Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Ministers to discuss EU issues in Brussels

2011-07-14

Minister for Europe announced the agenda for the General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils in a written statement to Parliament:

The Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council will meet in Brussels on 18 July. My Right Honourable Friend the Foreign Secretary (William Hague) will attend the Foreign Affairs Council. I will attend the General Affairs Council.

Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)

Initiatives in the area of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

We expect Baroness Ashton to present a report on CSDP which will be used as the basis for a discussion by Ministers. This follows an interim report which was presented to Defence Ministers at a FAC on 23 May. We are keen to support any initiatives that ensure the EU and NATO complement each other better. More generally, we will encourage the continued development of European civilian and military capabilities, and improvement to the coordination between EU civilian and military planning structures to help achieve a more joined up approach to crisis management. But we are opposed to the creation of any new institutions.

Southern Neighbourhood (Syria / Lebanon / Libya)

On Syria, we expect the Council to agree Conclusions which will keep up the pressure on the Syrian regime to end the violence engage in meaningful reforms and take forward a genuine and inclusive National Dialogue.

We also expect Conclusions on Lebanon which, while we recognise the complex challenges of the country's internal political structure, make clear our expectations that the new government uphold its international obligations, particularly by committing to cooperate with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

And on Libya, we expect EU ministers to take their lead on the discussion at the Contact Group meeting due to be held on 15 July. We may also take the opportunity to remind Ministers of the need to push ahead with implementation of the ambitious new approach to the region set out in the new European Neighbourhood Policy endorsed by the European Council and the FAC in June.

Climate Change and Security

Following a joint request by the Foreign Secretary and his German counterpart, Dr Westerwelle, that the FAC discuss climate change in light of the urgent and serious threat it poses to growth and security, Foreign Ministers will have the opportunity to consider the respective roles they, the High Representative, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and national diplomatic services can play in responding to climate change. Our view is that there is a need for greater emphasis on this in both Member States' and the EEAS's approaches to foreign policy. We also expect the adoption of formal Conclusions.

Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)

The 18 July FAC will receive a report from Baroness Ashton on the 11 July Quartet meeting. We expect Ministers will want to support Quartet efforts to get the Israelis and Palestinians back into direct talks. There is also likely to be a discussion of how the EU should respond to proposals for a UN vote on Palestinian statehood in September.

Pakistan.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss Pakistan. We want to emphasise Pakistan's strategic importance to the EU, and the need to re-energise the EU-Pakistan relationship. We would like Conclusions which include commitments that will lead to a broader and deeper relationship and set the framework for a third EU-Pakistan Summit.

Afghanistan

Discussion on Afghanistan is likely to cover a wide range of issues including security transition, the EU's long-term engagement with Afghanistan, and the EU Police Mission (EU POL). We will encourage a focused discussion, emphasising the importance of the EU's commitment to Afghanistan post-2014 and urging progress on key areas of the EU's expertise such as governance and capacity building.

Strategic Partners

If there is time, Ministers may consider the EU's relations with its strategic partners. They would focus in particular on Brazil and South Africa (given forthcoming EU Summits with those countries in October and September respectively). They may also cover China, Russia and the US, following Baroness Ashton's work last year to define EU priorities with those countries. We are keen that the EU identifies concrete goals, preferably using its trade levers, with each country. And that the EU places an equally high priority on its relations with India.

General Affairs Council (GAC)

Multiannual Financial Framework

The European Commission will present

their proposals

for the EU budget Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020.

This could be the opportunity to remind the Commission of the

Joint letter to the President of the European Commission

signed by the Prime Minister and leaders from Germany, France, the Netherlands and Finland in December 2011.

Reform of the Statue of the European Court of Justice

The Court of Justice of the European Union has submitted a number of proposals for reform to improve its efficiency and, in particular, to clear the significant backlog of cases in the General Court (GC). The GC is important because it has jurisdiction to hear at first instance competition and trademark cases that are vital to the functioning of the single market. The key proposal is to increase the number of judges in the GC by 12, from 27 to 39, at a cost of an additional €13.6m a year. While we support reform, we will have to take account of the need to deliver real budgetary restraint at EU level.

Presentation of the Presidency’s Programme

Ministers will be given a presentation by the Polish Presidency on their main priorities for the next six months.

June European Council

Ministers will discuss follow-up to the June European Council, which covered Migration, Economic Policy, North Africa and the Middle East.

Following the Council, the Prime Minister reported the outcomes to the House in his statement on the “

Statement on the European Council

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Conclusions of the June European Council meeting

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