**Belgium made sure Saudi Arabia knew it voted regime onto UN Women's Rights Commission, according to leaked emails**

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Belgium’s foreign ministry wanted Saudi Arabia to know it had voted to elect the kingdom to the UN Commission of Women’s Rights, leaked internal emails have reportedly revealed.

The disclosure risks fuelling a further backlash against the European country, which has been accused of putting concerns about equality to one side in order to ingratiate itself with the oil-rich kingdom.

The election of a nation which bans women from driving and working without a male's permission to a body whose role it is to promote women’s rights caused an outcry.

It emerged Belgium was one of a handful of EU member states to vote for the conservative nation in a secret ballot.

The leaked documents, seen by Belgian news site 7sur7, also appeared to undermine claims by Belgium’s Prime Minister, Charles Michel, that the ballot came unexpectedly and that the diplomat who voted was forced into a hasty decision without proper consultations with Brussels.

Mr Michel last week claimed that electing the nation to the commission was a mistake, citing the country’s poor record on gender equality.

“If we could do it again and if we would have the chance to discuss it at government level, I of course would have argued that we not approve this,” Mr Michel said.

But the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed of the vote at least nine hours before the ballot, according to the leaked documents reported by the news site.

The cabinet sent instructions to the delegation in New York instructing them on how to vote and requesting they inform the various candidates, including Saudi Arabia, of their support, according to the documents.

Deputy leader of the country’s Green party, Benoît Hellings, claimed Belgium's vote was a tactical move and said the foreign ministry was directly responsible.

“The cabinet of (foreign minister) Didier Reynders gave the green light to a shameless vote, scorning women’s rights, with the aim of getting in the good books of a notoriously no-go country in order to facilitate the election of Belgium to the UN Security Council," he said in a statement.

"Who is responsible for this decision? The minister of foreign affairs himself.”

Mr Reynders has maintained he was not personally aware of the vote before it happened.

Saudi Arabia was ranked third worst for gender equality in a list of 144 countries compiled for the World Economic Forum’s 2016 Global Gender Gap report.

Yet it gained the approval of 47 of 54 countries on the UN's economic and social council.

The British government has refused to deny that it voted in favour of Saudi Arabia's inclusion.