

HOME OFFICE

G6 meeting, Munich

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Theresa May): The informal G6 group of Ministers of the Interior from the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Poland held its most recent meeting in Munich, Germany on 17-18 May 2012.

The meeting was divided into three working sessions over one day, with a dinner the previous evening. It was chaired by the German Minister for the Interior, Hans-Peter Friedrich, and I represented the UK. The other participating States were represented by: Manuel Valls (France), Anna-Maria Cancellieri (Italy), Jacek Cichocki (Poland) and Jorge Fernández Díaz (Spain). The US Attorney General, Eric Holder and the Secretary for Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, attended as guests for the final session.

The first working session was on North Africa and Syria. Ministers considered the need to work with new Governments in the area to build stability and tackle the risk of terrorism and illegal migration. I emphasised the importance of working with countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and with Turkey, as well as those in the immediate region. I also urged continued support for the Annan plan on Syria, while noting that the Syrian Government was not presently complying with its obligations, and highlighting the need for the opposition to refrain from violence and distance itself from terrorist elements.

The second session focused on the European Commission's recent draft Directive laying down data protection rules for the police and judicial authorities. Ministers questioned the need for the Directive and called for more flexibility in it. They were particularly concerned about proposals that would govern the processing of data within individual Member States, and with the proposed requirement to renegotiate existing agreements for the sharing of data with countries outside the EU. I supported these concerns, arguing that Member States should seek fully to implement the existing Data Protection Framework Decision.

The third session covered the movement of terrorist networks across borders, both within the EU and more widely (e.g. to training camps in Africa or Asia). Member States, and the US representatives, emphasised the importance of exchanging information on suspicious movements effectively, adding that data protection rules, while important, need to recognise the day to day reality of law enforcement work. I stressed the need to identify suspicious patterns of movement, and the important contribution that the provision of Passenger Name Records can make to this.

The US representatives explained that their Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) had, in their view, been a great success, enabling them to detect a number of potential terrorists seeking to travel to the USA. They also expressed their appreciation for the recent approval of the new agreement on Passenger Name Records between the EU and the USA.

I also held separate bilateral meetings with other heads of delegations.

The next meeting of the G6 is expected to be held in the UK in November.