Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Written Ministerial Statement on the Foreign Affairs Council

2012-11-13

My Right Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on the afternoon of 19 November. My Right Honourable Friend the Minister for International Security Strategy will attend the European Defence Agency Steering Board and the Defence Foreign Affairs Council on the morning of 19 November.

There will be a joint lunch for Foreign and Defence Ministers to consider the issues outlined below. These meetings will be held in Brussels and will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland.

I will attend the General Affairs Council on 20 November, and the preceding dinner with President Van Rompuy on 19 November. The meeting will be chaired by the Cypriot Presidency.

European Defence Agency (EDA) Steering Board

At the EDA Steering Board, Ministers will be expected to agree as usual the EDA's budget and work programme for the forthcoming year and its indicative work plan for the next 3 years. Also on the agenda are the EDA's approach to pooling and sharing and the defence contribution to the development of EU policies. The Pooling and Sharing Report gives a progress update of ongoing activity such as the Helicopter Training Programme and Maritime Surveillance Networking, proposes new opportunities for pooling and sharing, and includes the Code of Conduct for Pooling and Sharing which Ministers are expected to adopt. Ministers will be updated on EDA work on the interaction between defence and wider EU policies such as Industry and Market, Research and Innovation and European Space Policy.

Defence Foreign Affairs Council

The agenda is expected to focus on EU Operations and the Defence Task Force.

EU Operations

The session on EU operations should open with an update on the current state of play in each of the EU's CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) operations. It is anticipated that discussion could then focus on the future of the EU Training Mission in Somalia. The UK is supportive of a third mandate for EUTM Somalia, so we will look to push for extension of the mandate and to set out our thinking on the design of that mandate. The Mali operation is the subject of a specific discussion during the joint lunch, so we do not expect it to be discussed during this session.

Defence Task Force

Ministers will receive an update from the European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services on the EU Defence Task Force's efforts in supporting competitiveness, and on innovation of the European defence industry within the internal market. The Defence Task Force is an internal EU Commission body co-chaired by the Commission's DG Market and DG Enterprise, established in 2011 to identify measures to improve the internal defence market and improve the European defence industrial base. It is focused on the three main areas of the internal market, the Commission's Defence Industry Policy and defence research and development.

Defence and Foreign Ministers Lunch

Mali

Over an informal lunch, Ministers will discuss the draft Crisis Management Concept being drawn up as part of the planning process for a CSDP mission to Mali. We do not expect Conclusions to be issued from the lunch. This is an opportunity for the UK to express its support for accelerated planning towards a CSDP mission while ensuring that due rigour is applied to that planning process.

2013 European Council on Defence

Ministers will have an orientation debate on CSDP ahead of the 2013 European Council on defence. The December 2012 European Council will commission the relevant EU institutions to conduct preparatory work through the course of 2013. The discussion at the FAC will centre on this tasking. We welcome the European Council looking at this issue and will be pushing for a tasking framed around enhancing European military effectiveness and a more efficient European defence industry.

Foreign Affairs Council

Southern Neighbourhood

Ministers will review developments in Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Egypt.

Ministers are likely to discuss recent events in Syria and their impact on EU efforts to support a peaceful transition. The UK is pushing for agreement to the full renewal of the EU's restrictive measures on Syria which come up for renewal on 1 December, and will encourage other Member States to increase their humanitarian aid.

On Lebanon, following the bomb attack in Beirut on 19 October, we expect Conclusions which will condemn that attack and reiterate the EU's strong commitment to Lebanon's stability and independence. The Conclusions will reiterate the EU's support for the work of the Lebanese Armed Forces and urge all Lebanese parties to engage in the dialogue being led by President Sleiman.

Ministers may take stock of recent events in Libya, including the appointment of Prime Minister-elect Ali Zidan and progress in the approval of his government. There will be an opportunity to discuss the provision and coordination of international assistance to the new Libyan authorities.

On Egypt, the Council will discuss follow-up to the EU-Egypt Task Force in Cairo which takes place on 13-14 November. The Task Force is a key moment in resetting the EU's relationship with Egypt. We will continue to encourage greater emphasis on the principles of more-for-more in the follow-up to it, in line with EU ambition to use the ENP to incentivise reform. The Task Force will also discuss work, including in the UK, to improve repatriation of assets stolen from transition countries.

Yemen

It is almost one year since the transition process in Yemen began with the signing of the Gulf Co-operation Council Initiative on 23 November 2011. The transition remains broadly on track, with President Hadi successfully appointed after an interim election in February, and the formation of a national unity government. The proposed Conclusions would show our support for these efforts but also encourage the Yemenis to continue in this vein through the successful preparation and launch of an inclusive National Dialogue, and preparations for full national elections in 2014.

Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process discussions will focus on the prospect of a Palestinian application to the UN General Assembly to upgrade their status to that of a non-member observer state. The UK will emphasise the need for EU countries to vote in a manner which advances our shared goal of realising the two state solution. We will make clear that we are encouraging the new US administration to act quickly to put its full weight behind ensuring the Israelis and Palestinians return to substantive negotiations resulting in the resolution of the conflict.

Ukraine

There will be an in-depth discussion of Ukraine following the parliamentary elections on 28 October. The discussion will consider how to take forward the EU-Ukraine relationship in the light of the elections and other developments. We do not expect there to be Conclusions in November.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Ministers are expected to agree Conclusions which will highlight our concerns about the insecurity in eastern DRC; condemn the actions of M23 and other armed groups; call for the cessation of all outside support for M23; and underline the importance of the government of the DRC showing leadership in resolving the problems. Ministers will also have the opportunity to consider what steps should be taken next to help to resolve the situation.

Cuba

Ministers will discuss the current situation in Cuba and the future of EU-Cuba relations. EU-Cuba relations are currently governed by the 1996 Common Position, which can be

found here

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EU-US

Ministers will have the opportunity to discuss the EU's priorities with the US following the US presidential elections on 6 November and the re-election of President Obama. We expect the discussion to cover a spectrum of leading international issues, including the global economy. We will stress the importance of an EU-US trade deal.

General Affairs Council

The key item of discussion will be the preparation for the November European Council on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The General Affairs Council (GAC) has led on the preparation of the MFF, which has been discussed at every GAC over the past year. Key issues such as the overall size of the MFF 2014-20 and the composition of spend in the different headings will be taken forward to the November European Council.

In addition to the MFF we expect this GAC to discuss the Commission's work programme for 2013, follow up on the agreements reached at the October European Council and the agenda for the December European Council.

Multiannual Financial Framework

Ministers will focus initially on issues around Cohesion policy, on which the Presidency hopes to secure a partial general approach on two remaining negotiating blocks: financial management, and the common strategic framework. Financial management deals with the processes for examination and acceptance of accounts and for financial corrections. The Common Strategic Framework is an annex to the Common Provisions Regulation which provides a strategic orientation at EU level for the funds.

The main item will be preparation for the special November European Council on 22 and 23 November. This will be discussed at a dinner with President Van Rompuy on 19 November and again during the Tuesday 20 November session.

The Cypriot Presidency has produced various iterations of the ‘negotiating box’ which now has an upper ceiling of numbers for the MFF. The Presidency has made it clear that they expect further downward revisions and I will be arguing that the upper ceiling is far too high.

I expect a further version of the negotiating box to be issued before the GAC. This will be

available here.

I will be emphasising the strength of feeling on budget size in the UK as demonstrated by the recent vote in the House of Commons.

I will also emphasise again that we will not agree to any changes to Own Resources, including the UK abatement.

Follow up to the October European Council and agenda for December European Council

At the October European Council the Commission was urged to make progress on implementation of the Growth Compact and to speed up delivery on growth enhancing measures such as concluding trade agreements. The Commission have indicated that they will undertake to put proposals on a range of issues on the table before the end of the year. I will urge the Commission to press forward on the issues we consider priorities, including the annual growth survey and the internal energy market, but also to maintain momentum in other areas such as the trade agenda, where the need for progress was highlighted in particular in the October European Council. I will emphasise the need for progress on trade deals with Singapore, Japan, Canada and also the United States, which the Prime Minister discussed with President Obama when they spoke after his re-election.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/written-ministerial-statement-on-the-foreign-affairs-council