

## OSCE's Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: UK response

Madam Chair, I wish to thank the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Mr Mecacci, for his presentation. Matteo – your comprehensive comments highlight the important and extensive support that ODIHR provides to all OSCE participating States in implementing our human dimension commitments.

You referred to the practical challenges that ODIHR has faced over the last year as a result of COVID-19. ODIHR staff's fortitude and dedication to their roles in the face of the pandemic has been commendable. The annual report's list of activities during 2020 is a clear demonstration of the staff's flexibility, resilience and commitment to ODIHR's extensive mandate. Thank you on behalf of my delegation to Ingibjörg Gísladóttir and Katarzyna Gardapkhadze for leading the Office throughout 2020.

Of particular note has been ODIHR's ability to continue to assist participating States through election observation missions. Health and travel restrictions have obviously impacted on the scale of observation missions, specifically the numbers of short term observers that could be safely deployed. Nevertheless, it is commendable that ODIHR still managed to observe and assess sixteen elections during 2020. Being able to deploy observation missions in such difficult circumstances has been important. It has provided reassurance that, even in times of crisis, the OSCE continues to prioritise our shared values around democracy, good governance and the rule of law.

Critically, the observations and recommendations that flow from ODIHR's election monitoring reports have continued to provide independent advice to help ensure us participating States live up to our commitments – dating back to Copenhagen in 1990 – to hold periodic, genuine, free and fair elections. As and when we – hopefully – exit the pandemic, we look forward to ODIHR transitioning back to more normal observation missions in terms of structures and the numbers of observers deployed.

We continue to support ODIHR's election observation methodology, which recognises an election is a process and considers the key elements of participating States' electoral systems, including the effectiveness and impartiality of the election administration, the legislative framework, the nature of campaigns (including the media environment), and the protection of fundamental civil and political rights. We believe that strengthening our democratic institutions and practices is a continuous process, and ODIHR's clear recommendations to each country help all of us improve our electoral processes. They also provide a useful starting point to inform ODIHR's needs assessments for future election observation missions, helping ensure each of our individual democracies can be supported appropriately, and in a way that builds on past successes and addresses previous failings.

We agree also with your wider comments about the political challenges posed by COVID-19. Participating States must ensure that pandemic-related restrictions are temporary, proportionate to the threat we face, and only used when strictly necessary. As we exit the pandemic, the advice and assistance of your Office will be important in ensuring we all continue to honour the full range of our human dimension commitments.

It's also important that, having exceptionally cancelled last year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), ODIHR work closely with the Chair in Office to ensure HDIM can be held this year. Regardless of the circumstances, HDIM needs to be organised in a way that safeguards the unique characteristics of the event, specifically the opportunities it provides to civil society from across the OSCE region.

Finally, COVID-19 has not been the only recent challenge to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms across the OSCE region. Discussions in the Permanent Council over recent months have highlighted growing concerns about some participating States failing to live up to their OSCE commitments.

Against that wider challenging backdrop, we offer our full support for ODIHR in continuing to play an active role in supporting us, participating States, to honour our OSCE commitments. This includes: promoting the principles of democracy; building stronger democratic institutions; strengthening the rule of law; and ensuring adherence to human rights and fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of assembly and association. We support you continuing to implement your mandate in the impartial and transparent manner you have demonstrated. And we support your emphasis on specific, targeted activities, including assistance for parliaments and courts, protection of human rights defenders, and, by turning "Words into Action" to encourage tolerance and non-discrimination.

Madam Chair, in the year ahead, the UK will be steadfast in our support for ODIHR. We are grateful for the Office's work, which continues to provide lasting benefits to our region. Again, thank you Matteo, and thank you Chair.

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## [Surge testing to be deployed in Sandwell and Birmingham](#)

Press release

Additional surge testing provided following identification of COVID-19 variant first identified in South Africa.



Working in partnership with the local authorities, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing in a targeted area within B66 3, B66 4 and B67 6 postcode areas in Smethwick/Cape Hill, Sandwell and Ladywood, Jewellery Quarter and Soho wards in Birmingham following the identification of a confirmed case of the variant first identified in South Africa.

The confirmed case is self-isolating and their contacts have been identified.

Everybody aged 16 years and over who resides or works in these Sandwell and Birmingham postcodes is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a variant of concern. This is where contact tracers look back over an extended period in order to determine the route of transmission.

By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify variant of concern cases and their spread.

People with symptoms should book a free test online or by phone so they can get tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to them at home. Those without symptoms should visit their local authority websites – [Sandwell](#) and [Birmingham](#) – for more information.

People in this areas should continue using twice-weekly rapid testing alongside the PCR test as part of surge testing.

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**[New UK Government Covid testing centre](#)**

## in Dundee

### News story

Walk-through coronavirus testing centre opens in Downfield, Dundee.



The UK Government has today [Friday 16 April] opened a new walk-through coronavirus testing centre at Kirkton Community Centre Car Park in Downfield, Dundee, DD3 0AX.

The new centre is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland, this comprises eight drive through sites, 43 walk-through sites, 42 mobile units, plus the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab which works round the clock to process samples.

The UK Government is providing all COVID testing and test processing outside of the NHS in Scotland. Around two thirds of all daily tests are provided by the UK Government, in support of Scotland's health services.

Tests must be booked in advance at: [www.nhsinform.scot/test-and-protect](http://www.nhsinform.scot/test-and-protect) or by calling 0800 028 2816. People should only book a test if they have coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste) or have been instructed to do so by a clinician or NHS contact tracer.

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## Statement following the meeting between Lord Frost and Vice President

# Šefčovič: 16 April 2021

Press release

Statement following the meeting between Lord Frost and Vice President Šefčovič in Brussels yesterday evening.



Lord Frost, Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, met Commission Vice President Šefčovič yesterday evening in Brussels.

They reviewed the situation as regards the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland in a constructive atmosphere.

Lord Frost said that the intensive discussions between the Co-Chairs of the Specialised Committee on the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland in recent weeks had begun to clarify the outstanding issues, and some positive momentum had been established. But a number of difficult issues remained and it was important to continue to discuss them. He agreed there should be intensified contacts at all levels in the coming weeks.

Lord Frost repeated the UK's commitment to working through the joint bodies provided for by the Withdrawal Agreement. He underlined that any solutions had to be consistent with the overriding commitment to respecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions and to ensuring minimum disruption of everyday lives in Northern Ireland.

Finally, Lord Frost and Vice President Šefčovič agreed to further engagement with business groups, civil society and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland shortly.

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# Russia: Foreign Office summons Russian ambassador

News story

The Foreign Office has summoned the Russian ambassador over the SolarWinds cyber attack and its recent malign activity.



The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has summoned the Russian Ambassador over the United Kingdom's deep concern at a pattern of malign activity, including cyber intrusions, interference in democratic processes, and the build-up of military forces near the Ukrainian border and in illegally-annexed Crimea.

A FCDO Spokesperson said:

The UK Government is deeply concerned about a pattern of malign behaviour by the Russian State. At today's Summons, FCDO Permanent Under Secretary Sir Philip Barton made clear the UK's support for the actions announced by President Biden in response to Russia's recent activity.

He set out the UK assessment that the Russian Intelligence Services were behind the SolarWinds compromise.

He informed the Ambassador that the UK will continue to work with our allies to call out and counter malign operations by the Russian Intelligence Services.

Sir Philip also stated the UK's concern at the build up of Russian military forces near the Ukrainian border and illegally-annexed Crimea. These activities are threatening and destabilising. Russia needs to cease its provocations and de-escalate tensions in line with its international obligations.

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