European External Action Service (EEAS)

Foreign Affairs Council: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell upon arrival

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Good morning.

These are being intense days, with the discussion on the Middle East. You know that yesterday, we had several meetings to discuss that.

First, the [Ministerial International Partners Meeting on Palestine] called by the Norwegian Minister [Espen Barth Eide], and after [a second meeting, co-organised by Saudi Arabia that was] the continuation of the discussions in Riyadh.

This morning, we will receive five Arab partners. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs plus the Secretary-General of the Arab League will join the Foreign Affairs Council to continue discussing about Gaza and the Middle East.

We will hear their vision on how to support Palestine and the Palestinian Authority, and how to revitalise the political process.

A lot of things have happened in the last days, in particular: the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court sending to the Court warrants against [Prime Minister of Israel, Benyamin] Netanyahu and [the Defence Minister of Israel, Yoav] Galant, and three leaders from Hamas.

That is an important decision from the Prosecutor, and I want to say that we have to respect the work of the International Criminal Court. We have to respect the work of this institution and let the Court - without intimidation - decide what they think about this initiative of the Prosecutor.

Unhappily, that is not the case. The Prosecutor and the Court have been strongly intimidated and accused of antisemitism - as always when anybody, anyone does something that Netanyahu’s government does not like.

I think that the accusations of antisemitism against the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court are completely not acceptable.

The word “antisemitic” is too heavy. It is too important, in order to use it in these occasions.

Then there is the still more important ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is the core of the international justice in order to act above the national level. It is at the core of the United Nations Charter.

And here, again, we have to express not only respect but ask for the implementation of the decisions of the Court.

And unhappily, what we have seen in the immediate hours, is that Israel continues the military action, that it has been asked to stop. Also, Hamas is launching rockets against Israel. So, both sides do not respect the ruling of the Court.

This morning, unhappily, more than 30 people have been killed in a refugees' camp, in an attack.

This is really a dilemma: how can the international community make "implementable", can enforce the implementation of the decisions of the International Court of Justice?

I suppose that today, we are going to discuss about it. Certainly, we will listen to the Arab partners. The Member States also will discuss about how to support the implementation of the Two-state solution, and more urgently, how to deal with the situation in Gaza - from a humanitarian point of view and from the point of view of the implementation of this ruling of the ICJ.

From my side, I will put on the table a proposal to relaunch our civilian border assistance mission EUBAM Rafah, if it is useful. We have been asked to do that. If we could, we will do it – but taking into account that everything has to be in the direction of having the Palestinian Authority to take responsibility on Gaza.

And then, on Ukraine. In Ukraine, the situation is also very dire on the frontline.

Russia also escalates the bombings of Ukrainian civilian targets and population. The death number is increasing on both fronts. The number of people being killed by military action is increasing – if you could say that this is "a military action" to bomb a supermarket and to bomb civilian infrastructure when they are full of civilians.

The attack on the [DIY] hardware store in Kharkiv on Saturday is another example of war crimes and Russian atrocities.

But we have to use the same approach, and to consider on the same basis, what is happening in one war and in the other. That is why, I called the Foreign Affairs Ministers of some Arab countries to discuss with us.

Then, Georgia. This will be the first moment in which the Ministers will assess the situation in Georgia. It is clear that the government is derailing from the European track, and [EU Foreign] Ministers will have to decide what to do.

Do not forget about the situation in Syria. After the Foreign Affairs Council meeting, we will have the annual [Brussels] Conference on “[Supporting] the future of Syria and the region”. We will use the presence of so many Ministers from Europe, and Arab [Ministers], here in Brussels to hold this Conference at the highest level and increase our commitment to the Syrian people and the countries that have been affected by the Syrian crisis and are hosting the Syrian refugees.

So, an intense – almost dramatic – moment in both frontlines. Let’s see what the Ministers can discuss and decide about how the European Union can react with respect to the crisis in Ukraine, in the Middle East and Georgia.

Q&A

Q. Are you going to suggest the Preparatory Peace Conference, to convene it soon, after this morning talking to the Arab countries?

[On EUBAM Rafah,] I expect the political discussion today to shed light about how we can implement this mission. But it is not only us who have to decide - the Egyptians, the Palestinians, the Israelis.

We have been asked to [re]activate this mission, which is still there, but we need to increase the number of staff and we need to have an agreement with everybody involved. We will not go there without a strong commitment from the Palestinian Authority.

And yes, yesterday it was said that an international conference has to take place, in order to push for the implementation of the Two-state solution. Because everybody says that we need a Two-State solution but in the end, while people say that the settlers are occupying more and more land in the West Bank, the violence continues, and the Two-State solution looks every day more difficult to reach. So, we should start talking about it and start doing something.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is certainly the priority, but the political solution – if we want to really obtain this solution, we have to engage more on that. The Arab [partners] have proposals, we want to listen to them. You know that this is an issue on which the EU Member States have different approaches. Let’s see what we can do together with the Arab [partners] and other members of the international community.

Q. When do you expect a decision on EUBAM in Rafah?

Today, we can have a political decision and then, it will have to be implemented technically.

Q. On Georgia, what is on the table? Which are the proposals?

The point about Georgia is not a full point on the agenda. It is a first assessment of the situation at the level of Ministers.

Q. You said that Israel has to uphold the ruling of the International Court [of Justice], but how will you make sure that Israel will uphold this?

Well, we do not have magic powers, but the important thing is what is the position of the Member States of the European Union with respect to the implementation of this ruling of the Court. Everybody agrees that the rulings of the International Court of Justice are binding, and they have to be implemented. Let's see what do we think about it and how we - the Member States - want to react. I cannot tell [you] before the meeting what is going to happen in the meeting.

Q. Do you expect any sanctions regarding Georgia today, and not only an assessment?

I said about Georgia [that] it is a first assessment of the situation. It is a first assessment of the situation at the level of Ministers.

Q. On the European Peace Facility, how do want to convince Hungary to agree to the disbursement of the eighth tranche?

It is not something which is on the agenda today. We will discuss tomorrow at the level of the Defence Ministers.

Q. Today, there will also be the Foreign Minister of Iraq [Fuad Hussein]. How can you do something about the refugees, because right now, more than 1 million refugees from Syria and other countries are in Iraq.

This will be discussed today at the Syria Conference. I hope that the donors will be providing resources also for the countries who are hosting these refugees, in particular [also] Iraq.

Q. Do you expect a discussion on the recognition of the state of Palestine?

It will be part of the discussion. Obviously, it will be part of the discussion. This is one of the things that has happened those [last] days. Some Member States have decided to recognise the State of Palestine, others not. Others are still in the process of thinking about it. There are divergences of points of views about [whether it] is the right moment, or not. Some decided yes, the others decided [it was] not. We will share the point of views of the different Member States.

Q. What is your personal opinion?

It does not matter.

Q. A few months ago, you said that you are working directly for the peace process in the Middle East. Now, after months, the situation is even harder and harder. Can you explain to us why did we arrive to this point, and how can we get [out of it]?

That is what the Ministers will be discussing today. I cannot tell you what is happening in the meeting before the meeting takes place, [only] after.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-257375

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-upon-arrival-18_en