

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

EU Foreign Affairs Council (Defence), 30 November 2011

The Minister for International Security Strategy (Gerald Howarth): The EU Foreign Affairs Council met in Defence Ministers Formation on 30 November 2011 in Brussels. I represented the UK.

The agenda items covered were current operations, partnerships, the ATHENA Mechanism Review (the method for calculating common funding for military operations), and the European Defence Agency (EDA) budget.

Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)

The three current EU Operations, Operation ATALANTA (counter-piracy), Operation ALTHEA (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and EU Training Mission Somalia (military training mission) were discussed in the Council. Whilst expressing concern about the difficulty in meeting the commitments to which Member States have agreed to, I expressed the UK's support for these ongoing operations and presented the UK's offer to continue to command Operation ATALANTA from the UK's Operational Headquarters at Northwood.

EU/NATO partnerships were also discussed re-emphasising the importance of close working relations whilst avoiding duplication.

There was no discussion at the Council on the ATHENA mechanism review (the method for calculating common funding for military operations) as nations had been unable previously to reach agreement. The noble Baroness, Baroness Ashton proposed that further work should be carried out and the Council Conclusions noted the ongoing work on the review with a view to an agreement by the end of 2011.

I made clear that, in the current economic climate, with most Member States, including the UK, reducing their defence budgets, I could not agree to an increase in the budget of the EDA for 2012. The Council subsequently agreed to freeze the EDA budget for 2012 at the same level as 2011 (€30.5 million) in accordance with the recommendation of Baroness Ashton.

Defence and Foreign Secretaries' Joint Dinner

In the Defence and Foreign Secretaries' Joint Dinner, the EU's performance in planning and conducting missions and operations was discussed with further discussions taking place at the Foreign Affairs Council on 1st December 2011. The outcome of these discussions is reported separately in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Written Ministerial Statement on the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC).

In the FAC, Council Conclusions on Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); Missions and Operations, Capability Development and improving the EU's performance in planning and conducting missions and operations were agreed. These can be found at:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/126504.pdf

The European Defence Agency Steering Board

An EDA Steering Board at Defence Ministers level was held immediately before the Foreign Affairs Council (Defence). This meeting agreed the EDA Work Programme 2012, the EDA Work Plan for 2012-14, the Annual Defence Data Report, and the establishment of the Helicopter Training Programme Category B Project which meets the UK's requirement for EDA preparations to deliver real capability. I announced the UK's intention to join the Helicopter Training Programme Project. There was a substantive discussion on pooling and sharing; in particular on the opportunities identified by the EDA and Member States expressed their interest in engaging in specific projects and programmes.

Wednesday 7 December 2011