

Speech: Minister for the Constitution speech at European Commission: 15 Oct 2018

Introduction

We agree democracy is essential for free, well-governed societies to prosper.

We in the UK, along with you, are part of a community, extolling the virtues of democracy.

But as the leaders of the G7 agreed earlier this year in the Charlevoix, “democracy and the rules-based international order are increasingly being challenged by authoritarianism and the defiance of international norms”.

It’s up to all of us to work together to defend our democracy and preserve it for future generations. In my view we must respect it, protect it and promote it – those are the themes I will be working on in the UK, Europe and around the world.

As the Minister for the Constitution in the UK Government, today, I will set out what we are doing to defend the UK’s democracy. We are committed to:

- maintaining transparency, fairness and equality for parties, campaigners and voters
- we want to protect the safety and security of the electoral process, free from fraud and interference
- and we want to build on our democratic traditions to remain world leaders in maintaining confidence in our democracy

Transparency for digital campaigning

Starting with one of the challenges we face – for the last three decades the internet has not only revolutionised the way we interact with each other, it has revolutionised the way we do politics, too.

Information is only a moment away, and on the whole those changes are positive.

Thirty years ago, voters also didn’t also have to worry about whether their choice was being influenced by misleading political ads on social media.

The digital landscape poses challenges which we can’t afford to shy away from addressing.

On international affairs – we know that certain states routinely use disinformation, bots and hacking as foreign policy tools. It’s not surprising that they should try to influence other countries democratic systems to further their own agendas.

Democracy is based on citizens being confident that the elections they vote in are fair and transparent.

Governments must act to meet the pressures of digital campaigning so this confidence is assured, in terms of foreign-originated content, but of course also domestic content and debate too.

We are working to protect the news environment so accurate content can prevail and has a sustainable future.

We have to be alive to the fact that traditional news outlets aren't the main source of information anymore.

We must give everyone the skills they need to distinguish between fact and fabrication.

In the UK, we are publicly consulting on how to require digital campaigning material to include the details of who has produced it.

Because voters need to see which organisation or individual is targeting them.

Salisbury

People need to be informed about the threats facing our country. I am immensely proud of the work done by the National Security Communications Team and the government's Russia unit in revealing the role of the GRU in the despicable Salisbury attack.

The actions of the GRU are genuinely a threat to all our allies in democracy.

We are working together by sharing information about their activity with our international partners so that others can learn more about the threat they pose.

Safety and security of elections

In the UK, we have seen no evidence of successful interference in our democratic processes. We are vigilant.

I am confident that our voting system is secure.

Whilst UK voting systems do not lend themselves to direct electronic manipulation because our ballots are conducted with paper and pen.

But we recognise that confidence in the electoral system, and participation in it, are very much linked.

In the UK – there's a reform we're doing – you only need to say your name and address to get your ballot paper – a test based on a 19th century assumption that people knew their neighbours at the polling station.

Clearly, this process can be open to abuse and needs to be updated for our

more modern, populous society.

One approach is to bring the UK in line with other European countries such as the Netherlands, France and Germany and many others where people can confirm their identity when they vote.

Conclusion

We know it is vital that everyone has confidence that their vote is theirs, and theirs alone.

Not only that – they have to feel that their vote matters, and that their voice is being heard, too.

I want the reputation of the UK's democracy to be absolutely solid:

- known for its transparency and fairness
- known for being a safe and secure electoral system, untainted by misinformation
- I want it known for being a democracy that genuinely does work for every voter
- and known for the willingness of its government to work hard to increase confidence in our democracy for the people it serves

As I said, we must respect, protect and promote our democracy for the next generation.

That work has a vital task for our times.

Press release: Environmental performance of business continues to improve report shows

Every year, the regulator publishes its Regulating for People, the Environment and Growth (RPEG) report which sets out the regulatory performance of businesses holding environmental permits in England and the effectiveness of the EA's regulatory approach.

The report shows that 93% of the 14,000 businesses the EA regulates demonstrated good compliance with their environmental permit conditions. Businesses which harmed the environment, however faced record penalties. A total of £25.5 million in fines were issued by the courts for environmental offences brought by the Agency compared to £8 million last year.

Waste crime continues to blight communities, cause environmental harm, and undercut legitimate business. The Environment Agency is closing more than two illegal waste sites every day but discovering a similar number of new illegal sites. The report acknowledges waste crime is becoming more organised and that more needs to be done. This will be addressed in the government's forthcoming organised waste crime review, which has examined how the Environment Agency, partners, and the law enforcement system can best tackle the problem.

The report also highlights the increased use of Enforcement Undertakings for less serious environmental incidents. In 2017/18 there were a record £2.2 million worth of Enforcement Undertakings accepted by the Agency. By companies admitting liability and making a financial contribution to put right the harm they have caused, both the environment and communities benefit.

Other key findings include:

- 812 illegal waste sites were shutdown in 2017/18; more than 2 a day.
- Serious pollution incidents fell to 419, down 18% compared to 2016.
- The number of persistently poorly managed sites reduced by 18% compared to 2016.
- Environmental charities, organisations and projects received almost £2.2 million, compared to £0.9 million in 2016, in Enforcement Undertakings.

Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director of the Environment Agency, said:

Our regulation is supporting a healthier environment and safer communities – serious pollution incidents fell by 18%. We closed down over 800 illegal waste sites, and the courts have imposed record levels of fines on companies for environmental offences.

We are committed to supporting businesses to innovate and grow, in return, we expect that businesses take their responsibilities to protecting the environment seriously.

The report can be found [here](#)

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News story: Pregabalin and gabapentin to be controlled as class C drugs

Prescription drugs pregabalin and gabapentin are to be reclassified as class C controlled substances from next April, the Government announced today (15 October).

Today's move comes after experts highlighted rising numbers of fatalities linked to the drugs. The change means it will be illegal to possess pregabalin and gabapentin without a prescription and it will be illegal to supply or sell them to others.

The drugs, which are used to treat nerve pain, epilepsy and anxiety, can bring about an elevated mood in users but can also have serious side effects, particularly when used in combination with other drugs.

In 2016, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) raised concerns over medicinal misuse, illegal diversion of the drugs and addiction, and recommended that pregabalin and gabapentin should be controlled as Class C Drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

The Government accepted the ACMD's advice and launched a public consultation to assess the impact on the healthcare sector. Pharmacies, doctors, pharmaceutical companies and patients responded to the [consultation](#), which has been published today, backing the tighter controls of the drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations.

Regulations implementing the change in law to control the drugs will be laid in Parliament on Wednesday.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Any death related to the misuse of drugs is a tragedy. We accepted expert advice and will now change the law to help prevent misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin and addiction to them.

While drug misuse is lower now than it was ten years ago, we remain committed to reducing it and the harm it causes.

That is why we have published a comprehensive strategy to tackle

the illicit drug trade, protect the most vulnerable and help those with drug dependency to recover and turn their lives around.

The law change will mean the drugs are still available for legitimate use on prescription, but there will be stronger controls in place to ensure accountability and minimise the chances of pregabalin and gabapentin falling into the wrong hands or being stockpiled by patients.

Doctors will now need to physically sign prescriptions, rather than electronic copies being accepted by pharmacists. In addition, pharmacists must dispense the drugs within 28 days of the prescription being written.

To ensure that there is enough lead in time for those in the health care sector to adapt to the new measures, they will come into force in April 2019.

News story: Clean maritime revolution starts voyage

Experts on clean shipping met today (15 October 2018), to plot the route to zero emissions for the UK maritime sector on the first day of [Green Great Britain Week](#).

Minister for Maritime Nusrat Ghani opened the first meeting of the Clean Maritime Council, which will devise a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the sector to improve air quality on and around our waterways, ports and shipping lanes.

The government is clear on the need for action on emissions from shipping. Air pollution is the fourth greatest threat to public health after cancer, heart disease and obesity. In 2016, domestic shipping accounted for 11% of the country's nitrogen oxide emissions.

The Council has an important role in addressing these issues, bringing together experts from across the maritime sector – from industry leaders developing greener vessels, to academics studying the economics of emission reduction.

Maritime Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

The UK maritime industry has a vital role in improving air quality on and around water, and council members will be looking at innovative and practical ways to reduce emissions from the sector.

The Clean Maritime Plan will bring new opportunities for Britain's businesses to design, develop and sell green solutions to this

global challenge.

The UK is already actively developing plans to reduce emissions from shipping, for example:

- hybrid ferries using battery power alongside traditional engines are being used between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight and in Scotland
- shore-side electricity is already in place at Portsmouth (MOD), Fraserburgh and Brodick to reduce engines running at ports
- Innovate UK is funding a project in Orkney to directly inject hydrogen into the fuel supply of a ferry

The country also played a leading role at the [International Maritime Organization](#) in setting a global cap on sulphur emissions and establishing a new global target to cut shipping's greenhouse gases by at least 50% by 2050. The Council further demonstrates the serious commitment we are making for the future of the sector, ensuring the UK can benefit from the global shift to zero-emission shipping.

The environment is also one of the main strands of the [government's Maritime 2050 strategy](#), a long term look at the opportunities for the sector for the next 30 years.

The clean maritime plan will be published next year and will include policies to tackle emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases from shipping, while ensuring the UK can reap the economic benefits of the global transition to zero emission shipping.