Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Councils: 24-25 June

2013-06-18

Foreign Office Minister David Lidington said:

I will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 24 June and the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 25 June. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Irish Presidency. The meetings will be held in Luxembourg.

Foreign Affairs Council

Western Balkans

At the FAC Ministers will discuss the Western Balkans and the Serbia/Kosovo Dialogue. Our views are set out in more detail below for the GAC, which will also discuss Western Balkans issues.

Eastern Partnership

Ministers will discuss the Eastern Partnership, looking ahead to November’s Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. We expect the discussion to focus on expectations for the Summit, particularly on whether the EU will be able to offer signature of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, and initialling of Association Agreements with Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. The UK remains committed to supporting these agreements on the basis of continued irreversible reform.

Southern Neighbourhood

Ministers will discuss the EU’s work in the Southern Mediterranean, based on an evaluation paper to be produced by the European External Action Service/Commission, which should be released shortly before the FAC. I plan to use this opportunity to reaffirm the need for EU support to be responsive to progress made against a country’s commitments and actions towards pursuing political and economic reform; to press for strategic, country-level discussions and collective assessment of individual states’ reform progress at future FACs; and to reiterate the need for more effective coordination of the EU’s activities both internally and in consultation with Member States, including through better use of strategic communications.

Syria

Within the context of the Southern Neighbourhood discussion, I expect Ministers also to discuss the latest developments in Syria, including G8 outcomes and progress on the Geneva II political settlement process.

Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)

Ministers will address the deteriorating prospects for a two-state solution, and the importance of supporting US efforts. This discussion will be an opportunity to agree the focus of EU policy and engagement on the MEPP for the coming months. I will focus on how the EU can support and contribute actively, alongside other regional and international partners, to efforts led by the United States to drive progress on the MEPP. This will include the incentives the EU could offer the parties to reach a negotiated solution, particularly on the economic and security tracks. I will press for Conclusions which outline the EU's approach and support to the US.

Afghanistan

This will be the first EU Ministerial discussion on Afghanistan in over a year. It will be an opportunity to re-affirm EU commitment to Afghanistan post-transition, complementing the G8 Summit discussion the previous week. I will press for further progress against the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, highlight the importance of elections in 2014 and note the achievement made on transition of security to the Afghan National Security Forces.

Climate Change

Ministers will discuss EU Climate Diplomacy, building on and reviewing progress since the previous discussion of this issue by the FAC in July 2011. We expect that Conclusions will be adopted, which will reaffirm the EU's commitment to addressing climate change as a strategic foreign-policy issue, and as a threat to economic resilience and security. I will support the European External Action Service in calling for renewed climate diplomacy efforts by all EU actors, particularly with a view to the deadline under the UN climate negotiations to adopt a new global, legally binding agreement by 2015.

General Affairs Council

The 25 June GAC will focus on EU enlargement and preparation for the 27-28 June European Council. There will also be a discussion on the Multiannual Financial Framework, following the agreement reached at the February European Council.

In addition, there will be a meeting with the President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, which is expected to focus on them June European Council.

Enlargement

The GAC will look at enlargement. Key decisions on Serbia and Kosovo are due to be taken, following the December 2012 GAC Conclusions. Ministers will discuss the Commission's proposal to open negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo. Discussion on Serbia will be focussed on preparing for a possible decision on opening EU accession negotiations at the June European Council. Serbia and Kosovo reached an historic agreement in April 2013 which included some autonomy for Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo and acceptance of Kosovo's state institutions for the first time. The UK's position on whether to support opening accession negotiations will depend on the progress Serbia makes on implementing this and existing agreements, and in normalising relations with Kosovo, by the time of the European Council. There may be brief discussion of Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) where the UK continues to support the Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations.

Preparation of the 27-28 June European Council

The GAC will prepare the 27-28 June European Council. The June European Council has an extensive agenda covering economic policy: including concluding the European Semester, which gives macro-economic and fiscal guidance to Member States, assessing implementation of the Compact for Growth and Jobs agreed by the June 2012 European Council, industrial competitiveness and smart regulation; Economic and Monetary Union; enlargement; strategic partners and possibly other foreign policy issues.

We will be clear that the best means to create jobs and growth and tackle youth unemployment is through structural reform and more flexible labour markets, opening up Single Market opportunities and pursuing ambitious trade deals. We will also seek to secure further progress in reducing burdens for Small and Medium Enterprises. On Economic and Monetary Union, we will make the case that strengthened governance must be voluntary for Euro Outs and continue to safeguard the Single Market.

The Multiannual Financial Framework (

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The GAC will discuss the legal architecture putting into effect the February European Council agreement on the 2014-20

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regulation and Inter-Institutional Agreement. The Irish Presidency intends to secure a mandate from the European Council to approach the European Parliament, which may vote on the

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at the 1-4 July Plenary. Should the European Parliament vote in favour of the proposal through the consent procedure, the

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texts will then return to the European Council for a final decision by unanimity.

It is important that we make progress on this important dossier, and the February European Council conclusions on the

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must be translated faithfully into the legal documents. Recent informal discussions have focussed on issues such as increased flexibility in managing the budget and for a mid-term review of the

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, both possibilities which the February deal allowed for. I will argue strongly that the agreement must respect the

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ceilings, that any revision of the

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must respect the Treaty provisions for unanimity in Council, and that our abatement be preserved.

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