Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Ministers to discuss EU issues in Brussels

2011-05-19

Minister for Europe David Lidington has set out the agenda for next week's Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council.

In a written statement to Parliament the Minister for Europe said:

Foreign Affairs Council (Foreign Ministers)

Libya

Ministers are expected to discuss developments in Libya since the Contact Group meeting in Rome of 5 May, where participants agreed to increase pressure on Qadhafi's regime. Ministers are likely to agree Conclusions referring to the recent announcements by the International Criminal Court (ICC) - see more below. And they may assess the humanitarian situation and discuss the possibility of setting up an EU office in Benghazi.

On 12 May, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, Chair of the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC), visited the UK and met the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development. The Foreign Secretary updated parliament in a

written ministerial statement on 13 May

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On 16 May, the Foreign Secretary welcomed the announcement by the ICC that Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo will apply for arrest warrants for Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, Saif al Islam al Qadhafi and Abdullah Senussi.

The Foreign Secretary said:

"I welcome this announcement. The human rights situation in Western Libya and the behaviour of the Qadhafi regime remains of grave concern and the UK was at the forefront of efforts in the UN to adopt resolution 1970 which referred the situation in Libya to the ICC. The request for these warrants is a reminder to all in Qadhafi's regime that crimes will not go unpunished and the reach of international justice will be long."

“Those responsible for attacks on civilians must be held to account. The international community must fully support the ICC in thoroughly investigating all allegations. I call on all UN Member States, whether parties to the Rome Statute or not, to offer their full co-operation”.

Syria

We expect the Council to agree Conclusions on Syria condemning the violence and ongoing repression of peaceful protestors and for release of detainees. It could also call for the UN/ICRC to be granted immediate humanitarian access to several towns in Syria; and to urge the Syrian Government to choose the path of reform and warn the Syrian leadership that the EU will work to agree sanctions unless the violence stops and detainees are released.

On 13 May, the FCO’s Political Director, Sir Geoffrey Adams, called in the Syrian Ambassador Dr Sami Khiyami to the Foreign Office to express the UK’s strong concerns about the ongoing situation in Syria.

Sir Geoffrey emphasised the UK’s profound concern about the Syrian government’s violent repression of its own citizens, and called on the Syrian authorities to respect universal human rights, including freedom of expression. Sir Geoffrey also expressed concern about the continued denial of access of international media into Syria.

The Political Director called on the Syrian Government to allow UN and other humanitarian organisations immediate and unhindered access to besieged Syrian cities, particularly the city of Deraa.

Sir Geoffrey said that unless the Syrian government stopped the killing of protestors and released political prisoners, the UK along with its EU partners would take further measures to hold the regime to account. These measures would include further sanctions targeted at the highest levels of the regime, including travel bans and asset freezing.

Yemen

This will be a further opportunity for the EU to demonstrate support for the Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC’s) initiative to resolve the current political deadlock to agree the transitional process. Further deterioration in Yemen’s economic and humanitarian situation, and a rise in violence between protestors and security forces, underpins the urgent need for a political settlement. The Government has remained in close contact with EU, US and Gulf counterparts on finding a peaceful solution. We expect there to be Council Conclusions.

My Honourable Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary State (Alistair Burt) discussed recent events when he met UN Special Envoy to Yemen Jamal Benomar in London on 12 May.

Speaking after the meeting My Honourable Friend said:

“Mr Benomar’s insights into recent developments in Yemen reinforced my deep concern about what is happening. I condemn the actions taken by the security forces that have reportedly caused the death of several protestors and injured many more in Taiz, Sana’a, and cities across Yemen. Mr Benomar and I agreed that all parties should exercise the utmost restraint and take all steps necessary to defuse this situation.

I urge the Yemeni authorities to demonstrate their commitment to an orderly and peaceful transition by respecting the right of peaceful protest and free speech. The rising violence we have witnessed risks undermining the efforts to secure the agreement brokered by the Gulf Co-operation Council. All parties need to come together urgently to confirm their commitment to this”.

Iraq

Baroness Ashton may raise the incident at Camp Ashraf in Iraq on 8 April, in which 34 people died and some 70 were injured. The UK has supported calls for an independent inquiry.

On 8 April, my Honourable Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary State (Alistair Burt) made the following statement:

“The UK Government has been disturbed to read reports that a number of civilian residents have been killed and many more wounded at Camp Ashraf yesterday. I absolutely deplore any loss of life and my sincere condolences go out to the families of those involved.

The Iraqi Government has provided us with assurances on several occasions that it will treat individual residents of camp Ashraf in a humane manner, act in accordance with Iraqi law, the Iraqi Constitution and its international obligations. We urge the Iraqi Government to uphold this commitment.

Our Ambassador in Baghdad has been expressing our concerns to the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the highest levels. We call on the Iraqi Government to cease violent operations in Camp Ashraf immediately and to ensure that the residents have full access to medical care. It is important that the Government of Iraq takes immediate steps to calm the situation and ensure that the human rights of the residents are respected. We are aware of a request by UNAMI to send a humanitarian monitoring mission to camp Ashraf as soon as possible. We fully support this request and therefore urge the Iraqi Government to quickly grant permission. We call on all sides to engage in a constructive dialogue that can lead to a lasting resolution to the situation.”

Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)

Ministers are likely to discuss recent developments in the MEPP, including the implications of the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation. There may also be Conclusions. We will make clear our hope that the announcement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas will lead to the formation of a government that rejects violence and pursues a negotiated peace, and that we will judge a future Palestinian government by its actions and its readiness to work for peace.

On 15 May, the Foreign Secretary called on all parties to exercise restraint after violence broke out on Israel's borders as Palestinians marked Nakba Day.

The Foreign Secretary said:

"I am deeply concerned by the violence on Israel's borders today and saddened by the loss of life. I call on all parties to exercise restraint and ensure that civilian life is protected. These developments make clearer than ever that a lasting and comprehensive resolution to the conflicts in the region is urgently needed and will only be achieved through negotiation."

Southern Caucasus

We expect Ministers to discuss recent developments in the South Caucasus, and in particular to focus on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

We expect Ministers to discuss the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) following Baroness Ashton's visit there on 13 May. The Government is deeply concerned that a BiH State-level government has not been formed over seven months after elections; that divisive nationalist rhetoric continues; and that there have been recent serious challenges to state level institutions and to the Dayton Agreement. We will urge the Council to remain fully engaged on this issue and to react as necessary to developments on the ground.

Sudan

Ministers are expected to be briefed on the key elements of the EU's Comprehensive Approach to Sudan, with a view to a possible substantive discussion and adoption of Conclusions at the FAC in June. Given the lack of progress on key issues under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and the ongoing violence in Darfur, the meeting on 23 May will be an important opportunity for Ministers to stress the importance of a continued focus on Sudan, both in the run up to and following the secession of South Sudan on 9 July.

External Action Service (EAS)

This should be an opportunity to set out our view on the priorities for EAS action, and to underline that the EAS should limit its representation of the member states to agreed areas. It will also be an opportunity to voice our opposition to the proposed budget increase for the

EAS of 5.8% (27 million Euros) in 2012, and press the EAS to produce a convincing plan for the savings that will lead to budget neutrality.

Iran

There should be an agreement, without discussion, to the designation of over 100 entities in order to strengthen EU sanctions and increase the pressure on Iran's nuclear programme. In addition, Baroness Ashton may brief Ministers on the reply she recently received from the Iranian chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili. A spokesperson for Baroness Ashton commented to the press that the reply "does not seem to justify" organising another meeting between the E3+3 (UK, France, Germany, US, Russia and China) and Iran at this time.

EU Human Rights

Baroness Ashton will brief Ministers on her preliminary views on an EU overall strategy for human rights, followed by an exchange of views. The final strategy is due to be announced in June 2011.

Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)

The current agenda includes three main items: an informal discussion of military operations; a formal discussion of military capabilities; and the European Defence Agency (EDA) Steering Board.

Informal working session on operations

Ministers will be joined by the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen for an informal discussion of military operations. The session is likely to focus on a potential extension to EU Training Mission Somalia. We do not expect the discussion to result in a decision; this is likely to be deferred to the June FAC. The session will also update progress on Operation ATALANTA, ALTHEA, and EUFOR Libya.

Formal working session on military capabilities

There will be Conclusions on pooling and sharing military capabilities and a broader dialogue on the Weimar initiative. Ministers are likely to discuss the High Representative's interim report (yet to be released) on the progress of the Weimar initiative and implementation of provisions in the Lisbon Treaty. We will support the principle of increased pooling and sharing among European and NATO partners but resist any calls for the creation of additional institutions or processes.

EDA Steering Board

The agenda for this meeting is currently being finalised. It will build from the session on capabilities, taking stock on key capability development projects and initiatives, including pooling and sharing and the European Air Transport Fleet (EATF) programme. We are broadly supportive of the EDA's work in these areas.

General Affairs Council

Croatia

The Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Fule, will brief Ministers on Croatia's progress on its accession negotiations and the approaching closure of negotiations. He is likely to focus on progress within Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights). This chapter was created to strengthen the accession process after the last EU enlargement. The Government will continue to monitor Croatia's progress and ensure that this chapter is closed on the basis of a thorough technical assessment against the benchmarks, including establishing the necessary track records to ensure that reforms are sustainable. Beyond this, the Government will ensure that closure of negotiations as a whole takes place on the basis of rigorous conditionality.

Charter of Fundamental Rights

The Presidency is seeking agreement to Conclusions in response to the Commission's annual report on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Council Conclusions set out the actions taken by the Council to ensure compliance with the Charter, including the work of the Fundamental Rights working group to produce guidelines to help other formations of the Council identify and resolve fundamental rights issues. The Council Conclusions may also describe the actions the Council has taken or announced under each of the six chapters of the Charter.

Roma

Ministers will an initial discussion of proposed European Council Conclusions on the Commission's Communication of 5 April entitled An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. The Commission's Communication can be found on

their website

The Conclusions are likely to call on Member States to develop national strategies or policy approaches to improve the social and economic integration of Roma communities, specifically through access to education, employment, healthcare and housing. The UK already has a strong record on the integration of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities. We will argue for the eventual Conclusions not to be overly prescriptive to allow us the flexibility to continue with these approaches. There will be a more substantive discussion at

the 19 May Employment and Social Affairs Council, which will feed into the 24 June European Council, where we expect the adoption of formal Conclusions.

Foreign Affairs Council (Development)

Sudan

We expect the Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, to debrief Development Ministers on his visit to Khartoum and Juba and to update them on the EU's plans for joint programming in South Sudan. Additionally, a possible Council Decision is expected on the use of 200 million Euros of de-committed funds from European Development Fund (EDF) to support development efforts in South Sudan.

Accountability Report on EU Development Policy

Ministers will discuss the findings of the Commission's Accountability Report on EU Development Policy. The report assesses progress against the EU's financing for development commitments and covers Official Development Assistance (ODA), innovative finance, domestic resource mobilisation, aid for trade, climate finance, cooperation with the private sector, and aid effectiveness. The discussion is likely to focus on how to achieve the EU aid commitment to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income on aid by 2015. Ministers will adopt a report on EU ODA performance in 2010, to be considered by the June European Council. This report is a welcome means of holding other Member States to account. We will continue to press others to fulfil their aid commitments.

Water

The Hungarian Presidency is expected to deliver proposals on the role of water in EU Development Policy, for which Council Conclusions are due to go through Environmental Council in June. The Government agrees that water for growth and development as well as water supply and sanitation for human development need greater policy priority within the EU. We will therefore support proposals to update and renew the EU policy on water in EU Development Cooperation. This should support the efforts to redefine and revitalise the EU Water Initiative, set up in 2002 as part of the World Summit on Sustainable Development to mobilise and coordinate EU resources to achieve the water-related Millennium Development Goals. We believe that water should be central in preparations for Rio+20 and that the EU should play a leading role in the preparatory processes and conferences. We will continue to insist on these points in negotiations with EU partners.

Cote d'Ivoire

This is an opportunity to emphasise the need for firm international support for stabilisation, reconciliation, and justice under President Ouattara's new government. Close co-ordination of

international community efforts, appropriately resourced and structured UN involvement; active and effective UN agencies; and a UN and EU sanctions regime that supports the goals of political, economic and social progress will be important.

I will deposit copies of this note in the libraries of both Houses. And I will update Parliament on Foreign and General Affairs Councils after the meetings.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-to-discuss-eu-issues-in-brussels