EU: Foreign Affairs Council – Syrian chemical weapons to pass through Italian port

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Syria's chemical weapons will be passing through an Italian port, with the selection of the precise place being decided – and notified to the Italian Parliament – by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemic Weapons (OPWC). The announcement was made by Foreign Minister Emma Bonino at the end of the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council.

The Council addressed the key issues currently on the international agenda: the Iranian nuclear dossier, the Syrian crisis, the Eastern Partnership and EU-Russian relations in the run-up to the January summit. This last topic was also discussed during a long lunch with the EU foreign ministers and the head of Russian diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov.

OPWC will report to Parliament on port chosen for transit of chemical weapons, announces Bonino

Syria's chemical weapons will pass through an Italian port, probably in the second half of January, explained the Italian foreign minister. Minister Bonino had recently announced Italy's willingness to take part in the operation, with the OPWC deciding on the Italian port concerned. There, the stockpile dismantled in Syria will be transferred from Norwegian and Danish ships to the Cape Ray, the American vessel equipped with special mobile apparatus for disposal of the weapons.

"The OPWC's decision will depend primarily on three factors: the draught, the port's capacity and its distance from or vicinity to populated areas", explained Minister Bonino. The OPWC has also confirmed that it is willing to illustrate the technical aspects of the operation to the Italian Parliament, when activity resumes in January", continued the Minister, who pointed out that the transfer of the weapons should take 24-48 hours.

Political developments in the Syrian crisis were another key topic for the Foreign Affairs Council, in the run-up to the Geneva 2 peace conference scheduled for 22 January 2014. Minister Bonino expressed Italy's conviction of the need to involve all actors concerned in the process.

The EU's door is still open for Ukraine

The other, sensitive dossier addressed was the Ukraine question. A dossier on which "I don't think great progress has been made", admitted Minister Bonino, who pointed out that "The EU's door is still open for Ukraine, even if Kiev has so far decided not to go for this option".

The question was discussed at some length during the lunch for the 28 EU foreign ministers and their Russian colleague, Sergei Lavrov. "The various contributions to the discussion were extremely frank on both sides. Lavrov confirmed that Russia is willing to review the economic implications of Ukrainian-European and Ukrainian-Russian relations". Confirmation of the EU-Russian summit in January will prevent any interruption in the dialogue, added the Italian foreign minister.

With Moscow "we have very important dossiers on which we can agree, but in all strategic partnerships there are dossiers like the Ukrainian one where the partners hold different positions". Minister Bonino expressed the

hope that “the confirmation of the EU-Russian summit would make it possible to resolve the tricky aspects of these dossiers”.

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