

PM meeting with Prime Minister Petr Fiala: 6 October 2022

Press release

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The Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Fiala for hosting today's gathering of European leaders, welcoming the important opportunity to discuss regional issues like energy security and migration.

The leaders were in strong agreement on the importance of likeminded European democracies presenting a united front against Putin's brutality.

They discussed the UK and Czech Republic's early support for Ukraine's defence and the need to continue military aid, help on reconstruction and sanctions on Putin's regime.

The Prime Minister and Prime Minister Fiala also noted opportunities for our countries to work together to secure long-term energy supplies, including cooperation on nuclear and renewables.

Both leaders welcomed the prospect of the United Kingdom resuming participation in the North Seas Energy Cooperation group. The Prime Minister looked forward to work progressing at pace on developing next-generation energy interconnectors in the region.

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Change to storage of radioactive waste granted for Hinkley Point C

This results from a change to the way radioactive waste will be stored at the site.

Pressurised water reactors at Hinkley Point C will use uranium fuel to create heat and generate electricity when operating. Once used within the reactor, nuclear fuel will undergo a period of cooling in a fuel pool. It will then be stored on-site before being sent off-site to a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

NNB Generation Company (HPC) Limited was originally issued a radioactive substances environmental permit in 2013. In the original design radioactive spent fuel was to be stored on-site in 'wet storage' – a method of submerging and storing in water.

The operator earlier this year applied to the Environment Agency for a variation to its permit. This was to reflect the change in the technology by which it will store spent nuclear fuel, from wet storage to 'dry storage'. Dry storage will see used nuclear fuel stored in sealed containers within a facility before it is sent to the GDF. The permit covers the associated discharges, not the storage of waste. However, a change to the permit was required to remove or amend specific conditions related to the previous wet storage technology that are no longer relevant.

The operator has said altering the storage method will not change the expected radiation dose from discharges to the general public or the wider environment. Such doses will remain extremely small.

Following a 4-week public consultation over the proposed change, the Environment Agency has today agreed to amend the permit. More than 40 organisations and members of the public responded to the consultation.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

We agree with the applicant's demonstration that the proposed change to spent nuclear fuel storage represents Best Available Technique (BAT) for Hinkley Point C. We are satisfied that the change will not lead to an increase in radioactive discharges and will not cause adverse radiological impact on people and the environment.

The changes will not impact our ability to effectively regulate the site and activities. We will continue to assess spent fuel storage and its impact at Hinkley Point C to ensure that discharges are minimised and that BAT is applied.

Separately, NNB Generation Company (HPC) Limited will be seeking the necessary changes to its Development Consent Order for Hinkley Point C later this year.

More information is available at: [Consultation on a variation to the Radioactive Substances Regulation Environmental Permit for Hinkley Point C \(HPC\) Nuclear Power Station, nr Bridgwater, TA5 1UD – Environment Agency – Citizen Space](#).

For more about the Environment Agency and its regulatory role with Hinkley Point C visit [Hinkley Point: nuclear regulation – GOV.UK](#).

Satellite communication deal raises competition concerns

- Deal could lead to airlines facing higher prices and worse quality on-board wifi
- Deal would remove key competitor from market

Viasat and Inmarsat are 2 of the largest satellite communications companies in the world, supplying businesses globally with mobile connectivity that enables services such as internet, email, and video calling. The 2 businesses agreed to merge in a \$7.3 billion deal announced in November 2021.

Demand for satellite connectivity is increasing rapidly, driven in large part by the ever-growing use of the internet by businesses and consumers, including through the increased use of data-intensive applications. Both companies are in the process of substantially expanding their offerings, sending more satellites into space and competing aggressively for new business opportunities. Other players, including Starlink (operated by SpaceX), OneWeb, and Telesat, are also entering the sector with a new generation of satellites.

The investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) found that Viasat and Inmarsat compete closely in the aviation sector, particularly for the supply of onboard wifi for passenger use. While only some airlines currently offer in-flight connectivity, the availability of these services is expected to grow significantly in coming years.

The deal brings together 2 of the strongest suppliers in a market with few other established players. Although new players, such as Starlink, OneWeb, and Telesat, are seeking to target the aviation sector, this is one of the most difficult industries for satellite operators to enter, and the CMA's initial investigation has found that there is significant uncertainty about when – if at all – these suppliers would be in a position to compete effectively with Viasat and Inmarsat.

The CMA's investigation also found that it can be very difficult for airlines to switch providers once they have installed a connectivity solution. The CMA is therefore concerned that the merged company could effectively lock in a large part of the customer base before emerging suppliers are able to compete.

The CMA is concerned that the loss of competition brought about by the deal could have an adverse impact on UK businesses and consumers: airlines could face higher prices and be offered lower quality connectivity solutions, ultimately affecting the cost, quality and availability of services for airline passengers.

Colin Raftery, CMA Senior Director, said:

This is an evolving market, but the merging companies are currently 2 of the key players – and it remains uncertain whether the next generation of satellite operators will be able to compete against them effectively.

Ultimately, airlines could be faced with a worse deal because of this merger, which could have knock-on effects for UK consumers as in-flight connectivity becomes more widespread.

The firms now have 5 working days to submit proposals to address the CMA's competition concerns. The CMA then has a further 5 working days to consider whether to accept any offer instead of referring the case for an in-depth Phase 2 investigation.

For more information, visit the [Viasat / Inmarsat merger inquiry page](#).

Notes to editors:

1. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.
2. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy carried out a separate investigation and made a [final order](#) pursuant to section 26 of the National Security and Investment Act 2021 to provide assurance that (i) controls are in place to protect information from unauthorised access and (ii) strategic capabilities continue to be provided by Inmarsat and Viasat to the UK government.
3. Under the Enterprise Act 2002, the CMA has a duty to make a reference to Phase 2 if the CMA believes that it is or may be the case that a relevant merger situation has been created, or arrangements are in progress or contemplation which, if carried into effect, will result in the creation of a relevant merger situation; and the creation of that situation has resulted, or may be expected to result, in a substantial lessening of competition within any markets or market in the United Kingdom for goods or services.
4. Viasat owns and operates a network of geo-stationary satellites and provides satellite connectivity services for use in consumer,

commercial, and government applications. Viasat also provides communications and cybersecurity products and services, and manufactures and supplies equipment and network technology for satellite connectivity services.

5. Inmarsat owns and operates a network of geo-stationary satellites and provides broadband and narrowband connectivity services for government and commercial applications.
6. Viasat entered into a share purchase agreement with Inmarsat's shareholders on 8 November 2021 pursuant to which Viasat agreed to indirectly acquire 100% of Inmarsat's issued share capital.
7. The CMA believes that the merger gives rise to a realistic prospect of a substantial lessening of competition in the supply of in-flight connectivity services to: (a) commercial aviation customers; and (b) business aviation customers.
8. All enquiries from the general public should be directed to the CMA's General Enquiries team on general.enquiries@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6000.

Humanitarian situation in Ukraine: UK statement to the OSCE

Thank you, Madam Ambassador.

Over seven months since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia's actions have had terrible consequences for the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Over 14,000 civilian casualties have been reported to date. Within Ukraine, 17.7 million are in humanitarian need. Approximately 7 million are displaced and 7.4 million have registered as refugees across Europe. Schools, hospitals and other medical facilities in Ukraine have been attacked. The sheer level of destruction means that humanitarian need will increase as winter approaches.

The [second Moscow Mechanism report](#) was an important step in attempting to establish the scale of the suffering resulting from Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine so far. It noted concern over "clear patterns of serious violations of international humanitarian law attributable mostly to the Russian armed forces", including the magnitude and frequency of the indiscriminate attacks carried out against civilians and civilian objects. The report detailed horrifying accounts of civilians reporting torture, rape, unlawful detention, enforced disappearances and the targeting of critical civilian infrastructure.

Last week's sham referenda conducted under considerable fear and harassment were neither free nor fair. The UK will never recognize the supposed results. And we will never recognize Russian attempts to illegally annex Ukrainian sovereign territory.

And it is not only civilians suffering. There is mounting evidence that

Russia has failed to abide by its obligations under the third Geneva Convention – that all prisoners of war should be treated humanely, afforded appropriate medical treatment and basic necessities, and be protected from humiliating and degrading treatment. As we have already heard this morning, wars have rules and these prohibit a detaining power from prosecuting prisoners of war for having participated in hostilities, or for lawful acts of war committed in the course of armed conflict. The sham trials – including of foreign nationals serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces – by an unrecognised court was a clear violation of international humanitarian law (IHL). We will hold Russia accountable for these violations.

Every day since the 24 February, we have seen the tragic consequences in Ukraine of Russia's aggression, but every day we have also been reminded of the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people. The United Kingdom will continue to do everything we can to support Ukraine, including through economic, diplomatic and humanitarian measures. And we will continue to call on Russia to withdraw from the territory of Ukraine, and put an end to the suffering. Ukraine deserves peace.

[New online claims form launched to benefit redundancy claimants](#)

The Insolvency Service is the first beta partner to work with the Government Digital Service (GDS) on their new digital form building platform – GOV.UK Forms.

GOV.UK Forms will allow government departments and arm's length bodies to easily create accessible online forms themselves, which will enable customers to share information in a timely and accessible manner.

The new online forms built using GOV.UK Forms will have a consistent look across all departments, and by meeting government accessibility standards, will allow all users to quickly and easily provide their information.

GDS are running a [private beta](#) testing phase after which they hope to make GOV.UK Forms available to all government organisations. The first partnership has seen GDS and the Insolvency Service collaborate to develop the [Amend a redundancy claim: holiday pay accrued form](#).

The holiday claim accrued amendment form will allow people, who have previously made a claim for redundancy pay, to easily provide updated information regarding their applications using an online form.

Customers will no longer have to download and submit a word document or call the Insolvency Service's helpline, making processing claims a quicker and simpler process.

The holiday claim accrued amendment form is one of six amendment forms used by the Insolvency Service's Redundancy Payment Service, and the Insolvency Service and GDS are looking to create digital versions of the others forms in the future.

John Wheatle, Director of Business Services Division for the Insolvency Service, said:

The new online holiday claim accrued amendment form is an exciting development for the Insolvency Service and will help boost our levels of customer service. Customers, who are already in difficult personal circumstances, will be able to easily amend their redundancy claims and notifications will be sent straight to the relevant people, reducing errors and speeding up the process.

We are very proud to have worked with GDS on this innovative project and hope that the new form provides a good launch pad for us to transition other forms online, as well as other areas of government to develop their own forms in due course and provide excellent customer service.

Clara Barnett, Deputy Director of Digital Service Platforms for the Government Digital Service, said:

This has been a great collaboration with the Insolvency Service and has demonstrated the value and huge potential of GOV.UK Forms.

By helping teams across government create simple and accessible online forms, we're making it easier for end-users to access government services. We're also improving the quality of data which the government collects, through simple validation and better form design, as well as speeding up processing times.