governance. BiH had not yet been able to do the same.

NATO and EU membership

130. The country was committed to pursuing NATO membership. We were told that there was "no plan B". Support for NATO membership was high in the country overall, though memories of NATO bombing of Bosnian Serbs in

1995 meant that support was much lower in the Entity of Republika Srpska. EU membership was a unifying aim for the whole country.

131. However, we were told that although many politicians publically supported NATO and EU membership, they recognised that meeting the membership requirements would inevitably mean giving up the benefits they derived from an inefficient and corrupt system. Much of the support for NATO and EU membership was therefore likely to be less than sincere.
132. Some witnesses said that the reforms required for NATO and EU membership were needed not just to achieve membership but because they were good for the country in themselves.

The Entity of Republika Srpska

133. There were still serious tensions between the three people of BiH. One witness described the country still being at war, but without weapons—war by constitutional means.
134. The constitutional settlement of Dayton had embedded some of these tensions. There had been attempts at the state level to centralise power, which was objected to by government at the entity level (particularly in the Entity of Republika Srpska). Objections to this were in part because these moves had been seen as contrary to Dayton and therefore unconstitutional. They were also seen as accruing power to a coalition that was in the majority state-wide but in a clear minority in the Entity of Republika Srpska.
135. There needed to be greater dialogue and understanding between the entities. It was not acceptable for positions, such as membership of NATO, to be decided by one level of government and imposed on all. There needed to be a unifying vision of what it meant to be Bosnian rather than a continued institutional conflict between the different entities and different levels of government. There was a sense that the Entity of Republika Srpska was being unfairly presented as a problem to be addressed, rather than as a constituent part of the country.

Corruption

136. Corruption was endemic (or at least perceived to be so). Some told us that there was relatively little outcry about this. There was a legacy from the Yugoslavian era where people did not equate public money with being tax payers' money or "their money". The direct effect of corruption on people's livelihoods was therefore not fully understood. However, others were clear that without addressing the problem of corruption the country could not develop and foreign investors would stay away.
137. Corruption was also evident within the justice system, with some state prosecutors and judges having been arrested. Three state prosecutors in a row had resigned because of corruption charges.
138. Fighting corruption required not only funding, but also political support and pressure from the international community.

Economy

139. Despite political dysfunction and corruption, the economy of BiH was growing (by around 3.2%). However, not by enough for people to see

increases in their living standards (which would require a growth rate of around 6–6.5%). The private sector was weak; there was a substantial grey market; and only around 23% of people pay tax. Many multiple generation families were supported by one salary; about 15.5% of GDP was spent on welfare; and youth unemployment was world's highest at 67%. There was therefore little public money available for proper investment in services or infrastructure.

140. Efforts from the international community were focussed on promoting a rebalancing of the economy. By supporting the private sector the intention was to weaken the influence of political parties over society and to increase the pressure to deal with corruption.

Education

141. Education was a problem in BiH. Education was segregated between Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs. In some places there was a policy of two schools under one roof: in one school building one ethnicity would be taught in the morning and another in the afternoon. Three versions of Bosnian history were being taught. Ethnic divides were being entrenched and passed on to new generations. However, this needed not be the case. There were attempts by civil society organisations to foster better understanding. There were also other examples of good practice. In Srebrenica there were multi-ethnic music groups and kitchens, bringing school children together regardless of ethnicity. Other proposals to address problems in education were funding new textbooks to teach a single history of the country, student exchanges within BiH and the region, and increasing scholarships to universities in Western Europe.

Migration

142. We were told that BiH had largely been bypassed during the previous migrant crisis. However, incidents of BiH being used as a transit country for illegal migration were increasing. Though each country's experience would be different, the solution to migration in the Balkans had to be regional. BiH's border agencies were increasingly working closely with their counterparts in the region and with other EU countries.
143. With youth unemployment so high, there was a "brain drain" problem of youth migration. BiH was in danger of becoming the country in the Europe with the fastest shrinking population because of this. This was leading to a problematic demographic as the population growing disproportionately older. This trend particularly affected the Croat population as they were automatically eligible for Croatian, and therefore EU, citizenship.

Organised crime

144. There was a huge surplus of illegal weapons in BiH left over from the war. These were being smuggled into Western Europe by organised criminals. This trade was being disrupted through regionally efforts coordinated by the EU.

Terrorism and Islamist radicalism

145. It was necessary to make a clear distinction between Islamist radicals and Bosnian Muslims. The problems of Islamic radicalisation were brought to BiH during the wars of the 1990s and bore no relation to the Muslim

population of BiH. The Muslim population of BiH was long standing and not in any way an immigrant population—they were “European Muslims”.

146. The issue of violent extremists was taken very seriously by the authorities. Where BiH citizens returned from fighting in Syria, they were dealt with according to law. Of 46 who had returned, 23 had already been convicted and were serving prison sentences. Others were also being proceeded against. The current maximum sentence for returning extremist fighters was five years but there were plans to increase this to seven. In addition to prosecution, there were increasing efforts in prevention and de-radicalisation. This work had been supported by EU and American funds.

Role for the UK

147. After Brexit the UK would still be seen as an important bilateral partner. With Germany and the USA, the UK had a reputation for being a robust and critical friend, not least through the UK’s continued role on the Peace Implementation Council. There was concern that the Brexit was being portrayed as a rejection of EU values and standards.
148. The UK should focus its support on:
- Smaller, more achievable outcomes. Grander visions of re-writing the Dayton Agreement and constitutional reform were not realistic and prevented actual progress;
 - Encouraging entrepreneurs, community enterprises, digitalisation and regional cooperation to weaken the hold of the political parties over society;
 - Combatting corruption and supporting the rule of law. This was something all of BiH could unite around and was necessary to restore citizens’ faith in their country and to encourage foreign investment;
 - Educational reform. Young people needed to be trained to seek opportunities for themselves rather than simply waiting for the political parties to provide them with a living: they should not be left to be “soldiers of fortune for the elites”;
 - Supporting future leaders who may be able to provide leadership not based on ethnicity. BiH was attempting to move forward whilst still being led by a generation steeped in memories of the war. It would take a new generation of leaders with a new perspective to really move the country forward.

APPENDIX 7: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

1. On 18 October 2017, the International Relations Committee held a roundtable meeting with 17 people from around the Western Balkans. The event was held under the Chatham House Rule.

Politics in the region

2. The role of political parties was discussed by some. Participants said that they were all-powerful in the region. In order for people to have secure jobs or a career they had to be involved with the political parties. The parties also controlled the voting system. There had been cases of turnouts being higher than the eligible electorate and political parties manipulating the results. Some participants spoke about political parties knowing election results in advance, having pressurised, bribed and blackmailed the electorate so extensively that the results were easily predictable. This explains the longevity of some political parties and individuals in positions of power and also explains the occasional outbreaks of rioting (in Bosnia in 2014, Macedonia in 2015 and Montenegro in 2015).
3. Attendees also spoke about party financing saying that it was linked to criminal organisations and often used for money laundering. Although there were public records about donations, these were utterly unreliable. There was a belief that most parties received funding from other countries.
4. People wanted to be engaged in politics and to protest but felt unable to as it would affect their life chances (and those of their families). This sense of being powerless to protest against the ruling parties was exacerbated by many families relying on a single wage. This made people even less willing to risk their livelihoods.
5. This situation was undermining faith in the ruling parties and, in some cases, was pushing people towards more extreme parties which, in turn, garnered enough support to be included in governing coalitions.

Governance and the rule of law

6. Some participants stated that there was a low level of trust in their own countries' institutions. Several participants highlighted the weakness of institutions and a lack of the rule of law as the fundamental problems in the region. A number of interlocutors stated that there were laws, but these were not properly implemented or merely circumvented. Without these things corruption, organised crime and radicalisation could not be tackled. This allowed politicians to pursue state capture (one described Montenegro as a 'private state'). Without improvements in this area the business environment would remain off-putting and the economy could not grow. It was also noted that there was a proven relationship between certain political actors and criminal groups. Opposition parties, it was claimed, were often the subject of differing levels of oppression.
7. The judicial system was criticised for not being independent and politically appointed. This was widely known but never tackled.
8. One participant argued that this was inevitable because of the general recognition within the international community of Kosovo. He claimed that

the creation of Kosovo had no basis in international law²⁴⁸ and that illegal action had a pervasive effect on the regard for the rule of law throughout the region.

Economy

9. Participants agreed that economic development was one of the most important issues to be addressed; youth unemployment was seen as particularly damaging and responsible for significant ‘brain drain’. Some stated that economic matters could not be discussed without reference to issues of national and ethnic identity; the economy and culture were intertwined and had no place for those not in line with their ethnic group’s views and the associated political party. Many therefore chose to leave. Others felt that tackling issues of identity alongside the economy would hamper progress.
10. The ‘brain drain’ phenomenon was a form of “quiet protest” against the stagnant economy, the influence of national and ethnic issues and the role of the political parties. Young and educated people increasingly wanted no part of that and were therefore seeking opportunities outside the region. All of the participants were based in the UK but from the region: the majority were hoping to stay in the UK or another Western European country. Some noted the sharp gender gap in salary rates in the Western Balkans.
11. The UK needed to invest more in the region. UK trade and investment was very low, particularly compared to others like Germany. The region offered substantial scope in markets like agriculture, natural resources, IT and communications and education.

EU membership

12. A number of attendees said that whereas EU membership had been seen as a solution to many of the problems the region faced, this had lost traction. Too often the reforms required by the EU were made on paper only. Politicians paid lip service to the ambition of EU membership but there was no real conviction. One participant said that every politician in Bosnia and Herzegovina had “around seven sentences” about the EU which were repeated as necessary but the commitment to membership went no deeper. One noted Bosnia’s failure to implement the Sejdic-Finci ruling, a barrier to further progress toward EU accession.
13. Some attendees noted that for all of the EU’s talk of combating corruption and establishing the rule of law, many of their own Member States had problems with those issues.

Ethnicity and national identity

14. Issues concerning ethnic groupings were raised several times. Many noted that identity was multi-layered. Some countries continued to struggle with integration and there is continued ethnic tension given cultural and linguistic differences. The pervasive nature of these issues was illustrated by one attendee who spoke about a football team in a traditionally Orthodox town in Albania which a Turkish businessman wanted to buy; the purchase was rejected purely on the grounds of his nationality. Some, however, noted the

248 However, see Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 2010, p 403: <http://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

positive approach taken by the new Macedonian government but that this was unusual in a region in which political elites use the threat of (and fear of) ethnic conflict as a means of retaining control. A number said that people want to live together, but the political context makes this more difficult.

Radicalisation

15. Some attendees noted a rising problem of Islamist radicalisation in the region. There were small organisations being established which preyed on the young and vulnerable in order to radicalise them. They were “brain washed” and, in some cases, prepared to fight in Syria. One person noted that this was not an exclusively Islamist issue, Christian (both Catholic and Orthodox) radicalisation was seen too.
16. For some, the issue of radicalisation (which some attendees were careful to note was not widespread) was a result of socio-economic problems. Those that were vulnerable to radicalisation were the poor and the uneducated. These problems were exacerbated by corruption and weak institutions.

Civil society

17. Many participants emphasised the importance of grass roots and civil society organisations. Whilst NGOs and international organisations such as NATO and the EU are often the focus of attention, many felt that change would have to take place from the bottom up. On paper many legal and constitutional arrangements seemed positive, but their implementation left much to be desired. Addressing this required engaging at the grass roots level, where many of the tensions arise. Participants recognised that it was harder to engage with these organisations, but maintained that civil society extended beyond NGOs. The role of NGOs was regarded by some as very important, and that, with the lack of effective opposition in the formal political party sphere, NGOs played a key role in holding governments to account. The role of NGOs in the change of government in Macedonia was seen as crucial.
18. Many noted the lack of press freedom and the difficult conditions under which journalists (particularly those critical of ruling elites) operate.

Views of the UK

19. There were mixed views of the UK. In some countries, the UK was thought of as less important than Germany and Scandinavian countries. In others, there were still positive memories of the UK’s role in combating fascism. However, the UK’s reluctance to offer support during more recent periods of social unrest had left some wondering where the UK stood—some said the UK appeared to be absent from the region. The vote for Brexit further complicated this. Advocating in favour of EU membership whilst at the same time planning to leave was seen as difficult to reconcile. Some had also seen a decline in funding from the UK after the referendum.
20. Several participants made the point that regardless of Brexit or its influence in the region, the UK remained very highly regarded for its higher education.

Visas

21. All participants agreed that the UK’s visa system left a lot to be desired. In contrast to other countries, the UK did not provide a point of contact and explicitly instructed applicants not to contact the Home Office. This made

many feel unwelcome. The difficulty of securing a visa also discouraged people from leaving the UK once they had successfully applied; many felt that if it was easier to apply they would be happier leaving, confident that they could return in the future.

Other countries

22. The UK's interest in attracting talent was appreciated and educational facilities and opportunities were well thought of. Some felt that the UK should put in place arrangements to encourage the return of those who had knowledge to offer as a result of their international experiences.
23. Views of Russia and China were likewise mixed. Serbia is favourable to Russia and politicians struggle to reconcile the EU's stance on Kosovo and Russian and Chinese infrastructure investment. In contrast, Russia was perceived to have interfered in Albania's elections. Some noted Turkey's growing influence, in particular their investment in the rebuilding of mosques. Macedonia was more neutral, likely to favour whoever was felt to have won out of the East and the West. Many thought that the election of Trump had increased support for Russia.

The future

24. Several attendees said that although the region faced many serious challenges, there was significant hope for the future. The region had to be seen in the context of how far it had come since the tragedies and crimes of the wars of the 1990s. Most considered a return to conflict unlikely, but acknowledged the reform challenges that remain.

Participants

25. The names of most of the participants are listed below but we have respected the choice of some participants to remain anonymous:
 - Andreja Bogdanovski (Macedonia)
 - Adi Delic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
 - Denisa Himaj (Albania)
 - Andi Hoxhaj (Albania)
 - Albana Istrefi (Kosovo)
 - Vahida Maric (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
 - Amra Mujkanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
 - Alfonc Rakaj (Albania)
 - Andrea Ugrinoska (Macedonia)
 - Marija Pesovska (Macedonia)
 - Sanja Vico (Serbia and Montenegro)