



HOUSE OF LORDS

European Union Committee

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12th Report of Session 2007–08

**Current  
Developments in  
European Foreign  
Policy**

Report with Evidence

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Internal Market (Sub-Committee B)  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy (Sub-Committee C)  
Environment and Agriculture (Sub-Committee D)  
Law and Institutions (Sub-Committee E)  
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Lord Maclennan of Rogart	

The Members of the Sub-Committee which carried out this inquiry (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy, Sub-Committee C) are:

Lord Anderson of Swansea	Lord Jones
Lord Boyce	Lord Roper (Chairman)
Lord Chidgey	Lord Selkirk of Douglas
Lord Crickhowell	Lord Swinfen
Lord Hamilton of Epsom	Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Lord Hannay of Chiswick	Lord Truscott

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### **Oral Evidence**

*Mr Jim Murphy MP, Minister for Europe;*

*Mr Nick Latta, Head of Russia Section;*

*Mr Martin Shearman, Head of Common Foreign And Security Policy Group and European Correspondent, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

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NOTE: In the text of the report:

(Q) refers to a question in oral evidence

(p) refers to a page of written evidence



# Current Developments in European Foreign Policy

## REPORT

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1. The Committee asked the Minister of Europe, Mr Jim Murphy MP, to give evidence on the most recent developments in European Foreign Policy. We thank the Minister for his time.
2. In the Report we make available, for the information of the House, the oral evidence given to the EU Sub-Committee C (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy) by the Minister for Europe, accompanied by Mr Nick Latta, Head of Russia Section, and Mr Martin Shearman, Head of Common Foreign and Security Policy Group and European Correspondent, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 23 January 2008; and the correspondence from the Minister.
3. Key topics in the evidence are:
  - Discussion of globalisation at the December European Council (Q 1);
  - The European Security Strategy, climate change, inequality (QQ 2–4);
  - The EU’s relations with Africa, in particular discussion of human rights and good governance at the EU/Africa Summit (QQ 5, 8, 9);
  - Zimbabwe (QQ 5, 9, p 6);
  - South Africa (Q 9);
  - China’s relations with Africa (QQ 6–8);
  - The European Neighbourhood Policy (Q 10);
  - Ukraine (QQ 10–12);
  - The EU and Iran (QQ 13–18);
  - Iraq (Q 16);
  - Syria and Lebanon (Q 20, p 5).

## **APPENDIX 1: SUB-COMMITTEE C (FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY)**

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The Members of the Sub-Committee which conducted this Inquiry were:

Lord Anderson of Swansea  
Lord Boyce  
Lord Chidgey  
Lord Crickhowell  
Lord Hamilton of Epsom  
Lord Hannay of Chiswick  
Lord Jones  
Lord Roper (Chairman)  
Lord Selkirk of Douglas  
Lord Swinfen  
Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean  
Lord Truscott

### **Declaration of Interests**

A full list of Members' interest can be found in the Register of Lords Interests:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg.htm>

## **APPENDIX 2: RECENT REPORTS**

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### **Recent Reports from the EU Select Committee**

Evidence from the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany on the German Presidency (10th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 56)

The Commission's Annual Policy Strategy for 2008 (23rd Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 123)

Further Enlargement of the EU: Follow-up Report (24th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 125)

Evidence from the Minister for Europe on the June European Union Council and the 2007 Inter-Governmental Conference (28th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 142)

Evidence from the Ambassador of Portugal on the Priorities of the Portuguese Presidency (29th Report, session 2006–07, HL Paper 143)

The EU Reform Treaty: work in progress (35th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 180)

Annual Report 2007 (36th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 181)

The Treaty of Lisbon: an impact assessment (10th Report, Session 2007–08, HL Paper 62)

### **Session 2007–2008 Reports prepared by Sub-Committee C**

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy: the EU and Africa (4th Report, HL Paper 32)

Current Developments in European Defence Policy (8th Report, HL Paper 59)

### **Session 2006–2007 Reports prepared by Sub-Committee C**

Current Developments in European Defence Policy (1st Report, HL Paper 17)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy (16th Report, HL Paper 76)

The EU and the Middle East Peace Process (26th Report, HL Paper 132)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy: Kosovo (32nd Report, HL Paper 154)

Current Developments in European Defence Policy (34th Report, HL Paper 161)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy (38th Report, HL Paper 183)

# Minutes of Evidence

TAKEN BEFORE THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE EUROPEAN UNION  
(SUB-COMMITTEE C)

WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY 2008

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Present	Anderson of Swansea, L	Roper, L
	Boyce, L	Selkirk of Douglas, L
	Chidgey, L	Swinfen, L
	Hamilton of Epsom, L	Symons of Vernham Dean, B
	Hannay of Chiswick, L	Truscott, L

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## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: MR JIM MURPHY, a Member of the House of Commons, Minister for Europe, MR NICK LATTA, Head of Russia Section, and MR MARTIN SHEARMAN, Head of CFSP Group and European Correspondent, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, examined.

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**Q1 Chairman:** Minister, I think we would like to pass on to the next set of questions now. As you know, you appeared before the full Select Committee to answer some questions on the European Council last December, but there is a number of them directly referring to the foreign policy and defence aspects which we would like to put to you, as we have done in the past. I wonder whether I could begin? In your evidence to the Select Committee you commented that the discussion on globalisation had been a significant topic at the European Council. In the conclusions to the December Council there is in the annexe a reference to the European Union sharing in the “responsibility for global security and stability” and I was wondering if you could say something about how that could actually be implemented and which of the instruments of the ESDP would be relevant for that?

*Mr Murphy:* In terms of the annexe and globalisation, there are all sorts of different levels of this, of course, and we spoke about it in the Commons earlier in the week during the debate, the second reading of the European Union Amendment Bill. Just the pace of global change economically, politically and culturally probably most historians would remark that it is unsurpassed at any other time in our history. There is a broad realisation that the European Union is a phenomenal vehicle to influence, not stop but influence the nature of political, economic and cultural globalisation. So in respect of the ESDP it is about conflict prevention where we can. It is about, where there is conflict, ensuring EU coordination with NATO. It is not a new conversation, I know, but it is one in which there is an increased realisation of the importance of it, notwithstanding the continuing difficulties, and that the ESDP missions are properly funded and resourced and that there is proper coordination with

all other sorts of international agencies. Those are the sorts of responsibilities the European Union has taken and should continue to do so.

**Q2 Lord Boyce:** Minister, one of the Conclusions invited Member States to contribute to discussion on the European Security Strategy. Perhaps you could say something about how our Government is going to contribute to that? How do we evaluate the strategy and what sort of suggestions do you think we can put forward in response to that request? Do you think if there is a good response from all Member States we will see a revised strategy as an outcome of the discussion?

*Mr Murphy:* President Sarkozy, of course, has spoken about this and his ambition for this to be an important part of the hopefully soon-to-be-ended process of rotating presidencies. I think it is important because there are weaknesses in the current strategy and that argument is well rehearsed about the importance of climate change on stability, for example. Climate change is not captured by the current strategy, nor is inequality. Somebody will say—not your Lordship’s Committee, of course—“Why are you talking about inequality when we are talking about security strategies?” but the fact is that all sorts of things and all sorts of organisations, reactionary, dangerous organisations, grow from the swamp of poverty. So those sorts of things have to be captured in a new refreshed strategy. The weakness of the current strategy, if I may be allowed to say this, is that it has the tone, I think the observation is, of post-coldwarism about it which, notwithstanding it is something we have previously spoken about, would not be appropriate. In advance of that the expectation, of course, is that the plan will be to publish our own UK security strategy and having done that there would then be the opportunity to

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influence the European one. That would be our approach.

**Q3 Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Could I just add a supplementary to that? Would you expect that the broad thrust of the revised Security Strategy, which the French Presidency has said it wishes to promulgate towards the end of this year, will continue to be what was in the previous one, known as “effective multilateralism?”

*Mr Murphy:* Yes, but with additional priorities, the types of things I have already alluded to.

**Q4 Chairman:** But some of those were incorporated into the Reform Treaty, were they not? I know we are not taking questions on it, but there were modifications to the Reform Treaty to extend from the Petersberg task to some of the other tasks which were in the initial European Security Strategy?

*Mr Murphy:* Not only specifics, for example the issue of inequality in the Security Strategy is not inside the Reform Treaty, but there are important movements in the right direction. I think its effective multilateralism, without giving anything away, would be an important component of the UK’s refreshed security strategy as well, as your Lordships would expect.

**Q5 Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Could I go on to the next question, Minister, which is about Africa. We were given a very useful briefing just ahead of the EU/Africa summit by Lord Malloch-Brown and subsequent to the summit we had a written report from the Ministry and DfID, so that was very helpful, and in particular on issues of human rights and good governance it seems that most of the concerns which we as a committee expressed in advance were more or less met at the summit in what I suppose is best described as a “goal-less draw”, because whereas Mr Mugabe got to go there he did get to hear a number of views on these subjects, and others too. I wonder whether you could assess the summit from that point of view, human rights and good governance, with a little bit more time to look at it and also how you think those sorts of issues will be followed up in the future in this new partnership and how it will impact on places where, alas, it is quite clear they are having no impact at all at the moment, such as Zimbabwe?

*Mr Murphy:* Firstly, I think there is the importance that the event took place at all. I think it is significant. We can all reflect upon the nature of other nations’ diplomatic efforts in different parts of Africa and particularly China. In the environment where China is, understandably, very, very active indeed it is important that the European Union, with the types of values that we seek to embody, human rights and other important issues, is present and an active

player. So I think that is important, the event being in place at all in the first place. In terms of Mugabe, maybe it would be helpful to say—your Lordships may already be aware of this—other Member States, not just the United Kingdom, did express very publicly their abhorrence at the kind of vile regime in Zimbabwe, including Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, which helped. Not in the Zimbabwe media, of course, but it helped ensure that this was not seen by others as an old colonial UK legacy responsibility matter in the way in which Mugabe had sought to do so. On human rights, there is a number of issues, but it may be helpful if I follow this up in correspondence, if your Lordships wish. There is a number of areas of agreed work including human rights and transparency in governance over a three year period. The event took place and that in itself is important, but much more substantive in the medium term is that these eight areas of work are then implemented. Although the Prime Minister did not attend, for a very good reason, there is a real desire throughout the Government to make sure that those commitments are then followed in concrete action, and we will be monitoring that very, very closely.

**Q6 Lord Swinfen:** Minister, you have mentioned China and its increasing influence in Africa. What is it doing to improve human rights in Africa?

*Mr Murphy:* I am not party to the bilateral conversations between Chinese diplomats and African diplomats, but it could do more.

**Q7 Lord Swinfen:** Is it doing anything, do you think?

*Mr Murphy:* I think I would have to rest with the answer that first of all, I do not know every twist and turn of Chinese diplomacy. It is not doing anywhere near enough. Whether China will claim it is doing anything, I am not sure, but certainly there is an observation that where a government in Africa feels that the European Union is being too prescriptive on human rights on occasion China has been willing to fill that diplomatic void vacated by the European Union. That is a delicate way of putting it on the basis that I am not party to all of the discussions, but certainly nowhere near enough is the answer.

**Q8 Lord Anderson of Swansea:** Back to Africa, clearly the Portuguese presidency were determined to crown their six months with a long-delayed meeting on Africa. The background was the Beijing summit of African and Chinese leaders. You began by saying, I think, that the importance of the meeting, one significance, was that it took place at all. Then, to be fair, you went on to talk about eight three-year programmes. Do you have any confidence, given the way the AU has developed, that these three-year

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programmes will really bear any fruit, or was the significance only the fact that it took place?

*Mr Murphy:* As your Lordship fairly acknowledged, my response was that there was a number of reasons why the summit was important. Of course, there will be another summit in 2010, which will be an opportunity—it is not the first opportunity, but it will be a public responsibility for all of those involved to have shown demonstrable delivery on these eight areas of work over the three years. The additional matter is that from talking to those who attended there is a different tone towards the summit from the last gathering, the last agreements, and it was not the European Union dictating to the African Union or to African nations. Personally, I think that is a good thing. It is a partnership rather than a lecture. On that basis, that it is a partnership, there is a greater degree of confidence that some of the agreements entered into in partnership will be delivered.

**Q9 Lord Hamilton of Epsom:** If it is a partnership, I think you mean a partnership with South Africa, and they have completely failed to date (despite something like two million Zimbabwean refugees flooding into South Africa, which already has an unemployment problem) to grapple with this problem at all? We seem to put all our faith in him, frankly, when he has delivered almost nothing to date.

*Mr Murphy:* Discuss! I should declare an interest. I lived in South Africa for my teenage years, although the accent does not give it away! I was also the President of the National Union of Students here in the UK and I think I worked out that there was not much possibility of being elected in South Africa, being a Glaswegian! Anyway, I am declaring the interest. Of course, Lord Malloch-Brown deals with the detail of this and your Lordships will have an opportunity to discuss it more with him, but South Africa has defied any predictor of its demise since the day of the end of apartheid. We were told it would never work economically, politically or diplomatically and for all sorts of other issues, cultural, tribal, South Africa was bound to fail. Each year we are told that. I am not belittling, of course, the difficulties in terms of everything that is going on. In terms of its relationship with Zimbabwe, South Africa of course has most to gain and most to lose from a solution in Zimbabwe. The elections in Zimbabwe are due in March. I said that we wished to keep out of the Serbian elections on 3 February and it would be a phenomenal mistake for the UK to offer even an implied view about those elections, but it is clear that the current basket-case that is Zimbabwe's economy is unsustainable. South Africa knows it has the most to gain and the most to lose from the continuation of what is going on at the moment and allowing that to happen.

**Q10 Lord Swinfen:** I want to talk about the European Neighbourhood Policy, about which Lord Grenfell has recently written to you. How does the Government think that the EU should take the policy forward and on which countries does it think the EU should concentrate?

*Mr Murphy:* Relatively briefly, because I know your Lordships wish to make progress towards Iran, first of there are two principles. The Neighbourhood Policy cannot be and should never be an alternative to membership. On occasion that has not been clear enough from all the European capitals. It cannot be an alternative to membership. The second thing is that we have to avoid the temptation, which is there for obvious reasons, of competition between resources, attention and effort on, if you like, the Neighbourhood Policy for the east and the Neighbourhood Policy for the south, which is an internal friction within the system. Thirdly, what we would now wish to see is those detailed bilateral Neighbourhood Policy agreements and action plans and getting them implemented. In terms of countries, I think the Ukraine is of important strategic interest, and personally I think it is important that we focus particularly on the Ukraine.

**Q11 Lord Swinfen:** Particularly for energy.

*Mr Murphy:* Particularly for democracy, energy relations with Russia and all sorts of others. The Ukraine, as your Lordship knows, is going through a period of democratic transition and it is important that the European Union is there as supportive as we can be to support the democratically elected government which is now in place. So there is a whole series of reasons why the Ukraine is of strategic importance to the European Union.

**Chairman:** Lord Selkirk, that to some extent covers it, but perhaps you would like just to continue on the Ukraine for a moment?

**Q12 Lord Selkirk of Douglas:** Yes. We are obviously interested in the likely effects of the developing relationship with Ukraine. First of all, what the effects are likely to be on Ukraine and secondly what the effects are likely to be on Russia?

*Mr Murphy:* On Ukraine, the UK does not wish to close the door of eventual European Union membership to the Ukraine, and we have said that clearly. Again, if we go back to the point about whether it is one voice speaking on behalf of 27 or 27 voices, if it is 27 voices there certainly would be a difference in emphasis and nuance on that, but we are working with European partners who think that in time the Ukraine's destiny is within the European Union. In terms of Russia's attitude, we all know this dreadful phrase "Russia's near abroad". It is a phrase that frankly seven months ago I did not think I would ever utter, but in terms of the diplomacy of Russia's

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near abroad, the Ukraine and Georgia again in particular Russia sees as being of important national strategic interest in terms of her sphere of influence. Georgia, of course, slightly aside from the question, has had her elections and the referendum and Russia's response has been unenthusiastic but relatively measured. I just wish to put that on record.

**Q13 Lord Anderson of Swansea:** Minister, the European Union's relations with Iran tell us much about power relations within the Union with the EU3 and also about the interrelations with the United States of America on Iranian policy. The main development since last we met has been the National Intelligence estimate of the United States. Is it the view of the European Union that this means for the US the military option is off the table?

*Mr Murphy:* I think President Bush has said that all options remain on the table. It may not be verbatim, but that is the tone of his response. I think your Lordships may find it helpful if I updated your Lordships in general terms about a gathering of the EU3 plus three (ourselves, Germany, France, the US, Russia and China) in Berlin yesterday which David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, attended. The very good news is that in principle there is agreement for a further in principle UN Security Council resolution on Iran. I think that is a really substantial step forward.

**Q14 Lord Anderson of Swansea:** Are you able to say a little more? Presumably that will mean a package of enhanced sanctions in respect of Iran? Are you able to particularise on that?

*Mr Murphy:* There will be a point in the process where I think it will be helpful to particularise on it, but at this current stage, now that we have the EU3 plus three agreement, there is now an issue about gathering wider Security Council endorsement of a resolution in terms of the package, but certainly without going into any detail sanctions would of course be part of that. I am happy if your Lordships will be comfortable that at the appropriate time we will share the information.

**Q15 Lord Anderson of Swansea:** Thank you. With the Chairman's indulgence, one related matter: clearly for the last three years the UK, France and Germany have worked on behalf of the Union as an EU3. There has been some resentment of this directorate (or whatever one calls it) and one has also had the problems over the invitations to London by the Prime Minister excluding the smaller countries. What can you tell us about the current state of the other countries about the EU3 generally and any new power developments within the Union?

*Mr Murphy:* I suspect there will be some who would wish to have an EU27 plus three. We cannot work in that way, but the EU3 is clear, notwithstanding any friction—which I think actually is overstated on occasion in the media—that there is an acceptance across the European Union, the three European states operating on behalf of the 27. When I was asked at Lord Grenfell's committee last week, I made it clear there (although this may not now be as necessary) that in the absence of a new UN resolution the European Union was willing to take collective sanctioning measures on its own. We will have to see how successful we now are in the detail of that UN resolution. That may no longer be necessary.

**Q16 Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** Minister, that EU position which Lord Grenfell has been discussing with you is very much focused on the nuclear power as it relates to Iran. What about Iranian attitudes to Iraq? Do the EU speak with one voice in trying to discourage Iran's well-documented interference in the internal affairs of Iraq—and "interference" is the mildest word I can think of to describe Iranian activities in Iraq? Does the European Union gather around on that issue or are the well-known positions of the past still very much a factor of the present?

*Mr Murphy:* The fact is that in the conversations about Iraq time and different personalities have led to a diminishing friction over the events of the recent past. The French Government is an important component of that changed dynamic, of course. I attended a meeting of the General Affairs Council of the European Union before Christmas where Iraqi ministers including the Iraqi Foreign Minister attended. It is difficult to overstate the determination to leave the past in the past. France in particular, and the minister who was there would have been Minister Jouyet, who spoke passionately about these issues, says it is finished and to leave the past where it is, and about unanimity about supporting Iraq in the process it is now involved in. So it is a very, very strong position.

**Q17 Lord Hamilton of Epsom:** Minister, I have had disagreements with Members of this Committee about whether Iran holds a veto on Arab-Israeli negotiations. I am convinced that it does because it controls Hezbollah and if any deal was done on the Arab-Israeli side which excluded Iran they could just get Hezbollah to start mortaring Northern Israel, which would break everything up. The EU have gone much further in talking to Iran than the Americans have and I think that may be unpleasant but is a necessity. Should we not make more of this? I think American foreign policy is completely mistaken in trying to make Iran a pariah state. I think we have got to talk to them. I do not think they are very nice

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people, but I think they are absolutely critical to the future of the whole region.

*Mr Murphy:* Do they operate a veto? Of course not, diplomatically. We all know that in terms of diplomacy of the Middle East Iran does not have a veto. Do they have the potential to wreck or assist the process? The sad assessment is that I think they do, through the funding of different organisations. But it is important for us to be able to talk to those with whom we do not agree. That fact is that, for example, in the Annapolis Conference it was very important for us to have the Syrian attendance. I am not a supporter of the regime or some of the characters, but it is important that they are party to the conversation.

**Q18 Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Can I follow up that point, because I very strongly agree with the view that the United States ought to be talking to Iran. Surely there will never be a better moment for the United States to agree without conditions to start a dialogue with Iran than the moment when the Security Council unanimously adopts a new punitive sanctions regime? Are we going to do anything to ensure that that opportunity is taken?

*Mr Murphy:* I am in a difficult position, as your Lordships will appreciate, neither being a spokesman for the Iranian Government nor the US Government. All I would say is that it is important for us to be able to talk to people we do not agree with.

**Q19 Lord Truscott:** Minister, on Iran how would you rate present cooperation with the Russian Federation, particularly on the Bushehr nuclear plant and the issue of nuclear non-proliferation?

*Mr Murphy:* Generally I think Russia is very engaged in this, which is reflected in their willingness in principle and actually in some detail—the detail will emerge over the next short period—as to the detail about the new proposed UN Security Council

resolution, so I think they are seized of it, they are engaged in it and they have a decent bilateral relationship with Iran, which is important, and they are in a position to offer, if one likes, part of the package of incentives. The incentives would be WTO plus longer term incentives in terms of Iran. In the short-term, in terms of their civil nuclear capacity, Russia is in a position to provide technology and support for legal Iranian action on its nuclear effort. So I think Russia is engaged diplomatically and bilaterally in a helpful way.

**Q20 Lord Anderson of Swansea:** We have had a bit of a Cook's tour of the Middle East, but could I, subject to that, mention Syria? Syria can prevent heavy weaponry from Iran reaching the Lebanon, which can be a major complicating factor in the area. President Sarkozy and the US appear to have a special relationship in respect of the Lebanon. How do we bilaterally and as Europeans judge what some say is a new flexibility on the part of the Syrians in respect of the Middle East's troubles?

*Mr Murphy:* The slight advantage as Minister for Europe is that Syria is not my speciality, but I think the fact that Syria is willing to participate in the conference is important. The French have a historic relationship with the Lebanon, as we know. I daresay that what I will have to do is to invite your Lordships to allow me to correspond with you on this specific matter after consultations with Kim Howells, the Minister –

**Chairman:** Yes, we have been in touch with him on this. Minister, can I, on behalf of the Committee, thank you very much indeed for coming. We realise that you have quite a lot of other worries of a parliamentary nature on your hands at the moment, but to come and talk to us both about Russia and about the European Council has been very valuable and will contribute to the reports which we are preparing. Thank you very much indeed.

#### Supplementary memorandum by Jim Murphy MP, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

When I gave evidence to Sub-Committee C on 23 January on European Union Foreign Policy, I agreed to correspond on two points.

Lord Anderson raised the issue of Syria and its regional policies. I said that I would consult my colleague, Dr Howells, Minister of State with responsibility for the Middle East.

The UK remains seriously concerned about the role that Syria is playing in Lebanon and the broader region. Syria's attendance at Annapolis and the efforts they have made to build their relationship with the Iraqi government show some flexibility in their approach. However, we judge there is a great deal more Syria could do to improve its regional policies.

Syria must play a constructive part in resolving the current political impasse in Lebanon, in the interests of all communities in Lebanon. Syria also needs to meet its international commitments as set out in a range of UN Security Council Resolutions. This means normalising relations as well as stemming the flow of weapons to Hizballah. Syria also continues to host the leadership of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Damascus.

In addition, despite some progress, foreign fighters continue to transit Syria on their way to Iraq: a trend which fuels violence in Iraq and creates a threat to Syria itself.

Our EU partners share many of our concerns about Syria. One area that we work together particularly closely on is human rights. In past months, we have seen a worrying deterioration in the human rights situation in Syria, with activists being detained simply for holding a meeting calling for greater democratic rights. The use of torture also remains a serious concern, and there are several reports of suspects dying during interrogation. The British Embassy in Damascus, working with other EU missions, continues to press the Syrians to improve conditions in general, as well to raise individual cases of concern. In addition, the EU Presidency made a statement on 1 February 2008 condemning the recent deterioration in the situation.

I also agreed to follow up Lord Hannay's question on Africa with more detail on the EU's approach to the human rights situation in Zimbabwe.

The 2007 EU Annual Report on Human Rights noted that the dire human rights situation in Zimbabwe had continued to deteriorate, with brutal treatment of opposition figures, human rights activists, and ordinary citizens exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

The EU closely monitors and takes appropriate action on human rights violations in Zimbabwe, most recently making a demarche to the Zimbabwe Government on 24 January. Under the joint EU-Africa Strategy and Action Plan, agreed at the EU/Africa Summit in December 2007, the Government of Zimbabwe has an obligation to protect human rights.

Since 2002 the EU's targeted measures on Zimbabwe have underlined its concern at the appalling human rights situation there. Last year they were strengthened with two new names of human rights abusers added to the list of those subject to a visa ban and assets freeze. Those measures will be maintained and we will press for them to be strengthened until there is an improvement in governance and human rights in Zimbabwe.

*13 February 2008*

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