



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

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Foreign Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
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Foreign Affairs Council: 20 July

I am writing to inform you about the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 20 July, which my Right Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

Foreign Affairs Council

A provisional report of the meeting and Conclusions adopted can be found at:
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/07/20/>.

Iran

The Council welcomed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, agreed on 14 July in Vienna. Ms Mogherini underlined the value of the US, Europe, China and Russia working together, and said the deal showed the EU could make a significant contribution on other international negotiations, such as the Middle East Peace Process. The Foreign Secretary opened the discussion and highlighted that this was a good deal that cut off all routes to a nuclear bomb. The next steps on implementation would however be challenging, and we would need to stay firm behind the deal. In an almost full table-round, other Member States were unanimous in their support for the agreement.

Libya

The Council was briefed by UN Special Representative Bernardino Leon on the initialling of a political agreement by the majority of Libyan parties. The Foreign Secretary congratulated Leon for his efforts and underlined the urgency of the situation. Ministers discussed what more the EU could do to bring the other parties on board and to further support the efforts towards the formation of a Government of National Accord, including the possibility of adopting sanctions against those undermining the process.

Tunisia

In a brief discussion before lunch with Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid and Foreign Minister Tajeb Baccouche, Ms Mogherini emphasised that the EU was ready to deliver its pledges of support, including on security sector reform, counter terrorism and exploring the possibility of a CSDP mission. Mogherini also announced a subsidised entry price for the Horizon 2020 programme and an increase for several years to the annual quota on tariff-free exports of olive oil from Tunisia to the EU.

Over lunch, Ministers reiterated their support to the Tunisian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The Tunisian Prime Minister set out the security challenges they faced and outlined their counter-terrorism response so far. The Foreign Secretary highlighted the scale of the UK's loss, and stressed our commitment to Tunisia and the role for the EU and its Member States on counter-terrorism, counter-radicalisation, trade and economic reform.

Middle East Peace Process

The Council discussed the Middle East Peace Process and adopted Conclusions. Ms Mogherini said that the EU should aim for incremental change in its support to the process. The Foreign Secretary acknowledged that the situation was difficult, and made clear the EU should address the urgent situation in Gaza; and increase pressure including through labelling measures.

EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights Mr Stavros Lambrinidis noted recent successes in EU human rights work, including successful campaigns for the release of human rights defenders. The Council adopted the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2015 to 2019. The High Representative noted that the UK, France and Austria had submitted national statements to the FAC minutes.

Mediterranean Migration

Hungary underlined the scale of migration along the Balkans route: up to 300,000 migrants were expected to settle or transit through Hungary this winter. Hungary's offer to host a conference on this subject was noted in the Conclusions on migration.

Macedonia

Commissioner Hahn welcomed the recent political breakthrough in Macedonia: the Opposition was moving back to Parliament after fourteen months' absence, a special prosecutor would investigate corruption and wire-tapping allegations, elections had been called for April 2016, and the main party leader would step down 100 days beforehand.

Bosnia - Herzegovina

Slovakia, on behalf of the Visegrad 4, regretted the decision by the Republic Srpska National Assembly to hold a referendum on the status of the Srpska Republic, which was a clear violation of Dayton and EU agreements. Ms Mogherini said the EEAS was urging parties not to hold the referendum, and noted no date had yet been set. She would visit the region, and proposed a full discussion at the October FAC.


Other Items

Ministers agreed a number of other measures:

- The Council adopted Conclusions on Iran.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Tunisia.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process.
- The Council adopted the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2015 to 2019 'Keeping Human Rights at the heart of the EU agenda'.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Migration.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Climate Diplomacy.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Energy Diplomacy.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Afghanistan.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Pakistan.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on the Central African Republic.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Mali.

- The Council endorsed the annual report from the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament on the main aspects of the common foreign and security policy.
- The Council endorsed the six-monthly progress report on the implementation of the EU strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- The Council amended the statement of reasons for certain persons subject to restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime.
- The Council adopted decisions on the EU position within Association Councils with Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Tunisia. The Council also adopted the EU position within the joint committee established by the Euro-Mediterranean interim Association Agreement on trade and cooperation between the EU and the Palestine Liberation Organisation for the benefit of the Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and the Gaza strip on the same matter.
- The Council adopted a Decision to add a protocol to the agreement on trade, development and cooperation between the EU and South Africa to take account of the accession of Croatia to the EU.
- The Council decided not to object to a Commission regulation establishing a flat rate for net revenue-generating projects funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds in the research, development and innovation sector.
- The Council adopted a Decision in favour of the accession of Kazakhstan to the World Trade Organisation. The Government has supported the accession of Kazakhstan to the WTO on the right terms. In acceding to the WTO, Kazakhstan will embrace a series of rules and commitments which form the foundation of an open, transparent and non-discriminatory global trading system and which will provide important guarantees for them and for the other WTO Members.
- The Council decided not to object to the adoption by the Commission of a regulation correcting requirements for investor, sponsor, original lenders and originator institutions relating to exposures to transferred credit risk.
- The Council confirmed that there are no grounds for opposing the draft measure proposed by the Commission amending the Council Directive on quality of water intended for human consumption.
- The Council adopted Conclusions on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MoU).
- The Council authorised the conclusion of a protocol to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement to take account of the accession of Croatia to the EU on 1 July 2013.
- The Council adopted a Decision on access to audiovisual services, on behalf of the European Union, of the European Convention on the legal protection of services on, or consisting of, conditional access.
- The Council appointed Mr Gustavs Norkarklis (Latvia) a member of the European Economic and Social Committee for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 20 September 2015.
- The Council appointed Ms Bettina Michelle Jakobsen (Denmark) a member of the European Court of Auditors for the period from 1 September 2015 to 28 February 2018.

I am writing in similar terms to Sir William Cash MP, Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee and Lord Boswell of Aynho, Chair of the House of Lords Committee on the European Union, copying to the Clerks of the respective Committees, Les Saunders at the Cabinet Office, Sophie Warner-Fog, FCO Departmental Scrutiny Co-ordinators, and Sheila Underwood, FCO Select Committee Liaison Officer. I am placing a copy of this letter in the library of the House. I will continue to update Parliament on Foreign and General Affairs Councils as and when future meetings are held.



THE RT HON DAVID LIDINGTON