Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council to meet in Luxembourg

2012-06-19

Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)

The FAC will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland.

Southern Neighbourhood

Ministers are expected to discuss the Commission’s report on activities in 2011, and the Roadmap for Future Action. We welcome the communication and recognise the broad range of activity the EU supports in the region. We particularly welcome the increased focus on developing the political relationship through task forces held in Tunisia and Jordan, and the promotion of civil society through the new civil society fund.

Ministers will take stock of the latest situation on the ground in Syria, following the G20 Summit in Los Cabos (18-19 June), and before a possible Contact Group meeting on Syria. The Council is an opportunity to outline our policy, along the lines of the Foreign Secretary`s statement to Parliament on 11 June. We need to support the Annan plan, increase the pressure on the Assad regime, and keep up a push for humanitarian assistance and on accountability. Ministers are likely to adopt Conclusions reinforcing our messages.

On Egypt, Ministers will take stock of recent events, including the 14 June decisions by the Supreme Constitutional Court and the 16-17 June Presidential elections. The Council Conclusions are likely to reaffirm EU support for the political transition, and keep pressure on the authorities to maintain the momentum of tackling the pressing economic and human rights concerns.

Pakistan

High Representative Ashton is expected to report back from her recent visit to Pakistan.The subsequent discussion will be an opportunity for the Foreign Affairs Council to set out the EU’s support for Pakistan’s forthcoming elections and the EU’s commitment to improve market access for Pakistan.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

We expect Council Conclusions to welcome the political progress achieved so far in 2012, and reaffirm the EU's strong support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective. The Conclusions are likely to reinforce the message that Bosnian leaders must urgently make a credible effort towards bringing their Constitution into compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights, thereby enabling their Stabilisation and Association Agreement to be brought into force as soon as possible. We also expect there to be a reference to key priorities that local leaders should aim to address before making a credible membership application. We expect the Council to call for a swift and sustainable resolution to the current political uncertainty in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

EU Human Rights Strategy

We expect a discussion on the proposed EU Human Rights Strategy, which consists of a Strategic Framework (a political declaration by the Council on the EU's direction on human rights) and an Action Plan.There may also be discussion of an EU Special Representative on Human Rights, on which a draft mandate has been circulated amongst Member States. There may be Council Conclusions.

Freedom of Religion

Ministers may discuss freedom of religion or belief, following an increase in violence directed towards religious communities in Nigeria. We are active in working to defend this fundamental freedom and encourage the EU to continue to give full attention to promoting freedom of religion or belief in its bilateral and multilateral relations.

Iran

Following the limited progress in three rounds of talks between the E3+3 and Iran, there will be an opportunity for Ministers to ensure the EU maximises pressure on Iran, including reviewing the oil embargo and Protection and Indemnity insurance ban, ahead of implementation on 1 July.

General Affairs Council (GAC)

The meeting will be the last under the Danish Presidency, and will be chaired by Denmark's Minister for European Affairs Nicolai Wammen. There are three main items on the agenda: the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), Cohesion Policy and preparation for the 28 June European Council. There will also be a discussion on whether to open accession negotiations with Montenegro.

Multiannual Financial Framework

As with previous meetings of the GAC, my main focus for these discussions will be for the negotiating box to reflect the UK's objective of delivering a restrained EU Budget, limited to a

real-terms freeze. Within a restrained budget, a greater share should be directed to priority areas such as external action, research and climate change. I will also defend the rebate and argue against any new EU taxes. The Presidency intends the negotiating box to establish parameters for the discussions after their Presidency and for MFF discussion at the June European Council.

Cohesion Policy

The Presidency will seek agreement of a partial general approach on several issues: on concentrating future programmes on fewer objectives; on the rules for financial instruments; on the performance framework; and on proposals on revenue generating projects. We will need to look horizontally at the specific regulations for the funds covered by the Common Provisions Regulations, including those for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to ensure consistency between them and to maximise the opportunities for harmonising the rules to reduce burdens for final recipients and authorities.

June European Council

Over lunch Ministers will discuss the priorities for the June European Council with President Herman van Rompuy.This conversation will continue into the afternoon, following the Council's approval of the Country Specific Recommendations when the plenary session reconvenes.The June European Council agenda is broad, covering growth, trade, the MFF, energy, enlargement, justice and home affairs and foreign policy. We expect the focus to be largely on economic issues in the Eurozone.

Montenegro's EU Accession

As agreed at the December 2011 European Council, the GAC will also discuss whether to open accession negotiations with Montenegro.The Commission's May 2012 report on Montenegro's progress implementing its reforms again concluded that Montenegro continues to make good progress and that accession negotiations should be opened.The UK supports this recommendation.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-affairs-council-and-general-affairs-council-to-meet-in-luxembourg