Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary meets German Foreign Minister

2014-02-03

The Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

It is a great pleasure to welcome my new colleague Frank-Walter Steinmeier, on his first visit to London as Foreign Minister of Germany.

Germany is one of our most important partners in the world; in trade, foreign policy and in Europe. Ours is a relationship based on friendship and common interests, and we agreed today to strengthen those ties further. Over the last few years there has been a strong intensification of the links between British and German Ministers. This is something we are continuing with the new Government, and in fact 10 of the 16 German Cabinet Ministers are meeting their British counterparts before Easter.

We had detailed discussions about our common interests in Europe:

We talked about the need to reform the EU to make it more competitive, and more democratically accountable: so that we strengthen the achievements that make the most difference to the lives of citizens across Europe, enable our economies to compete and thrive in the 21st century global landscape, and ensure a European Union built on sustainable democratic foundations.

Both our countries want to see strong growth in the economies of Europe, and the EU playing its part in supporting that. We are also staunch advocates of the strengthening of the Single Market, and of a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the United States, which would bring immense benefits to all our citizens.

It is important to both Britain and Germany that the nations of the Eurozone succeed. Frank-Walter and I agreed on the importance of fairness in the Single Market, whether countries are in or out of the Eurozone, and for a clear and fair set of arrangements between those countries that are in the Eurozone, and those that have kept their own currencies.

Turning to wider foreign policy, the Foreign Minister and I share deep concern about the situation in Ukraine, and the need to see democracy and the rule of law properly upheld.

We condemn violence and are very concerned by reports of disappearances and torture. We call for all these cases to be fully and transparently investigated. It is essential that the Ukrainian government take urgent action to build confidence and trust, and to facilitate

genuine political dialogue, reversing the decline in democratic standards and human rights and laying the foundations for free and fair elections. We look to Ukraine's leaders to take immediate practical, non-confrontational steps to show that they are listening to the concerns of the Ukrainian people and are committed to a prosperous, democratic and independent future for Ukraine. This is also crucial for Ukraine's longer term European perspective, which remains open.

And of course, we had lengthy discussions about the conflict in Syria. I deplore the reported killing of over 80 people in Aleppo this weekend, by the regime deliberately unleashing barrel bombs on the civilian population. It comes on top of the deliberate starvation of civilians in Homs and other besieged areas, which is grotesque and utterly unacceptable. The United Kingdom also believes that there is a compelling case for bringing the humanitarian situation back under discussion in the Security Council. I have discussed with the Foreign Minister today this and other steps to ensure that aid reaches all those in Syria who need it.

Both our countries are making a strong practical contribution to the destruction of Syria's chemical arsenal. We call on the Russian government to urge the regime to accelerate the work to deal with its chemical weapons and related material. And we will continue to work together in support of the Geneva II process – including the full participation for Syrian women, which we have long called for.

Germany has been a steadfast partner in helping to achieve the interim nuclear deal with Iran. Frank-Walter and I want to see a comprehensive agreement – and we agree that to maximise the chances of achieving one, the EU needs to maintain pressure through robust enforcement of sanctions. We look forward to continuing our work together when the negotiations resume in a fortnight.

On the Middle East Peace Process, we are united in our support for Secretary Kerry's push to achieve a Framework agreement. We agreed to continue our close cooperation so that the EU is able to play its important role supporting both parties.

Foreign Minister, I've very much enjoyed our discussions today and I admire the vigour you have brought with your return as Foreign Minister.

I look forward to our countries working side by side to address the many difficult questions that face us today, around the world and in the EU.

Thank you.

The Foreign Secretary William Hague and Foreign Minister of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

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For journalists

Email

newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

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