European External Action Service (EEAS)

Opening remarks by High Representative/Vice President Kaja Kallas for the Extraordinary Meeting and Exchange of Views with the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Dear Chair,

Honourable Members of the Committee,

It is good to be here with you to wrap up the year.

When we met for the first time in November last year, we all knew it was going to be an extremely tough year. So I want first to thank you for your commitment to supporting Europe’s role in the world in this tough year. And I’m hopeful it’s going to be easier but I’m realistic, I don’t think it’s going to be easier next year.

The tasks I mentioned – which we continue to face – are the greatest challenges of our time:

A full-scale war on our continent;

Actors actively seeking to change the rules-based international order;

And shocks to the global system.

But I also underlined the opportunities to expand our foreign policy footprint by:

Supporting Ukraine

building up our defence collectively, together with our closest allies;

And working more closely with partners to strengthen regional stability and economic integration.

In twelve months we have made substantial progress. Let me just give you three examples:

First, strengthening Europe’s security and defence.

We secured record funding to support Ukraine’s defence, as well as five major sanctions packages against Russia. These deprived Russia of the funds to fund its war machine, tens

of billions of euro.

But we now need to stick to our guns. The war in Ukraine drags on because Russia refuses to stop. Putin pretends that Europe is the obstacle to peace when nothing could be further away from the truth.

This war is taking place on European soil. So how the war ends matters to Europeans. It is not in any of our interests that Russia comes back for more.

The cost of supporting Ukraine today pales in comparison to what we would have to spend on a full-scale war in our European Union.

Europe has the economic leverage to force a just end to this war. But a lever only works when you use it.

That is why we have to work on the Reparations loan and put further sanctions in place.

The IMF estimates that Ukraine will need 135 billion euro for 2026 and 2027. The Commission has proposed options to help cover this, including the Reparations Loan. These are decisions that need to be taken collectively, the European way. Giving Ukraine the resources it needs to defend itself does not prolong the war, it can help end it.

In parallel, we set the stage for the biggest overhaul of European defence since the European Union's inception; from the White Paper and the Roadmap towards Readiness 2030, to the blueprints for strengthening military mobility. Europe is investing record levels on defence. These strategies will translate that money into capabilities that keep our citizens safe.

We have also signed partnerships on Security and Defence with eight countries, including the United Kingdom. These partnerships are already bearing fruit. From European funding to Ukraine with Norway, to working with Japan under our EU military operation – EUNAVFOR Aspides – that protects freedom of navigation at sea.

There is always safety in numbers. Only last month, EU and Indian warships for example successfully foiled a pirate attack off the coast of Somalia. This underlines how vital the EU's civilian and military missions and operations are.

But I agree that we need to be more focused, with more focused missions and operations, with clearer objectives.

Dear members,

My second example is the work over the last year to defend multilateralism.

Multilateralism means multiple voices around a table: the antidote of power politics. It means collective decision-making for collective challenges.

It is a celebration of diversity. It is a conviction that incorporating different perspectives creates better policy all round. Although imperfect, it is the best international system we have. Some openly question it, but we should not. The European Union should instead step up its defence. And you can count on me to do this as well.

I think about the Southern Neighbourhood ministerial meeting, where Syria joined for the first time after fourteen years. This meeting was also the first of its kind, bringing North African, Arab states and Israel together after the horrific Hamas attacks.

Two single events I chaired this year brought over 100 delegations to Brussels and more than 70 Ministers to the city.

One of those meetings was with the African Union.

This focussed on greater collaboration in critical raw materials, to artificial intelligence, regional integration and mobility. Our Global Gateway projects continue to offer win-win opportunities across all of these areas, in Africa and across the globe.

The other was the Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum. This brought together 64 countries, from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific islands. Here, a major focus was on maritime security and the protection of our undersea infrastructure. Around the table I heard a strong commitment to work together to protect our data cables and increase our resilience against potential threats. We will now take this work forward.

Dear members,

My third example is the work we have done with our partners across the globe.

Starting with our closest neighbours. The case for EU enlargement today is clear. The EU is a stronger player on the world stage when others join. The prospect of a European Union with more than 27 Member States by 2030 is now a realistic goal. There will be a leaders' discussion on enlargement already next week.

I also want to mention the steady increase in the alignment of candidate countries with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

This is not a box-ticking exercise. Rather, it underlines that these countries see the world the way we do and want to shape it with us. We should all welcome this.

At the same time, we also see that the closer a country gets to the European Union, the greater the pressure from malign foreign influence.

Russia and its proxies are ramping up disinformation campaigns, including in Armenia ahead of next year's election. Moldova was this year's primary target, but also the best proof that this challenge can be overcome.

I want to thank this committee for keeping the fight against foreign interference high on the agenda and recognising the urgency of increased ambition and resources to fight it.

On my side, we will keep mobilising the External Action Service assets we have created over the last decade while supporting civil society and free media. As we learnt from Moldova, countering foreign interference and defending the integrity of elections requires a ‘whole-of-society’ approach.

Let me add here that I welcome our cooperation on election observation. The European Union has so much experience to offer across the globe in defence of democracy. I look forward to our mutual conference in spring on this important topic.

Moving to our partners in the Gulf and Middle East, over the weekend I was in Qatar and Jordan. And in all my discussions, the desire to build a better future for the region, together, was palpable.

Gaza’s future is front and centre of this work. Yes, there are many challenges. But there are also many opportunities.

The European Union is the biggest enabler of a two-state solution because we keep our focus on the practical requirements.

For example, for Gaza to be governed by the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority needs to function effectively and be able to manage the security of the strip.

And this is why we are the biggest financial backers of the Palestinian Authority and a champion of reform. Our EUPOL COPPS mission is ready to be deployed to train the future Palestinian police.

And the EU adds value by addressing the entire criminal justice chain. We can train prosecutors and judges, support the Palestinian Judicial Institute in Ramallah, and help harmonise Gaza’s criminal code with the West Bank.

Beyond Gaza, we are contributing to regional security. This includes military-to-military confidence-building measures in Lebanon, to dialogues with Syrian civil society. We were also the first ones to lift sanctions on Syria in an effort to support reconstruction in the country.

So speaking of our partners, I want to address here a concern I think is on all our minds.

The U.S. National Security Strategy sends a clear message that we should be more self-confident. When it comes to Russia, yes, but also China. And sometimes, regarding our allies, like the United States.

But it is as a citizen who has lived under an autocratic regime I can tell you – and there are many of us who have lived under autocratic regimes –the European Union is the very

essence of freedom.

So any such criticism regarding liberties here, should be aimed in a different direction. Russia, perhaps, where dissent is banned, where free media is banned, where political opposition is banned, where ‘X’ is in fact also banned.

The European Union is 27 countries who have voluntarily chosen to work together, and we have several more who want to join. That shows the quality of us.

Dear Members,

The EU has significant economic leverage in the world. We have more leverage towards China, for example, than we tend to think. Our new Economic Security Strategy spells out all the tools we have. If we use them proactively, we can protect our companies and European industry.

At the same time, Europe’s leverage does not come for free. If we want to increase it, we need to increase our resources and use them more strategically.

As we enter negotiations on the next long-term budget, I know I can count on the Parliament’s support for our Global Europe envelope and a strong administrative budget also to manage our 145 Delegations all across the world.

I would also like to address the ongoing investigation here which prompted two resignations. I reiterate our full cooperation with the investigation and our complete transparency. I have full confidence in the authorities that due process is observed and that the presumption of innocence is maintained. I also have absolute confidence in the staff of the External Action Service who deliver every day for our Union and defend our interests all across the world.

Let me very briefly conclude.

We have to celebrate what we have achieved this year as a Union and considering that we have been under extreme pressure. But at the same time, we must acknowledge that we are only just beginning.

I welcome your continued engagement on foreign policy and repeat my commitment to remain engaged with the European Parliament.

Thank you.

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