



Home Office

**To: Home Secretary**

**From:** Duncan Norman,  
Deputy Director: CSN Project,  
SOC Overseas Engagement,  
**SCS:** Chris Jones, Director  
ICD  
**Date:** 14 January 2022

## Information to note

### Update on the Western Balkans Crime State Nexus Project

An update on the joint HO/FCDO Crime State Nexus (CSN) Project. The project, which forms part of the wider Western Balkans Organised Crime Group campaign, is aiming to disrupt the links between politics and crime in the Western Balkans starting with Albania as the pilot.

### Progress so far

- 1. Links between politics and crime (the “Crime State Nexus”) weaken democracy and stability across the Western Balkans and, in the case of Albania, increase the direct SOC threat to the UK.** We know, including from open source reporting, that a number of politicians, on both sides of Albania’s political divide, maintain close links to OCGs. This often forms part of a transactional relationship where an OCG will help a politician during elections by buying votes and intimidating voters in return for political patronage. This allows the OCGs, some of which impact the UK directly, to act with relative impunity. So far, Albania’s judiciary has proven to be ineffective at tackling this issue for a variety of reasons including corruption. If we can disrupt these links then we can make the OCGs more vulnerable to law enforcement activity. The project aims to do this by targeting corrupted politicians directly to help promote changes in behaviour amongst the politicians targeted and, ideally, the wider political elite.
- 2.** The project is now underway funded by CSSF. You agreed the project concept in March 2021 and we spoke about the project during your July trip to Albania where I was posted as HMA Tirana. I joined the Home Office on loan in September to lead a joint FCDO-HO project team. We have just concluded a cross-HMG consultation to refine the programme outcomes.
- 3. We are considering a range of tools including diplomatic levers, exclusion decisions and sanctions.** Although we are breaking new ground with this project, we are looking to learn lessons from other occasions where the UK has used these tools to promote change or better protect national security including in the context of CT, war crimes and extremism as well as capturing lessons from recent US experience.

4. **We are choosing targets carefully working closely with the NCA, FCDO and HMA Tirana and taking other HMG priorities fully into account when designing specific disruption activity.** We are aware of wider HMG objectives in Albania and the wider Western Balkans and are choosing targets that will progress the aims of the project whilst minimising the risk to other HMG priorities. These include other Home Office objectives where we need to work collaboratively with the Albanian government and opposition.
5. **We have begun international engagement.** The project is far more likely to be successful, and will be of lower risk to the UK, if we can work in tandem with international allies. The US, who have already taken action against some corrupt public figures in Albania, are keen to work together.

### **Media handling implications**

6. We are considering media implications and are working-up a strategic communications package as part of the project in conjunction with wider HO colleagues and in line with wider HO policies.

### **Next steps**

7. **We are planning to recommend an initial batch of relatively low risk targets for exclusion decisions on conducive grounds.** We are hoping to have the first batch of exclusions ready for decision by you during the first half of 2022 .
8. **The new Foreign Secretary was briefed on the project in November.** The National Security Adviser has indicated that he is content with the approach and the Western Balkans Special Envoy has also been briefed. I would be very happy to give you an oral briefing on the project if you would find that useful.

### **Copy list:**

Home Secretary, Policing Minister, Security Minister, Permanent Secretaries, Special Advisers, , Press Office, Parliamentary Team, Jaee Samant, PSG DG Private Office, Chris Jones, Suzie Daykin, Yvette Bosworth, Duncan Norman