



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

**Global Britain and
the Western Balkans:
Supplementary
Government response
to the Committee's
Tenth Report**

**Seventeenth Special Report of Session
2017–19**

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The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

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The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/facom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Tom Goldsmith and Hannah Bryce (Clerks), Dr Ariella Huff (Senior Committee Specialist), Ashlee Godwin, Dr Matthew Harries, Emma Makey, Dr Eoin Martin and Hannah Stone (Committee Specialists), Ffion Morgan (Committee Researcher), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), Zara Emmett (Committee Assistant) and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

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Seventeenth Special Report

On 6 July 2018, the Foreign Affairs Committee published its Tenth Report of Session 2017–19, on *Global Britain and the Western Balkans* (HC 1013). The Government response was received on 5 September 2018 and published as the Committee's Fourteenth Special Report – *Global Britain and the Western Balkans: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report* (HC 1572). On 15 November 2018 the Committee received a supplementary response. This response is appended below.

Appendix

This report sets out the Government's response to the Foreign Affairs Committee's conclusions and recommendations on Macedonia found in their report on 'Global Britain and the Western Balkans' published on 6 July 2018. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

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

The Government shares the Committee's concern about increased Russian interference in the Western Balkans, seen most starkly in the Montenegro attempted coup plot. This behaviour by Russia is destabilising for the region and for European security. While we cannot rule out further Russian interference in the region, the Government remains committed to supporting the Western Balkans to make progress on its Euro-Atlantic accession path and to increasing its resilience to malign external influence.

Ahead of the referendum, and at the request of the Macedonian Government, the Government funded a small team of independent experts to offer technical advice in support of the referendum on issues such as strategic communications. These experts were a resource for the Referendum Taskforce and operated independently of the UK Government.

In addition, the Government deployed two long-term and twenty short-term observers to the observation mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE. These observers helped confirm that the vote “was generally calm and well-organized, and procedures were administered professionally and transparently”, as stated in the preliminary conclusions of the mission. Our Embassy in Skopje also co-funded the independent tabulation of results by a local NGO to help ensure the impartiality and objectivity of the vote.

The referendum required a turnout threshold of over 50% for the outcome to be binding. Although turnout was below expectations at 36% (largely due to an over-inflated electoral list and an effective boycott campaign), the referendum was still a positive step for Macedonia, with over 90% of those who did vote making clear their support for the Prespa Agreement and their wish to be part of the Euro-Atlantic community.

In light of this outcome, we welcome Prime Minister Zaev’s decision to seek parliamentary approval for the Prespa Agreement and for the constitutional changes needed to amend Macedonia’s name. The Parliamentary vote on 19 October in favour of opening the constitution was a positive first step and we now anticipate further votes, first to amend the language of the constitution and then to close the constitution.

The Greek Parliament will also need to vote to ratify the Prespa Agreement, once the constitutional process in Macedonia has concluded. The Greek government has stated that it is confident it can secure the votes to pass the Agreement, in spite of significant popular opposition in Greece.

The Government is clear that the implementation of the Prespa Agreement has the potential to be transformative in Macedonia and to give impetus to resolving other disputes in the wider region. It offers the prospect of greater security and prosperity and better opportunities for Macedonia’s young people. We encourage both sides to seize the historic opportunity that the Agreement presents.

The UK is proud to be a longstanding friend and partner of Macedonia and Greece; something the Prime Minister reiterated to both Greek Prime Minister Tsipras and Macedonian Prime Minister Zaev at the Western Balkans Summit in London in July. The Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe and the Americas Sir Alan Duncan have both visited Macedonia this year in a demonstration of the UK’s support and we look forward to this partnership enduring and strengthening in the future.