

## Press Release - 9 September 2021

### EU Vice President meets Commissions in Belfast

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) have hosted a roundtable discussion with EU Vice President. Maroš Šefčovič Under Article 2 of the Protocol, both Commissions have been tasked with overseeing the UK Government's commitment to protecting equality and human rights in a post Brexit Northern Ireland.

Mr Šefčovič is the EU's Vice President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight. The purpose of the roundtable was to enable Vice-President Šefčovič hear views from across Northern Ireland's civil society about the impact of Brexit and the Protocol.

#### **NIHRC Chief Commissioner, Alyson Kilpatrick said:**

'The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission welcomed the opportunity alongside the Equality Commission to host Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and his delegation in Northern Ireland today.

Continuing engagement with the European Union is crucial to guarantee that human rights and equality standards are maintained following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU.

The EU has played an important role supporting our peace process. We encouraged Vice-President Šefčovič to keep working in partnership with the UK Government and NI Executive to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all of its parts. The two Commissions have an important role supporting the parties and we look forward to building on today's constructive dialogue.'

#### **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Chief Commissioner, Geraldine McGahey said:**

"The UK Government's commitment in Article 2 of the Protocol relating to the protection of equality and human rights in Northern Ireland is a positive aspect of the Protocol that is in everyone's interests.

"As we all work to ensure these are upheld, ongoing discussions between the European Commission, the Commissions and equality and human rights stakeholders are very valuable and important.

“We look forward continued and further engagement and dialogue with European Commission and others as we take forward this work”.

## **Notes to Editor**

1. Mr Šefčovič is EU Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight and the event took place on Thursday 9 September 2021 as part of a wider visit to Northern Ireland.

## **Role of Commissions**

- The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland have been tasked with overseeing the Government’s commitment to protecting equality and human rights in a post Brexit Northern Ireland, through a dedicated mechanism framework.
- Under the Ireland/NI Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement reached with the EU, the UK Government committed to ensuring that the protections currently in place in Northern Ireland for the rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provisions set out in the chapter of the same name in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement will not be reduced as a result of the UK leaving the EU including in the area of protection against discrimination (Article 2(1)).
- In the context of the Article 2 commitment, The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) will work together to provide oversight of, and reporting on, rights and equalities issues falling within the scope of the commitment that have an island of Ireland dimension.
- Schedule 3 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 confers new functions on both the NI Commissions (ECNI and NIHRC), to enable each to act as part of the ‘dedicated mechanism’ (DM), to monitor, advise, report on and enforce the UK’s adherence to its commitment that there will be no diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland as a result of the UK’s exit from the EU.