Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Iran and Western Balkans discussed at EU Foreign Ministers meeting

2011-12-05

In a written statement to Parliament the Foreign Secretary said:

A provisional

report of the meeting and all Conclusions

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The agenda items covered were as follows:

Western Balkans

The discussion focussed largely on Serbia, and the EU facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. All expressed concern at implications for the Dialogue of recent violence in northern Kosovo. I made clear the UK's strong support of enlargement in general, but on the basis of meeting the required conditionality. I also stressed the importance of Kosovo's EU aspirations. The General Affairs Council will return to this issue on Monday.

On Bosnia and Herzegovina, I emphasised the importance of focusing attention on the need for political progress on the ground, including the formation of a state-level government.

Iran

Ministers agreed Conclusions setting out the EU's serious and deepening concerns over Iran's nuclear programme following the latest report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which clearly set out possible military dimensions. They also decided to intensify pressure against the nuclear programme by sanctioning another 180 individuals and entities.

I took the opportunity thank EU Ministers for their support during and since the attack on our Embassy in Tehran. All my counterparts expressed solidarity and the need for a united response, and a number have already recalled their Ambassadors for consultations. Ministers agreed to issue the following response from the Council:

“The Council is outraged by the attack on the British Embassy in Tehran and utterly condemns it. It is a violation of the Vienna Convention. It also deplores the decision to expel the British

Ambassador from Tehran. The Council considers these actions against the UK as actions against the European Union as a whole. The EU is taking appropriate measures in response.”

After the meeting I made the following statement:

“Today, the EU demonstrated clear unity and solidarity with the UK on the outrageous attacks on our Embassy in Tehran. No difficulty in relations can excuse the Iranian regime’s complete failure to protect diplomatic staff and property. That is why yesterday I announced the closure of our Embassy in Tehran and the Iranian Embassy in London. This is also why the EU and wider international community have expressed universal condemnation. I welcome the fact that France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands have recalled their Ambassadors in Tehran for consultations.

I strongly welcome the EU’s decision to intensify pressure on Iran following the IAEA’s report by sanctioning another 180 individuals and entities. These include those directly associated with the nuclear programme and entities associated with the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The EU made very clear that it will not bow to Iran’s intimidation and bullying tactics. We will not back down and agreed today to work on further sanctions, including in the areas of finance and energy, by the next Council meeting. We want Iran to come to the table and negotiate meaningfully about its nuclear programme. Despite events this week we still want a diplomatic solution”

Iraq: Camp Ashraf

Baroness Ashton briefly raised Camp Ashraf and the interest the European Parliament was taking on this issue. Member States agreed that this was an issue for the UN and Iraq rather than the EU.

Southern Neighbourhood

Over lunch, Ministers had a positive exchange of views about Syria with the Arab League Secretary-General, Nabil El Araby. Ministers agreed Conclusions (see link above) and further EU sanctions against the Syrian regime. After the meeting I made the following statement:

“I strongly welcome this substantial further package of EU sanctions, targeted on President Assad, his regime and those who support them. This tenth round of sanctions aims to increase pressure on the Syrian regime to stop the continuing violent repression of the Syrian

people. EU sanctions stand alongside measures introduced by Turkey yesterday including the freezing of assets belonging to Assad and individuals in the regime, and the Arab League's decision to impose unprecedented sanctions. I welcome these moves which send a clear message that the Syrian regime's actions have left it isolated.

EU sanctions are part of a broad international response to the horrific abuses perpetrated by a regime that has lost legitimacy. The UN Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry report, issued on 21 November, highlighted the systematic and wide ranging nature of these abuses including through compelling testimony from many of those who have suffered at the hands of the Syrian regime. The UK worked closely with international and regional partners to secure a third UN Human Rights Council special session on Syria, on Friday 2 December.

The UK continues to support the Arab League's efforts to bring an immediate end to the violence and supports the work of Syrian oppositionists towards realising the aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom, dignity and a new political system."

On Egypt, Ministers agreed Conclusions welcoming the peaceful start to elections but expressing serious concern at the recent violence and calling for a swift transfer to civilian government.

Ministers agreed Conclusions on developments in the Southern Neighbourhood and the EU's response to the Arab Spring, including the need for an offer of market access to Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco. The Council also acknowledged through Conclusions the Polish Presidency's initiative to create a European Endowment for Democracy.

Middle East Peace Process

Ministers also had a short exchange of views with the Arab League Secretary-General about the latest developments in the Middle East peace process.

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Ministers agreed a useful package of CSDP measures (see link above) focused on improving the EU's contribution to international security on the ground. They agreed to prepare for a small, focused and carefully calibrated civilian CSDP mission in the Sahel, focusing on policing, security, infrastructure development and regional training; and affirmed the EU's readiness to assist the new Libyan authorities if requested. In line with the UK's priorities in the Horn of Africa, Ministers agreed to plan for a new mission to help countries in the region improve their own civil maritime security.

These new operations fit well with our vision of CSDP, bringing together a range of security tools for practical effect in areas where NATO, which remains the cornerstone of our security, would not be engaged. In order to improve the coherence of this effect in the Horn of Africa,

Ministers agreed to consider activating on a temporary ad hoc basis the existing EU Operations Centre, designed for low-intensity small-scale civilian or civil-military missions that do not require a military headquarters. This could bring together the EU's work to strengthen regional maritime capacities in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa region with its existing military training for Somali security forces, currently run through the EU's planning staffs. The EU's naval counter-piracy mission Atalanta will continue to be run from the UK's military operational headquarters at Northwood. This further demonstrates that the EU has all the structures it needs for effective crisis management and does not require new, costly and duplicative institutions such as a permanent EU operational military headquarters - something this Government will never agree to. Council agreed that, without prejudice to the Treaties, any future decisions on planning and conducting EU operations will be taken on the basis of unanimity and inclusiveness.

Ministers also highlighted the importance of improving Europe's civilian and military capabilities, and of strengthening the EU's partnerships with NATO, the UN and others. We hope that the focus of debate on CSDP will now shift from institutions to practical outcomes, effectiveness and real missions that actually make a difference in the world and can improve our own security and that of other countries within the EU and beyond.

Read

all conclusions from the 1 December meeting

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/iran-and-western-balkans-discussed-at-eu-foreign-ministers-meeting