

# House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS237)

## Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Written Statement made by: **Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington)** on 29 Jan 2015.

### Foreign Affairs Council: 19 January

My Right Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 19 January in Brussels. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Dimitris Avromopoulos, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, and Miguel Arias Cañete, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy were in attendance for some of the discussions at the FAC.

A provisional report of the meeting and Conclusions adopted can be found at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/01/19/>

#### *Russia*

Ministers discussed relations with Russia in restricted format. The High Representative, Federica Mogherini, highlighted the need for the EU to remain united in its support for Ukraine, financially and politically. Full implementation of the Minsk agreement was essential to de-escalate the situation in Ukraine. Sanctions remained an important element of the EU's approach. Ministers discussed the EEAS Russia Issues Paper, which set out options on what other EU instruments could be used to increase leverage. Commissioner Hahn outlined the need to engage with Russia on the EU's own terms.

The Foreign Secretary stressed that there should be no softening of the EU position, given there had been no constructive steps by Russia on the Minsk commitments. The EU should be ready to respond when Russia met its obligations. The Foreign Secretary also highlighted that Russia could no longer be considered a strategic partner to the EU.

#### *Counter Terrorism*

The High Representative outlined her proposal to mainstream counter-terrorism in EU foreign policy by publishing the strategy on foreign fighters in Iraq/Syria; embedding security experts in EU delegations in the MENA region; maximising use of EU agencies; and improving communication with partners in the region and at home. She urged speedy adoption of the EU Directive on Passenger Name Records (PNR).

Discussion centred on the source and spread of radicalisation in the region. Many Ministers agreed on the need for better EU communications and the need for enhanced cooperation, including with Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria. A recommendation was made for a broader approach encompassing Boko Haram and other groups in the Sahel to be discussed at the February FAC. Ministers also agreed on the need to counter both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

#### *Lunch with Arab League Secretary General Elaraby*

Ministers discussed the Middle East Peace Process, Libya and Counter Terrorism, with Secretary

General Elaraby. The Foreign Secretary agreed that countering terrorism in the region was a priority for both the EU and the Arab League, and urged the Arab League and the Arab States to improve the human rights situation in order to unlock greater EU assistance. Elaraby reassured EU Ministers that Arab Ministers shared their condemnation of terrorism.

The High Representative undertook to strengthen further formal and informal links between the EU and Arab League, both at working level and at political level. In the margins of the Council, Ms Mogherini signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Elaraby furthering cooperation between the EEAS and the Arab League.

### *Libya*

Due to the extended discussion on Russia, the substantive point on Libya was postponed until February.

### *Climate Change*

Ministers endorsed the EEAS's Action Plan for Climate Diplomacy ahead of COP21 in Paris, and agreed on the need for the EU to have a clear climate change policy. Commissioner Cañete identified securing ambitious commitments and credible climate finance as the two main challenges. Ministers called on the EU to support countries through technical assistance, expertise and funding.

### *AOB*

The High Representative updated Ministers on her thinking on the future of EU Special representatives (EUSRs) and her intention to appoint EUSRs for the Middle East and Central Asia. Ministers also noted recent events in Cuba and Colombia.

Ministers agreed without discussion a number of other measures:

- The Council adopted Conclusions on Democratic Republic of Congo/Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR);
- The Council adopted Conclusions on Tunisia;
- The Council appointed Mr Lars-Gunnar Wigemark as new EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1 March 2015 to 30 June 2015;
- The Council approved the EU position for the fifteenth meeting of the EU – Armenia Cooperation Council on 20 January in Brussels;
- The Council endorsed the six-monthly progress report on the implementation of the EU Strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, covering activities in the second semester of 2014;
- The Council agreed to launch the EU Common Security and Defence Policy mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) on 15 January 2015. It also allocated a budget of €11.4 million for the mission in the period until 14 January 2016;
- The Council decided to appeal against the judgement of the General Court in the case Council vs Hamas of 17 December (T-400/10). The Court had annulled, on procedural grounds, the Council's decision to maintain Hamas on the EU list of terrorist organisations. During the appeal, Hamas will stay on the terrorist list;
- The Council established the EU military advisory mission in the Central African Republic (CAR). This mission sets out to support security sector reform in the CAR. It also authorised the HRVP to open negotiations with the CAR authorities for an agreement on the status of this mission.