



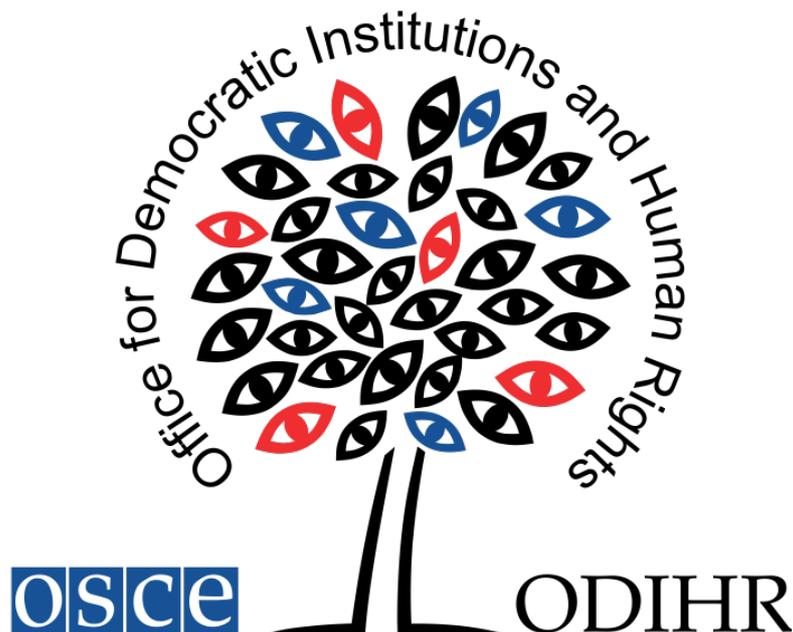
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

GENERAL ELECTION
7 MAY 2015

OSCE/ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT

2-5 March 2015



Warsaw
30 March 2015

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**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
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OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report

I. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the United Kingdom Delegation to the OSCE to observe the 7 May 2015 general election and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) from 2 to 5 March 2015. The NAM included Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumiłowicz, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Department, Mr. Steven Martin, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Adviser on New Voting Technologies, and Mr. Vladimir Misev, OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser.

The purpose of the mission was to assess the pre-election environment and preparations for the general election. Based on this assessment, the NAM should recommend whether to deploy an OSCE/ODIHR election-related activity for the forthcoming election, and if so, what type of activity best meets the identified needs. Meetings were held with officials from state institutions and the election administration, as well as with representatives of political parties, media, and civil society. A list of meetings is included as an annex to this report.

The OSCE/ODIHR would like to thank the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for its assistance and co-operation in organizing the NAM. The OSCE/ODIHR would also like to thank all of its interlocutors for taking the time to meet with the NAM and to share their views.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 7 May, voters will elect 650 members of the House of Commons for a five-year term under a first-past-the-post system in single member constituencies. The legislation governing elections is complex, voluminous and fragmented, with at least 25 pieces of primary legislation and copious pieces of secondary legislation. Following the 2010 general election, the coalition government's programme included a number of proposals for enactment of several election-related acts. While amendments addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, a number remain outstanding. An initiative to review the existing electoral legal framework is in progress. Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the consolidation and simplification of legislation is still required; however, they stressed that the stability of the law is the cornerstone of the political system.

The administration of the general election is managed by Returning Officers who are appointed by local government authorities and who oversee the conduct of elections at the constituency level. The Election Commission (EC) has an indirect role in the election and oversees tasks such as political party registration, party and campaign finance, and voter education and provides a wide range of guidance material. Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the conduct of elections enjoys a high level of trust among the electorate and expressed general confidence in the electoral administration.

The right to vote is granted to citizens who reach 18 years of age by election day and who are included on the voter list in an electoral constituency. Commonwealth citizens are also eligible to vote if certain legal requirements are met. Contrary to four judgments by the European Court of Human Rights and previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, prisoners continue not to have the right to vote, irrespective of the gravity of the crime committed.

Individual electoral registration (IER) has replaced the previous system of household registration. IER requires individuals to register themselves individually, by providing 'identifying information', such as their national insurance number, address and date of birth so that their identity can be verified. As the migration to IER is not complete, voters who do not confirm their identity will remain on the voter lists for this election and should be able to vote. Some OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors raised concerns about the completeness of voter lists and the possibility that some groups, such as students, may be left off. To promote IER, various voter awareness campaigns were initiated and supported by different levels of government and several civil society organizations.

Candidates can stand as independents or on behalf of registered political parties and must prove nominal constituency-based voter support and provide a deposit. Political parties met with by OSCE/ODIHR NAM indicated they do not have formal quotas for female or national minority candidates; however, they noted a range of efforts to promote and enhance their participation.

The official campaign starts 25 working days before election day; however, in practice, contestants are able to campaign at any point ahead of the election. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors thought that the campaign will focus on economic issues, such as unemployment, reform of the National Health Service as well as immigration. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed general confidence about the ability of parties to compete on a level playing field.

The legislation establishes limits on campaign spending for candidates and parties. Campaign expenditures limits for candidates vary for the 'long campaign', which started on 19 December 2014, and the 'short campaign', which only starts once a candidate is registered. Limits on campaign spending by political parties depend on the number of seats contested. Third-party campaigning was further regulated by the adoption of new legislation in 2014. Certain OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors opined that this legislation was adopted without sufficient public consultation and expressed concern that it may inhibit legitimate third-party activities.

A diverse media landscape exists, with broadcast media legally obliged to be impartial, while the press often supports one particular political party or another. Paid political advertising on television and radio is prohibited; however, public broadcasters are required to air free broadcasts on behalf of registered political parties. The Office of Communications (OFCOM) is the broadcasting regulatory body with power to sanction non-compliance with regulations. The number and format of television debates among party leaders, including the issue of which parties would be granted 'major party' status thus giving certain entitlements in the media, was an issue of public interest.

OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the electoral process and stressed the country's long-standing tradition of democratic elections. Notwithstanding, OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed a possible observation activity. Authorities have considered and addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, although a number still remain. Considering the ongoing efforts by the authorities to modernize and simplify the legislation and the transformation of the voter registration system as well as the introduction of new legislation for third-party campaigning, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM sees benefit in undertaking a more scrutinized assessment of these aspects. Based on this, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM recommends the deployment of an Election Expert Team (EET) for the 7 May general election. The OSCE/ODIHR EET could focus on the effects of implementation of new legislation and application of election procedures, voter registration, and aspects related to campaign financing.

III. FINDINGS

A. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy comprising England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Monarch is the head of state with largely ceremonial powers. The bicameral parliament exercises legislative authority through the House of Lords (upper chamber) and the House of Commons (lower chamber). The 650 members of the House of Commons are elected by popular vote. Currently, the House of Lords comprises 790 members.¹

Executive power is exercised by the government of the United Kingdom and by the devolved governments of Wales and Scotland, as well as the Executive of Northern Ireland. Traditionally, the government is headed by the prime minister, who is the leader of the party that gained the largest number of seats in the House of Commons in the last general election.

Following the 6 May 2010 general election, ten political parties and one independent candidate were elected to the House of Commons. The Conservative Party got 306 seats and headed a coalition government, together with the Liberal Democratic Party, which obtained 57 seats. The opposition was led by the Labour Party with 258 seats.²

Two major referendums and 21 by-elections have taken place since the last general election.³ In 2011, a referendum was held to consider replacing the existing first-past-the-post electoral system with an alternative vote system, and in 2014, another referendum considered Scotland's independence from the United Kingdom; both failed to pass.

For the 6 May 2010 general election, the OSCE/ODIHR deployed an Election Assessment Mission, which concluded that the "election was administered in a transparent and professional manner and demonstrated an open, pluralistic and highly competitive process."⁴

B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The 650 members of the House of Commons are elected under the first-past-the-post system in single member constituencies for a 5-year period. Candidates who receive the highest numbers of valid votes in a respective constituency are elected. Candidates will compete for 533 seats in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales and 18 in Northern Ireland.

The delineation of constituency boundaries is managed by the Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. While determining constituency boundaries, the commissions should consider the borders of local administrative units while maintaining the electoral quota.⁵ The Fifth Periodic Review of Westminster Constituencies under which current members of parliament are elected took place between 2000 and 2007. The Sixth Periodic Review commenced in 2011 and was

¹ Most members of the House of Lords are appointed for life along with a limited number of Church of England current serving archbishops and bishops.

² Other parties in the House of Commons include the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) – 8 seats, Scottish National Party (SNP) – 6, Sinn Féin – 5, Plaid Cymru – 3, Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) – 3, Alliance – 1 and Green Party – 1. Following by-elections in two constituencies in 2014, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was represented with two seats in the outgoing parliament.

³ Of the 21 by-elections, 14 were held due to resignations of members of parliament, 6 due to death and in 1 due to a court decision to repeat the election due to a violation of election legislation related to the campaigning of the winning candidate.

⁴ See [all OSCE/ODIHR previous reports on the United Kingdom](#).

⁵ The electoral quota is calculated by dividing the total number of eligible voters by the number of constituencies.

intended to finish by October 2013, with new constituencies for the 2015 general election.⁶ However, the review was interrupted due to a lack of consensus in the government and will be restarted in 2016.

C. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legislation governing elections is complex, voluminous and fragmented. At least 25 pieces of primary legislation and copious pieces of secondary legislation regulate the general election with some parts of the legislation repeated. The 1983 Representation of the People Act (RPA), last amended in 2010, is the primary law for the general election along with other primary legislation including the 2000 Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act (PPERA), the 2006 the Electoral Administration Act (EAA) and the 2009 Political Parties and Elections Act (PPEA). In addition, secondary legislation includes statutory instruments, regulations, rules and orders.

The 2010 coalition government's programme included a number of proposals for the enactment of several election-related acts.⁷ The 2011 Fixed-term Parliaments Act ended the prerogative power of dissolution and fixed the date of general elections at five-year intervals. The 2013 Electoral Registration and Administration Act (ERAA) introduced individual electoral registration (IER) and lengthened the period between the dissolution of the parliament and election day. The new legislation addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations such as allowing voters in line at the close of polling to still vote, extending and harmonizing different election timetables, and introducing additional safeguards for postal voting. Other recommendations, such as prisoner voting rights, the introduction of voter identification safeguard mechanisms and broadening the rights of observers to monitor all stages of the process remain outstanding.

The 2011 Parliamentary Voting System and Constituency Act (PVSCA) made provision for the introduction of an 'alternative vote' system, providing that the change would be endorsed by a referendum.⁸ The PVSCA also provided for a reduction in the number of the seats in the House of Commons to 600, creation of more equal constituencies, and shorter boundary review intervals, which remains in force, regardless of the referendum result.

The Cabinet Office is responsible for developing election legislation policies by promulgating regulations related to the administration of elections, proposing changes to legislation, and for some aspects of election funding.⁹ Furthermore, in 2012, the Law Commission of England and Wales along with the Law Commissions of Scotland and Northern Ireland commenced work on reforming the electoral legal framework, which aims to harmonize and simplify electoral legislation by 2017.¹⁰ Most OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors noted that the conduct of elections enjoys a high level of public trust and the stability of legislation is the cornerstone of the political system. However, it was also noted that further reform to consolidate and simplify the framework is needed.

The legal framework offers voters the possibility of voting by proxy on the basis of a justification submitted 6 working days before election day and for by postal ballot, without justification needed, 11 working days before election day. Voters who have applied for postal ballots are marked accordingly in voter lists and cannot be issued ballots on election day. However, they can deliver their postal ballot

⁶ The electoral quota will be established based on the autumn 2015 electorate figures and will be basis for delineation of the new constituency boundaries. The final data of the eligible voters is expected to be published between December 2015 and February 2016.

⁷ The coalition government's programme was an agreement platform for establishing a coalition government between the Conservative Party and Liberal Democratic Party after the 2010 general election.

⁸ The PVSCA provides, however, that boundary changes will take effect, irrespectively of the referendum results.

⁹ The responsibility for developing election legislation policies was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Cabinet Office in 2011.

¹⁰ The Law Commission is independent body tasked to review legislation and recommend reform as required.

envelopes until close of polls. EROs are responsible for compiling and maintaining lists of postal and proxy voters. Due to additional safeguards mechanisms related to postal voting, a new regulation was adopted that requires election staff to verify 100 per cent of the postal vote requests. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors did not express concerns to the longstanding practice of proxy voting, despite potential challenges to the secrecy of the vote.

The outcome of an election can be challenged by voters and candidates through an election petition filed with an Election Petitions Office within 21 days of the submission of the results protocol.¹¹ Longer timeframes to submit a petition may be allowed if the petition questions the election on the grounds of corrupt or illegal practices, or in connection with election expenses; these are then formally investigated along criminal procedures. Petitions are heard by an 'election court' formed by judges on rotation to try election petitions. However, complaints against electoral officials must first be addressed to the respective officers involved and appealed to the county court. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors generally noted their confidence in the complaints process related to elections.

D. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The administration of the elections is managed locally by Returning Officers (ROs), who are appointed by local government authorities and who oversee the conduct of elections at the constituency level. In England, Scotland and Wales, the management of elections is decentralized and ROs, one per constituency, enjoy considerable independence in performing their duties.¹² In Northern Ireland, the election process is overseen by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) headed by a Chief Electoral Officer, supported by eight assistant ROs and eight assistant EROs.

Presiding Officers, appointed by ROs, manage the polling stations. They are supported by staff assisting with issuance and receipt of postal ballots, polling and counting. All election officials are bound by impartiality requirements in the execution of their duties, have purely administrative functions and do not have responsibility for overseeing the campaign or the conduct of candidates. ROs also provide training for lower-level election officials. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed general confidence in the electoral administration; however, some specific concerns were raised about the possibility of linking a voter to a specific ballot, which might affect the secrecy of the vote.¹³ It was also noted that potential challenges might arise on election day, as a number of local elections will be held concurrently with the general election across most of England.

Support to the ROs is provided at a national level by the Electoral Commission (EC). The EC is an independent public body composed of 10 commissioners supported by an executive and management structure. The EC is responsible for tasks such as the registration of political parties, oversight of party and campaign finance, and some voter education. The EC does not have a direct role in administering the election and mostly provides support and guidance to election officials.

¹¹ A petition must be accompanied by a fee of 400 GBP. One interlocutor informed the OSCE/ODIHR NAM that one political party incurred administrative costs of approximately 250,000 GBP in a court case relating to the 2010 election and also recommended a specialized electoral prosecutor to be established. The legislation grants the Director of Public Prosecutions, on his/her own initiative or by court's invitation, to make inquiries and institute prosecutions.

¹² The position of RO is ceremonial and ROs designate Acting Returning Officer (ARO), who is traditionally a senior officer of the local authority. Approximately, 380 AROs will be designated, with some responsible for more than one constituency.

¹³ Ballots are numbered and have a unique identifying mark. A corresponding number list contains these numbers and the unique identifying marks of all ballots. When a ballot is issued, the voter's number is recorded beside the ballot number on the corresponding number list. All materials are stored at the same premises after election day, thereby giving rise to some concern regarding voter secrecy.

In order to ensure consistent application of electoral procedures and in line with previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, the EC published a range of guidance materials for electoral administrators, parties, candidates and agents as well as for voters, journalists and third-party campaigners. Materials are available in English and Welsh. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors also noted that a performance measurement system for election officials was introduced; however, the EC does not have the authority to impose sanctions for underperformance or non-compliance. Election officials are only accountable to the courts through an election petition process after an election. Interlocutors met with by OSCE/ODIHR NAM noted the limited role of the EC in administering the election; however, they expressed general confidence in the electoral administration.

E. VOTER REGISTRATION

The right to vote is granted to citizens of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland who reach 18 years of age by election day and who are included in constituency voter lists. Commonwealth citizens can be registered as voters provided that they have indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom. Citizens of the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland may only vote in the general election if residing in the United Kingdom. Citizens living abroad can register and vote by post or by proxy, provided they were registered to vote in the United Kingdom within the last 15 years.

Prisoners serving a custodial sentence do not have the right to vote. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has ruled in four judgments that this blanket prohibition is disproportionate and incompatible with the right to participate in elections.¹⁴ In 2012, the Ministry of Justice held public consultations and proposed a draft bill to amend the blanket restrictions; however, the bill has yet to be adopted.¹⁵ A number of OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors highlighted the importance of passing this legislation in the next parliament.

Under the ERAA, IER was established and replaced the previous system of household registration. The transition to IER commenced in England and Wales in June 2014 and in Scotland in September 2014 and has not yet been completed. In Northern Ireland, individual registration has been used since 2002. IER requires individuals to confirm their inclusion in voter lists through a multi-step verification process. The IER system requires individuals to register themselves, individually, by providing 'identifying information', such as their national insurance number, address and date of birth so that their identity can be verified.

Approximately 90 per cent of voters were transferred to the new system automatically using the Department of Work and Pensions or local administration databases. EROs sent follow-up reminders and conducted individual visits to voters who have not verified their information. Some two million voters have not yet confirmed their identity to be registered under the new system; however, they will remain on voter lists for this election and should be able to vote. Some local authorities encountered technical difficulties with the software to manage voter list data during the early stages of the transformation to IER.

In order to be eligible to vote in the upcoming election, voters need to be registered by 20 April; online registration is also possible for the first time. Voter lists are managed at the local level and there is no central voter registry. EROs are responsible for compiling and maintaining voter lists in their respective constituencies. Fines of up to 80 GBP can be imposed on those who are asked and refuse to register and

¹⁴ The first ECHR ruling was in 2005, [Hirst v. the United Kingdom, no. 74025/01](#), and most recently in 2015, [McHugh and others v. the United Kingdom, no. 51987/08](#).

¹⁵ The draft bill included three possible options: a ban for prisoners sentenced to four years or more; a ban for prisoners sentenced more than six months or; a restatement of the existing ban.

finer of up to 5,000 GBP for providing false information to the ERO.¹⁶ In England and Wales, local councils appoint an officer of the council as the ERO. In Scotland, ERO functions are performed by the officials in charge of land and property valuation. In Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer is the ERO for each constituency.

While all OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed the introduction of the IER system, some expressed concerns about the completeness of voter lists due to possible individual under-registration, in particular for first time voters, students, those in rented properties, and eligible voters born outside of the United Kingdom. To promote voter registration, the government has initiated an Electoral Registration Transformation Programme for online registration, and a campaign on social media targeting youth and first time voters.

F. PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

The EC administers political party registration and maintains two registers of political parties, one for Great Britain and one for Northern Ireland. The EC can refuse to register a party name or description for a limited number of reasons. To contest an election, a party must appear on the register no later than two days before the close of candidate nominations for that election.

Every eligible voter can stand as candidate, either independently or on behalf of a registered political party. To be nominated, a candidate must file his/her nomination with the RO (with 10 supporting signatures from registered voters in that constituency) and pay a deposit of 500 GBP no later than 19 working days before election day. Deposits are returned to candidates obtaining at least five per cent of the valid votes in their constituency. Political parties met with by the OSCE/ODIHR NAM noted that the parties do not have formal quotas for participation of female candidates or national minority candidates. However, they noted various mechanisms to promote and enhance their participation.

G. CAMPAIGN AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

While the official campaign starts 25 working days before election day, in practice, political parties and prospective candidates are allowed to campaign at any point ahead of the election. Candidates have the right to use free public venues for campaigning, free campaign broadcasts on television and discounted postal communication with voters. Candidates are obliged to comply with planning rules to post large banners, to remove printed material within two weeks after the election day and to use imprints on all campaign materials. Candidates cannot campaign in the vicinity of the polling station during election day and are not allowed to publish exit polls before the close of polls. EC guidance instructs candidates not to campaign in an aggressive and intimidating manner.

All registered parties and candidates are entitled to receive copies of voter lists, which is a key component in their planning of the campaign and identifying potential supporters. In addition, some parties intend to conduct door-to-door campaigning and to campaign via the social media. Political parties informed the OSCE/ODIHR NAM that the campaign will likely focus on economic issues such as unemployment, inflation and poverty, and the reform of the National Health Service as well as immigration. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed general confidence in the ability of parties and candidates to compete on a level playing field.

The legislation establishes limits to campaign spending for candidates and parties. Campaign expenditures limits for candidates vary for what is referred to as the 'long campaign' (between 19 December 2014 and the date that parliament is dissolved) and the 'short campaign', which only starts

¹⁶ In March 2011, eight people were sentenced to a total of 25 years by the Southwark Crown Court for providing false voter registration information, fraud and money laundering.

once a candidate is registered. During the long campaign, the maximum expenditure is 30,700 GBP plus 6 to 9 pence per elector in the borough or county constituency, respectively. During the short campaign, the limit is 8,700 GBP plus 6 to 9 pence per elector in the borough or county constituency, respectively. Limits on campaign spending by political parties are distinct from those set for candidates and depend on the number of seats contested.¹⁷

The EC oversees political party and election campaign finances and can impose civil sanctions and initiate criminal investigations. All political parties are required to submit quarterly reports on donations and loans received, as well as annual accounts to the EC. During the campaign period, reports on donations and loans must be submitted weekly to the EC. Complete campaign reports of all expenditure must also be submitted within 3 months after election day if the amount is below 250,000 GBP and within 6 months if it is over 250,000 GBP. All reports are publicly available on the EC website. OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed confidence in the work of the EC as a regulator body for campaign and party finance. Individual candidates are required to submit financial reports to the respective ROs, within 35 days of the declaration of electoral results.

Third-party campaigning during elections was further regulated by the 2014 Transparency of Lobbying, Non Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (Lobbying Act). The legislation introduced spending limits for charities and individuals who do not stand as candidates and required them to register with the EC if they intend to spend above a certain threshold during the campaign.¹⁸ According to some OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors, the legislation was adopted without sufficient public consultations and involvement of relevant stakeholders, which raised concerns about the level of comprehensiveness of the new legislation and possible limitations for third-party campaigners. In July 2014, after the adoption of the legislation, the EC jointly with the Charity Commission, organized public consultations to address some of these concerns and subsequently issued detailed guidelines.¹⁹

H. MEDIA

A diverse media landscape exists with a strong tradition of public service broadcasting and a large national print media sector. Public and private broadcasters are legally obliged to be impartial in political reporting. In contrast, press are not bound by such obligations and often supports one particular political party or another.

The Office of Communications (OFCOM) is the regulatory body for television and radio and has the power to institute graduated sanctions to broadcasters for non-compliance with regulations. However, it does not conduct systematic monitoring and generally acts on complaints. The 2003 Communications Act is the principle legislation regulating the media, with secondary legislation comprising OFCOM's Broadcasting Code and rules on Party Political and Referendum Broadcasts. Section 5 of the Broadcasting Code requires that "news, in whatever form, must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality", and more specifically, during the election period, Section 6 requires broadcasters to give 'due weight' to the coverage of major parties and appropriate coverage to other

¹⁷ Nationwide, parties can spend up to 30,000 GBP multiplied by the number of seats contested.

¹⁸ Third-party campaigners are obliged to register if they spend above 20,000 GBP in England or above 10,000 GBP in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland starting from 19 September 2014 until election day. Under the new legislation, spending limits for third-party campaigners were reduced for approximately 60 per cent compared to under the previous legislation.

¹⁹ In October 2013, the Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement (the Harries Commission) was established and supported by over 150 campaign and charity groups. It issued number of recommendations related to the new legislation, most of which were partly or fully implemented.

parties and candidates.²⁰ These requirements do not apply to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the main public service broadcaster, which established its own editorial and election guidelines overseen by the BBC Trust, the BBC's governing body.²¹

Paid political advertising on television and radio is prohibited and an electoral silence period is required for election day. According to legislation, each party contesting the elections must be offered at least one broadcast of up to 4 minutes and 40 seconds on television, while major parties must be offered two broadcasts. This will be the second general election to feature debates among party leaders and with the potential number and format a prominent topic. According to OFCOM, broadcasters are free to decide the structure and format of the leaders' debates and encouraged them to invite non-major parties to participate in such debates. The final number and format of the debates has not yet been decided.

Print media are overseen by a voluntary non-statutory body, the Press Complaints Commission. The Commission adjudicates complaints with reference to its code of practice, which includes provisions on accuracy, right to reply and privacy. The Commission has no legal powers, but its decisions are to be published by the paper complained against.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the electoral process and stressed the country's long-standing tradition of democratic elections. Notwithstanding, OSCE/ODIHR NAM interlocutors welcomed a possible observation activity. Authorities have addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations such as the right to vote for voters standing in line at the close of the poll, harmonization of different elections timetables and introduction of additional safeguards for postal voting. Other recommendations, such as prisoners voting rights, introduction of safeguard mechanism for voter identification and broadening the rights of observers to monitor all stages of the process have not been addressed. Considering the ongoing efforts by the authorities to modernize and simplify the legislation and the transformation of the voter registration system as well as the introduction of new legislation for third-party campaigners, OSCE/ODIHR NAM sees benefit in undertaking more scrutinized assessment of these aspects. Based on this, the OSCE/ODIHR NAM recommends the deployment of an Election Expert Team for the 7 May general election. The OSCE/ODIHR EET could focus on the effects of implementation of new legislation and application of election procedures, voter registration, and aspects related to campaign financing.

²⁰ OFCOM's decision to include a party on the list of major parties is based on the respective party's performance in the previous election, with more weight given to the past general election and on current support according to the opinion polls. See [the list of major parties](#) and [OFCOM's statement of the review](#).

²¹ Section 10 of the BBC guidelines requires impartiality and fairness in the news judgment during reporting. In the guidelines, special attention is given to the smaller parties to receive due weight in the coverage.

ANNEX: LIST OF MEETINGS

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Paul Arkwright, Director, Multilateral Policy Department
Kate Knight Sands, Deputy Head, International Organizations Department
Jack McIver, Team Leader, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Team
Emma Kouki, Elections Officer, Human Rights and Democracy Department
Gary Postans, Officer, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Team

Cabinet Office

Paul Docker, Head of Electoral Administration
Colin Dingwall, Programme Director of Electoral Registration Transformation Programme
Catherine Webster, Head of Political Parties and Referendums
Adam Shoosmith, Head of Electoral Funding

Electoral Commission

Andrew Scallan, Director of Electoral Administration
Tom Hawthorn, Head of Policy of Electoral Administration

Law Commission of England and Wales

Nicholas Paines QC, Commissioner
Henni Ouahes, Team Lawyer
Gethin Thomas, Research Assistant

Boundary Commission for England

Tony Bellringer, Secretary to the Commission

Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)

Martina Cicakova, Policy Support Officer

Conservative Party

Alan Mabbutt, Head of Local Government and Legal Officer, Conservative Councillors' Association
Philippa Broom, Director, International Office

Labour Party

Mike Creighton, Director of Audit and Risk Management
Nabila Sattar, International Projects Manager

Liberal Democratic Party

Robert Woodthorpe Brown, Chair of the International Relations Committee

Electoral Reform Society

Katie Ghose, Chief Executive
Chris Terry, Research Officer

Office for Communications (OFCOM)

Adam Baxter, Standards Executive
Charlotte Christison, Government and Parliamentary Business Manager

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

David Cowling, Editor in BBC Political Research Unit

The Daily Telegraph

Christopher Hope, Assistant Editor and Chief Political Correspondent