

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus debriefs the EP's Foreign Affairs Committee on the December FAC Conclusions (13 December 2012)

Caption: On 13 December 2012, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, debriefs the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) regarding EU–Russia relations, the situation in the Southern Neighbourhood and the enlargement package for the Western Balkans. In the debriefing, particular reference is made to the Southern Neighbourhood and the possibility of developing an initiative in the area of border security.

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The Minister of Foreign Affairs debriefs the EP's Foreign Affairs Committee on December FAC Conclusions - 13/12/2012

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, debriefed today the European Parliament's (EP) Foreign Affairs Committee on the Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council meeting of December 10. Dr. Marcoullis attended the EP's Foreign Affairs (AFET) Committee meeting for the last time during the Cyprus Presidency of the EU Council, on behalf of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the Committee of the Foreign Affairs Council's (FAC) discussions concerning EU-Russia relations, the situation in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, particularly the Middle East, Syria, Libya and Egypt, while also taking stock of the developments with regards to the enlargement package of the Western Balkans.

Russia

Dr. Marcoullis said that the EU Foreign Ministers reviewed the Union's relations with Russia as well as the domestic and foreign policy outlook of the country in preparations of the EU-Russia Summit on December 21.

"It will be important to use the Summit to encourage progress from the Russian side on key commitments, including on World Trade Organisation (WTO) concerns and energy," Dr. Marcoullis pointed out.

She added that the EU's regular consultations with Russia on human rights which took place on December 7 will feed into the Summit's discussions, and concluded that on the Russian side, priorities are expected to include visa liberalisation and efforts to stimulate investment and technology transfer from the EU.

Middle East

The Minister of Foreign Affairs also referred to the FAC discussions concerning the Middle East, and particularly the UN General Assembly vote granting the status of non-member Observer State to Palestine in the UN, and the subsequent announcement by the Israeli government of expanding settlements in the West Bank.

"Though EU Member States were not able to vote in a unified way on the UNGA resolution, the core goals and principles that underpin the EU's policy on the Middle East remain fully intact. The adoption of Council Conclusions by the FAC demonstrates this," stated Dr. Marcoullis.

She added that these Conclusions call on the parties to engage in direct negotiations without preconditions and with a view to attaining a viable two-state solution. They also make clear the EU's readiness to use all its instruments to support this goal and to facilitate improvement in the difficult circumstances prevailing in Gaza.

Also, whilst reiterating the EU's commitment to the security of Israel, the conclusions express the Council's dismay at the recent announcement by Israel regarding the construction of housing units. On this last issue, the Cypriot Minister informed the Committee on the statement she made yesterday to the plenary.

Meeting with Syrian Opposition Chairman

Dr. Marcoullis reported to the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the informal meeting of the Council with the chairman of the Syrian opposition coalition, Mr. Mouaz al-Khatib, for an exchange of views on the development of the opposition and latest developments on the ground.

"This was a valuable opportunity to gain first-hand information and to underscore key messages, including the need to ensure representation of minorities in the coalition, to pursue full respect for human rights -

including women's rights - and make concrete plans for the transition," underlined Dr. Marcoullis.

She added that the December FAC adopted Conclusions reiterating EU's support to the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. Dr. Marcoullis stressed that the EU's position on recognising that coalition was further elaborated and that the EU "accepts them as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people".

Finally, the Cypriot Minister mentioned that European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, reported to the Ministers on the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation and referred to her announcement of an increase of €30 million in EU support.

Southern Neighborhood, Libya and Egypt

Dr. Marcoullis mentioned the High Representative's feedback to Ministers on the outcome of the fact-finding mission in Libya, to prepare a possible initiative in the area of border security, and added that work will now be taken forward on a Crisis Management Concept for such an initiative.

As regards Egypt, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the FAC took stock of the instability that has afflicted the country in recent days ahead of the referendum on the Constitution on December 15.

"The EU is encouraging an inclusive and consensual solution and the need for a Constitution that upholds human rights for all and establishes a democratic separation of powers," she pointed out.

Western Balkans

She also informed the Committee that the FAC considered the foreign policy aspects of the enlargement package adopted by the General Affairs Council on December 11. The main focus was on Serbia/Kosovo, where the High Representative gave an update on the latest round of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue on December 4, and reported on the good progress made on a number of issues.

Dr. Marcoullis mentioned that Ministers congratulated Baroness Ashton for the progress she had achieved in the dialogue and outlined their positions on some of the foreign policy aspects of the enlargement package.

Council Conclusions on other issues

Dr. Marcoullis concluded her report to the MEPs by mentioning that the Council had also adopted Conclusions on Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

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