Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Minister updates Parliament on outcome of Foreign Affairs Council

2012-01-30

In a written statement he said:

A provisional report of the meeting and all Conclusions adopted

The agenda items covered were as follows:

Iran

Ministers agreed an extensive package of sanctions and accompanying Conclusions (see link above) focusing on Iran's nuclear programme. The measures adopted include a phased embargo on Iranian oil; freezing the Central Bank of Iran's assets; and sanctions on the petrochemical sector, gold and precious metal and dual-use goods.

Following the meeting, the Foreign Secretary said:

"Today's action demonstrates the EU's growing concern about Iran's nuclear programme, and our determination to increase peaceful, legitimate pressure on Iran to return to negotiations.

It is action made necessary by Iran's defiance of six UN Security Council Resolutions and its refusal to enter negotiations over its nuclear programme. Iran's recent decision to commence 20% enrichment at its underground site at Qom shows that it continues to choose a path of provocation. This is an enrichment programme that has no plausible civilian use, in a site that the Iranian authorities hoped to keep secret.

We call again on Iran to answer the serious questions raised by the International Atomic Energy Agency, to adhere to UN Security Council Resolutions and to suspend its enrichment programme in accordance with them. Iran has it in its power to end sanctions by changing course and addressing the concerns of the international community. We are ready to talk at any point if Iran puts aside its preconditions. Today's sanctions show how serious EU member states are about preventing nuclear proliferation and pressing Iran to return to the negotiating table. We will urge other nations across the world to implement similar measures and to increase the impact of the measures the EU has adopted".

The Prime Minister made a

statement on the Iranian sanctions

with President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel on 23 January.

The Foreign Secretary made a response to an

urgent question on Iran

in Parliament on 24 January.

Burma

EU Ministers agreed Conclusions (see link above) recognising the recent progress in Burma and suspending visa bans against the President, members of the Cabinet and speakers of the Houses of Parliament.

Drawing from his recent visit, the Foreign Secretary highlighted the changes in Burma as justifying these first steps towards enhancing the EU's engagement with the country. He stressed that the EU should only make any further responses following progress against our benchmarks: the release of remaining political prisoners, free and fair by-elections on 1 April, and credible steps towards resolving ethnic conflict.

Syria

Ministers agreed an 11th round of restrictive measures against Syria, which listed a further 22 individuals and 8 entities. Ministers also agreed Conclusions (see link above) which included expressions of concern over the Syrian Government's brutal crackdown, and a welcome for the Arab League's initiative to seek United Nations Security Council support for a political solution.

Speaking after the meeting, the Foreign Secretary said:

"I welcome today's EU agreement to an 11th round of EU sanctions on Syria, targeting 22 individuals and 8 entities supporting the Syrian regime's appalling campaign of violence and repression against its own people.

The UK has been a driving force behind these EU sanctions, working closely with other EU states. The sanctions demonstrate that the international community will identify and hold to account those responsible for abuses. Anyone involved in supporting the regime's repression should carefully consider their actions.

The UK supports the Arab League's leadership in seeking to resolve the current crisis. We welcome its call for President Assad to leave power and allow a political transition. Assad's brutal repression means he has lost all legitimacy and should step aside, opening the way to

the freedom demanded by the Syrian people. We will continue to increase the pressure on the Syrian regime in support of this goal."

Serbia / Kosovo

Discussion focused on a possible decision on Serbia's candidate status at the General Affairs Council on 27 February. I argued that the award of candidate status should be based on progress against the conditions agreed by the December European Council, in particular on regional cooperation.

Middle East Peace Process

Conclusions were agreed (see link above) supporting talks in Jordan, encouraging the parties to remain engaged and pressing Israel on settlements.

I briefed on President Abbas's visit to London of 16-17 January, where he had meetings with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Egypt

Ministers had a brief exchange on Egypt. On 22 January (the day before the FAC), the Foreign Secretary spoke about the historic change and opportunity following the opening of the Egyptian Parliament:

"2011 was a year of historic change and opportunity for Egypt. The world was inspired by the courage of the Egyptian people in the revolution which began on 25 January, as they demonstrated for their dignity, their freedom and their rights. What has followed has been a time of great hope and optimism, but also anxiety and uncertainty. Much has been achieved, but challenges remain. The historic elections for the People's Assembly, now almost complete, are an important step in building a prosperous and stable future for the new Egypt.

Britain will continue be a close friend and strong partner to the Egyptian people as they consolidate the country's transition to democracy."

Belarus

Ministers agreed to broaden the criteria for subjecting persons and entities to targeted sanctions. This paves the way for the EU to impose travel bans and asset freezes on those responsible for any serious human rights violations or the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition, and on those people or entities supporting or benefiting from the current regime.

Sudan and South Sudan

Ministers agreed Conclusions (see link above) expressing concern about the deteriorating and unpredictable situation between both countries.

Speaking on 22 January, the Foreign Secretary commented:

“I am gravely concerned at reports that South Sudan intends to shut down its oil production, and at Sudan’s earlier decision to seize South Sudanese oil and prevent oil tankers from leaving its ports. Unilateral actions do nothing to further the prospects of the people of either country. I remind both governments of the statesmanship they showed last year in allowing the people of South Sudan to determine their own future. I call on them to show that same statesmanship now, by refraining from dangerous and destabilising actions of this sort, and by continuing to work with President Mbeki and the AU High Level Implementation Panel to negotiate a fair settlement.”

Somalia

I updated Ministers on the forthcoming London Conference on Somalia, and committed to follow up at a future FAC.

Religious Freedom

Italy initiated a short discussion about how the EU might update its approach to human rights and freedom of religion and beliefs in the context the recent bombings in Nigeria.

Common Security and Defence Policy

EU Ministers adopted without discussion Conclusions on the activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Horn of Africa.

I will continue to update Parliament on future Foreign and General Affairs Councils.”

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-updates-parliament-on-outcome-of-foreign-affairs-council