EU Foreign Affairs Council – Syria: new sanctions against the regime

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The EU foreign ministers approved a new package of sanctions against Syria. The decision was taken in the course of a meeting in Luxembourg in which Minister Giulio Terzi participated. The Syrian crisis was among the prominent themes of the debate, along with Egypt's democratic transition and violence against Christians.

Syrian's unacceptable downing of a Turkish military plane

Among other things, the new package of sanctions includes a ban on insurance companies' coverage of shipments to Damascus of weapons or non-lethal equipment with a potential to be used for repressive ends. At the same time the EU condemned the "unacceptable Syrian downing of a Turkish military plane", calling upon Damascus to cooperate fully with Turkey and "allow full access to an immediate investigation" and to the international community's full support for these efforts.

Syria: more pressure on the regime

This tightening of sanctions aims at ratcheting up pressure on the Syrian regime. At the same time, according to Italy, the opposition needs to be encouraged to join forces around a common plan and promote an inclusive approach. In this sense, the 6 July meeting in Paris could, according to Terzi, be an "important step in encouraging the opposition, which is making significant progress, to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis".

Defence of religious minorities

Another of Italy's major concerns is the defence of religious minorities, especially in the wake of the tragic toll of the latest bloody Sunday in Nigeria, where Christian communities are under attack in spiraling religion-motivated violence. Terzi insisted the issue be included on the agenda. The Council underscored its firm commitment to promoting human rights and democracy in the world and approved a strategic frame work to guide European efforts in the coming years.

Iran: total oil embargo total as of the start of July

As regards the Iranian nuclear question, the EU will impose a total oil embargo on Teheran as of the early July, as decided back on 23 January. This was the announcement by foreign policy representative Catherine Ashton. “The sanctions that we decided on will be applied”, she ensured, explaining that “the purpose is to push Iran to negotiate the nuclear question”. The EU maintains a dual approach policy based on sanctions and willingness to dialogue.

The future of Egypt

The ministers also discussed the future of Egypt, a great nation decisive also to regional balances. “Italy, Terzi explained, “is confident about the future of Egyptian democracy and congratulated the country for the important step toward democracy represented by the way in which President Morsi was elected, along with his conviction that the bond of friendship between our two countries can be strengthened.

Finally, the Council reitereated full support for the European prospects of Bosnia-Herzegovina, reasserting its intention to strengthen the UE’s role in sustaining economic development in that country and strengthening rule of law.

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