Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Afghanistan, Middle East and North Africa, Iran and Somalia discussed in Brussels

2011-11-21

Full text of the Minister for Europe's written statement to Parliament:

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and General Affairs Council (GAC) were held on 14-15 November in Brussels. My Rt. Hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary attended the FAC (foreign affairs). My Hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (PUSS) for International Development attended the FAC (development). The UK Permanent Representative attended the GAC.

The agenda items covered were as follows:

Foreign Affairs Council (foreign affairs)

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

Provisional report of the meeting (both foreign affairs and development), and all Conclusions adopted

Afghanistan

Ministers agreed Conclusions (see link above) that approved a mandate for an EU cooperation agreement for partnership and development with Afghanistan. They also agreed to extend the EU police mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) in principle until the end of 2014, and made a commitment to support Afghan efforts in strengthening policing and the rule of law beyond 2014.

The Foreign Secretary stressed the importance of a clear vision for a future political settlement being set out by Afghanistan at the Bonn Conference on 5 December. He also underlined Pakistan's key role and the need for the EU to maintain momentum on engagement with Pakistan, as agreed by Ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council in July.

Syria

Ministers adopted Conclusions and restrictive measures against a further 18

members of the Syrian regime and stopping all European Investment Bank loans.

Following the FAC, the Foreign Secretary said:

“I welcome the EU’s decision today to apply further pressure on President Assad’s regime, following the strong measures announced by the Arab League this weekend. The EU has listed a further 18 individuals involved in or supporting the regime’s activities, including military, security and intelligence officials leading military operations in Syria. In addition, the EU has moved to prevent any further disbursement of loans from the European Investment Bank to Syria.

President Assad has ignored countless calls by the international community to put an end to the horrific violence in Syria. Since the Syrian regime’s claim to have agreed to the plan put forward by the Arab League on 2 November, violence has only escalated with a death toll of over 3,500 people since March. As long as the violence continues, we will continue to press the Syrian regime to bring an end to this killing”.

Libya

Ministers agreed Conclusions welcoming the declaration of the liberation of Libya on 23 October. They encouraged the National Transitional Council to respect human rights in line with its Constitutional Charter.

The Foreign Secretary emphasised the success of NATO’s military intervention. The three key actions for now were moving forward with EU support, engaging the tools of the Neighbourhood Policy and sending measured but clear signals on our expectations on human rights, including the rights of women.

Tunisia and Egypt

Conclusions welcomed the ‘historic’ elections in Tunisia (see link above). Baroness Ashton laid out support underway or ready to be negotiated with the new Government: agricultural liberalisation, ‘open skies’, a mobility partnership, a free trade agreement, and a doubling of funding in 2011 to €160m. On Egypt, there was a brief exchange on elections due later this month. Ministers are likely to return to this at their meeting in December.

Horn of Africa and Somalia

Ministers adopted a strategic framework for the Horn of Africa. This will guide EU action in five areas: building robust and accountable political structures; contributing to conflict resolution and prevention; mitigating security threats emanating from the region; promoting economic growth, and supporting regional economic cooperation.

On Somalia, Ministers adopted Conclusions which expressed concern about the situation in Somalia, reaffirmed the EU's commitment to support AMISOM and to continue the EU training mission for Somalia's security forces.

The Foreign Secretary set out the UK's support for Kenyan action in Somalia, which he stressed should be done in coordination with the Transitional Federal Government and in

compliance with international law. He also outlined proposals for an international conference on Somalia in 2012, announced by the Prime Minister on 14 November.

Iran

Ministers agreed Conclusions expressing increasing concern about the possible military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear programme and the lack of progress with diplomatic efforts. They also raised the prospect of reinforced sanctions measures in December.

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Over lunch, Ministers discussed current and possible future CSDP operations. The Foreign Secretary set out the UK's substantial contribution to European Defence, not least as the EU country with the largest defence budget. He also reiterated the UK?s longstanding opposition to the establishment of an EU Operational Headquarters. Baroness Ashton concluded that EU Defence and Foreign Ministers would discuss this further at their meetings on 30 November and 1 December respectively.

Foreign Affairs Council (development)

The EU Common Position for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4, Busan, 29 November - 1 December 2011)

The EU Common Position for Busan was adopted and received general endorsement from Member States. PUSS O'Brien stated the UK's desire to see a clear focus on transparency, results and fragility and stressed the importance of ensuring Busan produces an ambitious outcome that engages broader development actors as well as traditional donors. This was endorsed by Commissioner Piebalgs and the High Representative Baroness Ashton.

Ministers also discussed the issue of EU 'Joint Programming'. Commissioner Piebalgs proposed a Busan initiative which launched Joint Programming in pilot countries. PUSS O'Brien set out the UK?s concerns and made it clear that consultation on any list of countries and any form of EU Coordination must be country-led, pragmatic and open to all donors, rather than led by Brussels.

Horn of Africa

Development Ministers addressed the humanitarian and development aspects of the Horn of Africa crisis, continuing the discussion held by Foreign Ministers during the Foreign Affairs Council earlier in the day. Commissioner Georgieva praised UK leadership in the Horn and called for a concerted long-term effort which addressed resilience.

PUSS O'Brien called for a sustained EU effort over 2012 with more Member States providing support and highlighted the importance of engaging with Turkey, the Gulf States and other donors in an ambitious response based on need and resilience. Ashton concluded by endorsing PUSS O'Brien's message on the need for a holistic response and the importance of finding a political solution. This was supported by a number of Member States. The PUSS also confirmed that the UK would be hosting the Somalia Conference next year. The announcement was met with wide approval from Ministers, Baroness Ashdown and the Commissioners attending.

Future of EU Development Policy

Ministers endorsed the recent European Commission's (EC) Communication on 'Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: An Agenda for Change'. PUSS O'Brien stressed the importance of establishing a results framework for EU aid and also reinforced the UK concerns on EU Joint Programming.

EU Budget Support

This item focused on the EC Communication on „The Future Approach to EU Budget Support to Third Countries? - which was broadly welcomed by Ministers. There was general agreement on the principle of differentiating aid - ensuring it is more focused on the poorest countries. PUSS O?Brien stressed that decisions on budget support should be made in-country on a case by case basis, with non-EU donors and Member States retaining full ministerial responsibility over funding decisions.

AOB: G20 and Energy for All

Limited time was afforded to these AOB points. Nevertheless, France highlighted the achievements of the French G20 Cannes Declaration. Additionally, Commissioner Piebalgs stated that he would write to Ministers on his initiative on Sustainable Energy for All.

General Affairs Council (GAC)

The GAC was chaired by the Polish EU Presidency (Mikolaj Dowgielewicz, State Secretary for European Affairs).

Draft record of the meeting

Multiannual Financial Framework

Ministers discussed the EU?s multiannual framework for 2014-2020. The Presidency indicated that it would present a report to the European Council on 9 December. They stressed that this report would signal the end of the clarification stage, paving the way for negotiations to begin in earnest in January 2012 under the Danish Presidency.

The UK Permanent Representative set out the UK's views. The current proposals were too high. The Commission needed to explore ways of replacing some current expenditure rather than adding more. Proposals to increase structural and cohesion funds as well as the Connecting Europe Facility were also too high. The UK could not support macro fiscal conditionality on EU Budget funding due to the special position of the UK by virtue of Protocol 15 of the Treaties. Structural funds should be directed towards the poorest regions which are mostly located in the poorest Member States. And the Commission's proposals on the Common Agricultural Policy needed to be substantially reduced.

October and December European Councils

Ministers reviewed the proposed agenda for the December Council which includes economic issues, energy and EU enlargement. Signature of the Treaty on the accession of Croatia to the EU is scheduled for the margins of the December Council.

During the discussion on draft European Council Conclusions the UK Permanent Representative stressed the need to reflect earlier Council Conclusions on ensuring the widest possible reduction of regulatory burden and the importance of trade as a driver for growth. The UK Permanent Representative welcomed the undertaking of President van Rompuy to update the European Council on the reflections of the euro area Member States, but noted that October European Council Conclusions had talked in more explicit terms about the integrity of the EU as a whole and the role of the 27 in any discussion on treaty change; and that the UK wanted to see that approach reflected here.

Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Ministers agreed Conclusions which welcomed the European Commission?s report on the Baltic Sea Strategy which had been agreed by the General Affairs and External Relations Council in October 2009.

I will deposit copies of this note in the libraries of both Houses. And I will also continue to update Parliament on future Foreign and General Affairs Councils.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/afghanistan-middle-east-and-north-africa-iran-and-somalia-discussed-in-brussels