

Thursday, 23 May 2013

## France wants Hezbollah armed wing on EU terror list by June's end



France said on Thursday it hoped an initiative could be agreed by the end of June to put the armed wing of Hezbollah on the EU's list of terrorist organizations on grounds the group is importing Syria's war into Lebanon. Paris has traditionally been cautious about backing steps to sanction Hezbollah, fearing it could destabilize Lebanon and put U.N. peacekeepers at risk, but in recent weeks has said it would consider all options. Britain said this week it wants the EU to add the military wing to the list because of evidence the Islamist group was involved in an attack that killed five Israelis in Bulgaria. German diplomats in Brussels said on Wednesday Berlin would support Britain's request, which will be discussed in early June by a special EU working group.

### Violating Lebanese politics

Foreign ministry spokesman Philippe Lalliot, confirming comments made by Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius at the end of the Friends of Syria conference in Amman on Wednesday, said Hezbollah had violated an agreement among Lebanese political parties by getting involved in Syria. "By deciding to intervene massively in Syria, Hezbollah has broken the consensus," he told a daily briefing on Thursday. "The war in Syria is not the war of the Lebanese. Importing it into Lebanon is dangerous for its stability as the rise in tension in the country shows." Five people were killed and more than 50 wounded in overnight clashes in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli among gunmen backing rival factions in Syria's civil war, doctors and security sources said on Thursday. Hezbollah guerrillas are fighting their biggest battle yet for Assad, and about 30 were killed on Sunday, Syrian activists said, during fighting in the rebel stronghold of Qusair, near the Lebanese border. France, the former colonial ruler in Lebanon, has about 900 troops as part of the U.N. peacekeeping force in the country. Britain's request will be discussed first by the special working group, and if it is approved it will be taken to foreign ministers. French support is likely to make it easier to convince other reticent EU member states to support the proposal and achieve the required unanimity of the 27 states. "It is conceivable to adopt this decision between now and the end of June, but that will depend on an agreement in Brussels," Lalliot said. Bulgaria presented the results of its bomb probe to EU foreign ministers on Feb. 18, urging them to take a harder stance towards Hezbollah. Two days later, Bulgaria's government resigned after mass protests over an economic crisis. The United States already lists Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and U.S. and Israeli authorities want the EU to follow suit. But many European governments are concerned the move could fuel tensions in the Middle East. In Europe, only the Netherlands lists Hezbollah as a terrorist group, and Britain blacklists its military wing. European governments and companies must cease any financial dealings with groups on the list.