

Foreign Affairs Committee

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From The Chair

Rt Hon William Hague MP
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19 December 2012

Dear William

Balance of Competences Review

Thank you for your letters of 27 November and on previous occasions, keeping the Foreign Affairs Committee informed about the FCO's plans concerning the Balance of Competences Review, and inviting us to submit evidence to the foreign policy element of the Review.

The timing of the evidence-taking stage for the foreign policy report is difficult for the Committee. Ideally, we would want our response to the call for evidence itself to be based upon fresh evidence; but our existing commitments between now and Easter make this impracticable. So, unfortunately, the Committee will be unable to make a dedicated submission by the deadline of the end of February.

We do expect to make some relevant comments in the report which will flow from our current inquiry into *The future of the EU: UK Government policy*. However, I think it is unlikely that our report would be published before the end of February: late March or April is a more realistic prospect. I hope that your balance of competences review team might nonetheless take it into account.

In the meantime, I would also like to draw the attention of the foreign policy review team to the following points that my Committee has made in reports since 2010:

- In its report on *Future interparliamentary scrutiny of EU foreign, defence and security policy* (First Report of Session 2010-11, HC 697), the Committee put forward a proposal on this issue which stressed: the need for parliaments to meet to exercise oversight of EU foreign, defence and security policies; the requirement that arrangements for such meetings be inter-parliamentary, in conformity with the inter-governmental nature of CFSP and CSDP; and the need for inter-parliamentary arrangements to add value to the work done by individual parliaments. The Committee has continued to stress the inter-governmental nature of CFSP in its follow-up work on the establishment of the new inter-parliamentary CFSP oversight conference.
- In its report *Piracy off the Coast of Somalia* (Tenth Report of Session 2010-12, HC 1318), the Committee discussed the EU's maritime anti-piracy mission and EU development and humanitarian support to Somalia. The Committee urged the Government to provide at least one vessel to counter-piracy operations at all times,

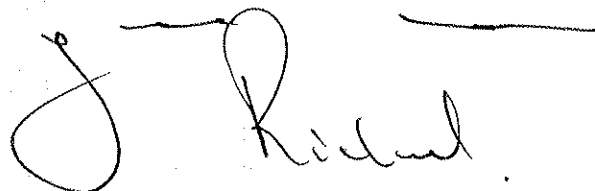
and to host the EUNAVFOR HQ at Northwood for the life of EUNAVFOR's operations (para 57). The Committee further concluded that the UK should continue to act through the UN and EU programmes to pursue peace and stability in Somalia (para 132).

- In its report on the *FCO's Departmental Annual Report 2010-11* (Eleventh Report of Session 2010-12, HC 1618), the Committee expressed some concern that the Government's – otherwise welcome – wish to place talented British diplomats into the European External Action Service might place the FCO's resources under additional strain at a time of spending and personnel cutbacks (paras 38-40).
- In its report on *UK-Turkey Relations and Turkey's Regional Role* (Twelfth Report of Session 2010-12, HC 1567), the Committee was positive about the idea of an EU-Turkey partnership outside, but not prejudicial to, Turkey's EU accession process. Such a partnership should include cooperation on foreign policy (paras 201-205).

The Committee's attention was also drawn to the issue of entry visas and the potential for a difference to open up between the visa regime facing Turkish nationals wishing to enter the Schengen area and that facing Turkish nationals wishing to enter the UK (paras 23-30). Since the Committee's report was published in April 2012, this potential appears to have increased, with the EU's launching of a process aimed at eventually lifting the Schengen visa requirement facing Turkish nationals. In the Committee's experience, visa regimes can be one of the most important factors shaping international attitudes towards those applying them. The possibility that the Schengen states may apply a more liberal visa regime than the UK may thus represent a risk for the UK in some respects. It may therefore be worth the foreign policy review team alerting their colleagues in the Home Office to this aspect of the balance of competences between the UK and the EU in the area of immigration.

- In its report on *British foreign policy and the 'Arab Spring'* (Second Report of Session 2012-13, HC 80), published in July 2012, the Committee concluded that the UK had been able to "demonstrate leadership" in the EU and the UN to achieve its desired response to the uprising in Libya (para 58). However, as regards the response to the 'Arab Spring' by the EU overall, the Committee deemed it "mixed". It welcomed the EU's stated commitment to a new approach, but identified only limited results so far. The Committee also concluded that the number of separate EU funding programmes in the region contributed to a lack of transparency which inhibited proper parliamentary scrutiny (paras 117-118).

I hope that these points can be fed into the foreign policy part of the Balance of Competences Review and will prove useful. The foreign policy review team should not hesitate to be in touch with Committee staff if they require further information.



Richard Ottaway MP
Chairman