

Presidential elections in Belarus: UK statement

The UK continues to monitor the situation in Belarus as preparations for the upcoming Presidential election continue.

We note with disappointment, the lack of transparency around the system of candidate registration, resulting in popular opposition candidates being denied access to the ballot in spite of the fact that they had submitted well in excess of the required 100,000 ballot access signatures. To maintain confidence in the electoral process, it is important that all aspects of the election campaign are open, fair, and transparent.

We are concerned that there will be no ODIHR or Council of Europe missions to monitor this election due to the lack of a timely invitation from the Government of Belarus. The absence of these observation missions makes it all the more important that local independent observers are allowed unrestricted access to polling stations.

In our statements to the Permanent Council on 21 May and 02 July, we expressed our concerns over the targeting of peaceful protesters, members of the opposition, journalists, bloggers, and media actors by the Belarusian authorities. According to local NGOs, since the start of the election campaign, over 1,000 people have been arrested or detained for exercising their right to peacefully protest, or for reporting on these protests. Many people remain in arbitrary detention, and there have been reports, particularly by journalists and other media actors, of mistreatment by law enforcement officers. Once again, we urge the Belarusian authorities to release all those who remain in detention, and to allow people to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

We are now less than three weeks away from the election, and it is important that candidates are given the opportunity to campaign without the fear of detention or persecution of themselves, their teams, or their supporters.

Progress report on the OSCE Gender Action Plan: UK statement

Thank you Ambassador Yrjölä for presenting this Report today and for assuming your current role. We take this opportunity to re-iterate the UK's full support to you during this period. We also thank OSCE executive structures and field operations for their contribution to advancing gender equality in

the OSCE.

The Report clearly shows the progress made in the last three years. But it also shows how far we still have to go. Alongside concerns over backsliding since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Report demonstrates the need for sustained and increased commitment to achieving gender equality. The series of webinars hosted by the OSCE's Gender Section highlighted worrying trends, particularly in relation to violence against women and girls, including on-line harassment .

This year, as we mark the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and 20 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, we must recognise and ensure that gender equality is integral to all that we do. We have OSCE tools at our disposal, such as the toolbox on the 'Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes'.

At the OSCE, strong and accountable leadership is essential to progressing gender equality and ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into all activities. There are some good examples of this, including in the activities of the field operations. The introduction of mandatory gender-responsive performance objectives for all supervisors would be an excellent next step. We also support the Office of Internal Oversight's recommendation on the provision to all staff of the Intensive Gender Training organised by Department of Human Resources.

The OSCE's strategy for achieving gender parity by 2026, including at senior levels, is an important step to achieving gender equality. As your Report states, it is important to create an enabling environment to attain this goal. Although progress has been made, women still account for less than 30% of senior management staff at the OSCE.

We appreciate that there has been some improvement on gender parity in OSCE events, but women continue to be under-represented. This isn't just about the numbers. Gender balanced panels contribute to more informed discussions and to more informed policies.

On the serious issues of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, we welcome the OSCE's 'zero tolerance' approach. We recognise that actions have already been taken in this respect and that follow up work to the UN-led Safe Space Survey is continuing. As the OSCE looks to strengthen its policies and implementation mechanisms on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, it will be important that the organisation has the necessary processes in place and that these are in line with international best practice.

As Chair of the OSCE's MenEngage network, the UK Ambassador has highlighted that it is the responsibility of all of us to adopt a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment. We need to foster a safe space for staff in the OSCE and within our delegations to raise concerns, including through consistent messaging and action by senior leadership – Ambassadors, Heads of Institutions, and others.

The landmark survey on the Well-Being of Women in South East Europe in 2018 demonstrated the shocking prevalence of sexual violence against women and girls. And, with the increase in domestic violence that we've seen globally since the outbreak of the pandemic, it is even more important that we fully implement the commitments we made in the Ministerial Council Decision of 2018 on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. We must make the prevention and redress of violence against women and girls a key part of COVID-19 national response plans.

In concluding, we reiterate our appreciation for this Progress Report and the recommendations contained in it. We would also like to thank the OSCE's Gender Section for their continued hard work. We look forward to a sustained and increased momentum on gender equality over the coming year.

OSCE Mission to Skopje: UK statement

Thank you Mr Chair

Welcome back to the Permanent Council Ambassador Koja and thank you for the comprehensive Report on the Mission's activities. We also appreciate that the Executive Director of the Council of Media Ethics joined your informal briefing to participating States yesterday.

I would like to start by commending the Mission and its staff for their continued support to the Republic of North Macedonia and to the Government's reform agenda. Your report includes some notable highlights across the Mission's activities, including in support of new legislation and in the Mission's essential role in early warning.

Whilst the global pandemic clearly affected some of the Mission's planned activities, you turned your focus to assisting the response to the crisis, including through support to the most vulnerable people, and to preventing an increase in domestic violence. We would appreciate hearing more about the impact of these Mission activities, and particularly in relation to preventing domestic violence, an area where many countries saw a shocking increase during periods of lockdown.

We also welcome the support you provided to the State Electoral Commission to prepare for safe elections when they took place on 15 July. We note that some of ODIHR's previous recommendations were partially implemented with the amendments to the Electoral Code on 15 February, but that several long-standing recommendations still need to be addressed. The continued presence of and support from ODIHR and international partners will be key for electoral reform in the months and years to come. The cyber-attack on election day that took part of the State Electoral Commission's website offline has highlighted the need for enhanced cybersecurity measures for all key institutions.

On transnational threats your report notes that after nearly two years of strategic engagement, the Mission is now well positioned to assist the country in combating organised crime and transnational threats. As it looks increasingly likely that the COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have a notable impact on serious organised crime, cybercrime and violent extremism, we look forward to hearing more on this in your next Report.

Ambassador Koja, following the Mission's introduction of mainstreaming a gender perspective into its programmatic work in 2019, we welcome your development of a Gender Action Plan for 2020 and 2021, and the corresponding Annual Activity Plan. Your focus on Gender Equality is commendable, including the Mission's assistance in mainstreaming a gender perspective into Parliament's work, increasing sensitivity and awareness among police and judiciary to gender-based violence, and impact assessments on the implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men that will serve as a basis for a new Law on Gender Equality. Your new outreach approach to debunk rumours and prejudices on grounds of gender, that reached more than one million people through on-line activities, is also encouraging.

We underline the important contribution that young people can make to decision-making and development of effective policies, and welcome the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies in January this year. Young people have the ability to make a real difference in bridging ethnic divides. And, ensuring that all children – from primary through to secondary school – receive an education that is based on inclusivity and is non-discriminatory is essential to providing a firm foundation for a cohesive society. The new Law for Primary Education that has inclusivity amongst its eight principles is a welcome step. We look forward to hearing more on the implementation of these laws in your next Report.

Finally, we support your sustained focus on safety of journalists. We are concerned about the growing trend in cyber-bullying and verbal abuse and appreciate that you are taking steps to address this issue. Journalists must be able to operate without fear of threats or acts of violence.

Thank you Ambassador Koja for joining us today and please pass on our appreciation to your team.

UK space innovation programme launches with fund for climate change and communications projects

- The first projects to be funded will use space technology to tackle global issues such as climate change or increase connectivity

- £5 million of the funding is set aside exclusively for international space projects, to strengthen the UK's partnerships with space faring nations

A new National Space Innovation Programme has launched, with an initial £15 million funding for projects related to Earth observation, communications and international partnerships.

This is a first step towards helping the UK compete more effectively on the world stage with other countries which have dedicated national funding for space on top of their commitments to the European Space Agency (ESA).

The UK has previously supported national space innovations on a case-by-case basis, such as funding for UK spaceports and launch operators. The new innovation programme will ensure a more coordinated approach to national funding, supporting the development of a comprehensive UK space strategy, as part of a Government commitment to increasing the UK's space ambitions.

The UK space sector is a huge economic success story, growing by over 60% since 2010. The industry already supports £300 billion of UK economic activity through the use of satellite services, and employs more than 40,000 people. This is expected to grow further, with the space sector estimating there could be a £60 billion market in the future in new Earth observation and communication technologies.

The UK Space Agency is inviting proposals for high-risk, high-reward projects to develop new technologies, products or services with the potential to grow the UK space sector, create high-skilled jobs and tackle global issues.

The first £10 million of this funding will support projects focusing on either:

- Earth observation technologies – half of the measurements needed to monitor climate change rely on satellites, so the development of more advanced instruments and data analysis techniques will support climate science and inform strategies to reduce emissions or protect local areas from impacts such as flooding, by identifying changes to the environment
- Communications projects – new technologies such as autonomous vehicles, AI and robotics rely on fast, reliable connectivity, and need to operate in remote areas that may be difficult or expensive to reach using ground-based signals or fibre. Satellite communications can fill in the gaps, and new projects could be funded to enhance how space and ground-based systems complement one another to ensure 100% coverage, support new technologies and increase resilience.

The remaining £5 million of this initial funding has been set aside for investing in international projects, which in turn will support closer working relationships with key space faring nations such as the US, Australia

and Japan.

Stronger international relationships and the ability to fund new projects, will also help boost UK space exports, which are already worth £5.5 billion each year, in areas such as satellite platforms, sensing systems and advanced software.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

The UK has a thriving space sector, and as well as being a science superpower, we want to lead the world in space technology.

The National Space Innovation Programme will ensure that our best and brightest talent have the backing they need to turn their world class ideas into goods and services, creating jobs and opportunities dedicated to tackling the most pressing global challenges we face.

UK Businesses, universities and research organisations can bid for funding to match their own investment in projects that will help the space sector create new high-skilled jobs, while developing new capabilities and technologies. Each project will be able to bid for a grant between £200,000 and £2 million, out of the £15 million funding.

Dr Graham Turnock Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency said:

The National Space Innovation Programme will enable the UK to develop products, services and technologies while creating high-skilled jobs and boosting our economy.

The UK Space Agency is leading work across Government to develop the UK's space capabilities. Our closest international competitors have well-developed national programmes alongside their European Space Agency commitments. Now is time for the UK to do the same as we increase our space ambitions.

[APHA launches recruitment campaign for plant health inspectors](#)



The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is recruiting over 100 new posts in its Plant Health and Seed Inspectorate (PHSI) as it plans for an increase in activity at the end of the EU transition period on 31 December. This is also likely to be a first step with the potential for further recruitment later in the year.

Plant health inspectors have a crucial role in maintaining and promoting a high plant health status in England and Wales. Their work is valuable to Defra group's purpose of protecting and promoting plant health within trade, agriculture and the natural environment.

The roles are varied and cover a range of interesting tasks such as: inspecting crops and fresh produce; helping to organise emergency measures to control outbreaks of pests or diseases; certifying items such as plant, seeds and grains for export; and ensuring required documentation is in order.

Ian Hewett, Service Delivery and EU Exit Director underlined the importance of this recruitment:

This recruitment is a critical part of our preparedness for the UK's final departure from the EU. The additional PHSI capacity will enable us to meet our goal of facilitating trade and maintaining our biosecurity.

Casey Higgins-King, one of APHA's PHSI inspectors, shares what she enjoys about her work:

There is no typical day working in plant health, and that is what is so wonderful about this job! One day I am walking through forests, parks and gardens checking for *Phytophthora ramorum*. (algae-like organism called a water mould).

The next I could be walking potato crops with other local inspectors, or I could be in a distribution centre, a garden centre, or plant nursery, carrying out surveillance for quarantine pests and diseases. I am constantly learning, adapting, and improving in this job.

The roles which are currently open for applications are (Civil Service Jobs references shown in brackets):

- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, North West](#) (61403)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, West Midlands](#) (61412)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, North East](#) (61406)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, East Region North](#) (61416)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, South West](#) (61409)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, South Central](#) (61411)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, London Gateway/Felixstowe](#) (61324)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, South East](#) (61258)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, East Midlands](#) (61417)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, North & North Wales](#) (61408)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, East Region South](#) (61415)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, Heathrow](#) (61230)
- [Plant Health & Seed Inspectors, Cambs/Suffolk](#) (61414)

These are all offered on a 24-month basis as a fixed-term appointment to external candidates, or as a loan to internal candidates from within the Civil Service, with the potential for extension or permanency. Secondments can be offered to NDPB employees.

Candidates who don't have the qualifications listed in the job adverts but are able to demonstrate in their application the required technical knowledge gained through experience will be considered for interview. Successful applicants will receive tailored learning and development.

The closing date for the current round of vacancies is Thursday 6 August 2020

The closing date has been extended to Sunday 16 August 2020 for the following locations:

Details about the roles available and how to apply are available on Civil Service Jobs. You can search for them by selecting APHA as the organisation or by using the reference numbers listed above.

To make sure you don't miss future opportunities, sign up for job alerts on [Civil Service Jobs](#), selecting APHA as the organisation.

To find out more about these vacancies, please contact PHSIJobs@apha.gov.uk.

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1. 5 August 2020

Extension to application closing date for East Region North, South Central, London Gateway/Felixstowe, East Region South and Cambs/Suffolk.

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