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Britain will formally recognise Kosovo as a sovereign state following its declaration of independence from Serbia, the PM has said.

Speaking to journalists in Downing Street, the Prime Minister said that the move would "close the chapter" following the break-up of Yugoslavia and help carry Kosovo to "a prosperous future". The UK understood Serbian sensitivities around the change and remained committed to Serbia's "European future", he added.

The PM said:

"I have written to President Sejdiu to tell him that Britain will now formally recognise Kosovo as an independent sovereign state... I believe this is a step forward for the international community and this follows the meeting that has already just finished with the European Union Foreign Ministers."

Mr Brown said that the decision to recognise independence had depended on assurances that minorities within Serbia would be protected under any new administration. The UK will continue to provide support through the presence of soldiers with the NATO mission, police officers with the EU representation and financial aid for the next three years, the PM added.

Kosovo issued its declaration of independence on Sunday after nine years under NATO control following the expulsion of Serbian troops in 1999. Following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels today several countries, including the UK, pledged their support. Key United Nations members such as China and Russia are opposed to the move.

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Read the statement in full

Can I just say that after the meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers today, I have formally written to President Sejdiu to tell him that Britain will now recognise Kosovo as an independent sovereign state... And I've done that with three considerations in mind:

Firstly, I want to close the chapter that has followed the break-up of Yugoslavia. Kosovo has been and is the last unresolved status issue. There are sensitive issues that we understand in Serbia but we believe that Serbia is committed to and we are committed to Serbia's European future;

We are also satisfied that Kosovo is taking the steps that are necessary to protect the minorities within its country. We are satisfied with the safeguards it has given, particularly in safeguards for Kosovo Serbs, and there will be supervision by the international community;

At the same time we will do what we can to help ensure stability and ensure the development of Kosovo as a country. There are of course 140 British troops that are part of the NATO mission; there are 60 British policemen that are part of the EU mission. We will continue to provide aid to Kosovo at £23m over the next three years. And make what we can do count so Kosovo has a satisfactory and prosperous future. So today we are recognising Kosovo as an independent sovereign state. I believe this is a step forward for the international community and this follows the meeting that has just finished with the European Union Foreign Ministers.

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