EU: FAC on Syria, Central Africa and nuclear question – Bonino raises case of marines – Brussels confirms interest

2014-01-20

The Iranian nuclear programme, the Syrian crisis ahead of the Geneva 2 meeting of 22 January and the crisis in the Central African Republic were among the principal topics addressed by the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in Brussels. Minister for Foreign Affairs Emma Bonino raised the issue of the case of the two marines – Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone – being detained for nearly two years now in India, on which the EU confirmed its continuing interest.

Bonino, dialogue and humanitarian truce expected from Geneva 2

“The start of a process, which we know very well will be long, difficult and highly complicated, but one that will at least be the beginning of dialogue. The first essential thing is a humanitarian truce to allow access by aid groups, the humanitarian catastrophe is absolutely unacceptable”. These were the results that Minister Bonino, as she herself explained, are expected from the Geneva 2 Conference planned for Wednesday in Montreux. The minister also mentioned UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s invitation to Iran to attend the conference. “Many of us will be in contact with the Russians and Iran to see how to move the situation forward” Minister Bonino explained, underscoring that she “remained of the opinion” that Iran had to be invited. But, she added, “I think that the initial meeting platform must be a shared one; I said this to Zarif when I saw him and I insist on this position”. Moreover, the FAC remarked in its conclusions that “the only solution” to the Syrian conflict was a true political transition based on the full implementation of the Geneva 1 Conference communiqué of 30 June 2012.

FAC suspends “some sanctions”. EU cites “first step toward a comprehensive solution”

The 28 EU foreign ministers also implemented the suspension of “some sanctions” against Iran, in accordance with the 24 November agreement on its nuclear programme. The sanctions are to be suspended for 6 months, the council conclusions explain, as a first step toward a comprehensive solution The duration of this first step may be “extended by the mutual consent” of Iran and the 5+1. Regarding the suspension, the Italian foreign ministry noted that “there is no margin for misunderstanding. The sanctions remain and will remain in

place until a final agreement has been reached that establishes the civilian and peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme, beyond any shadow of doubt and in compliance with an international system of certification".

Bonino raised issue of marines, "a question for EU-India meeting"

Minister Bonino also raised the issue of the case of the Italian marines detained in India. The issue "will be readdressed also in EU-India political consultations on Friday", the minister reported, explaining that during the FAC meeting "Catherine Ashton confirmed the EU's interest, stressing the correctness of our position and our request, and confirming that she had been following the dossier for a long time". The EU-India meeting to which the minister referred concerns a trip to India by the director of the European Diplomatic Service to meet with the Indian foreign minister. High Representative Ashton asserted, from her part, that "we have been in contact with the Indian authorities for the two years that the case has remained unresolved", in coordination with Italy.

Crisis in Central African Republic. FAC approves military mission

The crisis in the Central African Republic was another of the main topics of discussion at the FAC in Brussels. The foreign ministers unanimously approved the operational planning of a European military intervention in the Central African Republic in support of the African and French forces, expressing its deep concern over the extremely unstable and unsafe situation there. Parallel to the FAC meeting, a donors conference, organised in Brussels under the aegis of the UN and the EU, announced total donations of 366 million euro for humanitarian aid to the populations of the Central African Republic affected by the crisis.

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