

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the Foreign Affairs Council

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I would like to start with the obvious fact that we have been following in the last hour the news coming from Saint Petersburg, together with the Foreign Ministers of all the EU Member States. Our condolences go to all Russian people and, in particular, to those who lost their loved ones and we continue to follow the news coming from Saint Petersburg with a lot of apprehension. As we will receive more details, we will be more precise also in our reaction but I expressed my condolences also to the Foreign Minister [of Russia, Sergey] Lavrov in a message we sent him.

In the [Foreign Affairs] Council today, we adopted important decisions.

First of all on Syria, as we will host the Syria Conference [Brussels Conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"] tomorrow and the day after tomorrow (link is external) in Brussels. We have adopted a European Union Common Strategy on Syria. You will find it well defined on paper, focusing on 6 major objectives that the European Union will put at the centre of its work. We find it is essential for the international community to keep focused on the situation in Syria. We have, as we enter in the seventh year of the conflict, 13.5 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria including 6.3 million Syrians internally displaced and an additional 5 million Syrian refugees hosted in the wider region. This requires not only humanitarian support, which is something that we hope the international community will commit to the day after tomorrow (link is external) in Brussels. On our side we will continue to be the major humanitarian donor for Syrians.

The situation also requires the international community to unite, to facilitate a political solution to the conflict. For the European Union, it is essential, first of all, to find a framework to ensure a genuine political transition, supporting the work of the UN Special Envoy [for Syria] Staffan de Mistura. The Conference the day after tomorrow (link is external) will focus also on supporting the Geneva talks and his work. I talked to Staffan [de Mistura] this morning and we shared some considerations on how to proceed on the political transition and on the solution to the conflict.

Second: promoting a meaningful and inclusive transition in Syria. This means also creating space for all the Syrian people, including all different backgrounds, including civil society, including women and obviously the Syrian opposition in whatever kind of solution and agreement can be found.

Third: saving lives by addressing the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable Syrians across the country. This, as I said, is the field where the European Union has been consistent and will continue to be, but we do not want to be the only ones not only

pledging but also delivering on the pledges. This is why in the Conference we will assess where we are on the commitments we all made in London last year and see where we need to fill the gaps.

Fourth: promoting democracy, human rights and freedom of speech by strengthening Syrian Civil Society Organisations. As you might know, the European Union has been working constantly with Syrians of all backgrounds in the last years and we will continue to do so.

Fifth point, that is very important to us and to all Member States and that was re-stressed today: the need to promote accountability for war crimes with a view to facilitating a national reconciliation process and transitional justice. This is something on which we believe the future of Syria can be based.

And, last but not least, supporting the resilience of the Syrian population and of the Syrian society. This includes some preparation work that we will start together with the UN system and with the international financial institutions, on the bigger picture of how the international community gets ready to support the reconstruction, the reconciliation and the stabilisation of the country in the moment when a political agreement is found to pave the way to the transition.

This will be addressed at the Conference, and we discussed this with the ministers and how to support the region at large, in particular Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. We will work with them on the follow-up of [2016] London ['Supporting Syria and the Region' Conference]. In particular we have the EU-Turkey Statement, but also and mainly, I would say, the compacts that we have developed with Jordan and Lebanon. We will assess together with the Prime Ministers of Jordan and Lebanon our support to these two countries that are key and the way forward to this. But also our support to Egypt and Iraq, other two countries that are highly affected by the Syrian crisis and this will be an opportunity for the entire international community to give a strong support to the entire region.

But, again, let me stress: humanitarian sustained support; full engagement in supporting the UN work in Geneva – the political talks; starting to prepare for the reconstruction that will have to be ready but will come only when a political transition and a political agreement will be in place.

We also adopted important decisions and conclusions on Yemen, in which the European Union, first of all, points to the fact that this cannot become a forgotten crisis. It is entering its third year. It is politically entering into a stalemate that we cannot afford to take place, first of all, because we have 17 million citizens there who are aid dependent, out of which 7 million are in the brink of famine. This can have very serious humanitarian consequences, but also security consequences that are very serious for the entire region, spreading to the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. This affects broader stability and security implication that we are trying to tackle.

The European Union is, also in this crisis, a major humanitarian donor but we are also facilitating some talks and some efforts to resume negotiations. We have decided to increase not only our humanitarian but also political and diplomatic work to try and bring an end to this conflict.

We also exchanged views on Libya. I updated the Ministers on the latest developments and, in particular, on the establishment of the Quartet on Libya where the European Union joined the Arab League, the African Union and the UN in trying to bring the Libyans together - East and West - within the Libyan Political Agreement. It is a pure illusion, and a dangerous illusion, to think that one part can rule over the entire country against the other. What is needed is really for all Libyans to come together and we believe that working together with other regional organisations, in particular with the Arab League and the African Union and obviously with the United Nations, can help the Libyans to come together themselves.

We also went through the latest developments when it comes to security in Libya. When it comes to the situation in the Oil Crescent, stressing the need to preserve the oil infrastructure for all Libyans and preventing illegal oil sales outside the official channels and circuits, the NOC (National Oil Company) and the Central Bank and also on one aspect - that is not the central and the only aspect with which we deal with when we discuss about Libya - meaning the migration one. We went through the implementation of the Malta decisions and, in particular, commented on the agreement that also the southern tribes of Libya signed recently - I think at the end of last week - to agree among themselves about better management of the southern borders, among themselves, to fight traffickers. I think that we shared the approach that these developments need our encouragement and support and this is something we will guarantee. As well as we are glad to see that the IOM [International Organisation for Migration] is restarting its work in the country and we are fully supporting them in this effort.

We finished our agenda today with a long and very productive exchange with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit. I met him just last week in Jordan where he kindly invited me to address the opening of the [28th] Summit of the Arab League. We have been working very closely together in the last months, at the meeting of the Quartet on Libya in Cairo, and at the meeting of the Arab League and the European Union's Foreign Ministers at the end of December. We have a communality of approaches and policies when it comes to the Middle East Peace Process, when it comes to several of the regional crises.

We also discussed the preparations of the Brussels Conference ["Supporting the future of Syria and the region"] and we have decided to continue to work together very closely, coordinating as much as possible our positions and steps, including starting to work on holding of the first Summit between the European Union and the League of Arab States. That was first decided in our ministerial meeting in Cairo in December and then confirmed at the Summit in Jordan last week, so we will start preparations for that in the coming weeks.

I'll stop here and I am ready for your questions.

Q: On no information from Turkey if they will send a representative to the Conference on Syria ["Supporting the future of Syria and the region"]. The tensions have been high between Turkey and several European countries lately over the campaigning in European countries on the referendum, is this linked? What is the explanation you get? Do you have information about Turkey sending anyone or not to the Conference and what do you think, what do you expect from the Turkish side? Thank you.

The invitation is open at the level of Prime Minister. As I said, the three Prime Ministers of the countries that are most affected by the Syrian crisis, being Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, have been invited to the Conference. We know that both Lebanon and Jordan are coming at the level of Prime Ministers with large ministerial delegations. On the Turkish side there is, at the moment, no confirmation. The invitation is always open. I would not link this to tensions, also because contacts with the Turkish authorities are ongoing and continue to be constructive on the Syria file. I assume that the decision will be mainly linked to the internal political agenda that is particularly intense, I imagine, in view of the upcoming referendum - it is only in ten days from now. So, obviously that will be a choice for the Turkish authorities, not for me to answer on that, but I would rule out tensions on Syria with Turkey, on which we are continuing to work well.

Q. Sur le Sommet UE-Ligue Arabe, savez-vous déjà quand il pourrait avoir lieu? Sur le Yémen, quand vous entendez développer les pressions politiques et diplomatiques pour une solution, pouvez-vous un peu expliquer? Avez-vous discuté avec les Etats membres du problème de la livraison d'armes à l'Arabie Saoudite qui pourraient ensuite se retrouver au Yémen?

Ce dernier point n'a pas été discuté aujourd'hui au Conseil. Sur le niveau du travail diplomatique et politique pour essayer de trouver une solution politique à la crise, il s'agit de faciliter surtout un travail, c'est-à-dire des efforts pour faciliter des rencontres qui puissent après faciliter des négociations officielles, en soutenant les approches qui sont déjà sur la table, surtout de la part de l'Envoyé Spécial des Nations Unies avec les acteurs régionaux qui ne sont pas seulement les acteurs du Golfe mais aussi les acteurs de la Corne de l'Afrique et de la région au large, c'est-à-dire aussi de la Ligue Arabe. L'Union Européenne n'est pas seulement un donateur principal mais aussi un acteur qui a la confiance des différents acteurs régionaux qui sont impliqués dans le conflit et cela nous donne une possibilité de faciliter peut-être un terrain d'entente que l'on peut trouver pour trouver une solution non-militaire à la crise.

Pour le Sommet Union européenne - Ligue Arabe, on va commencer les préparations, y compris la définition d'une possible date. On est maintenant en avril déjà, j'imagine que ça va être plutôt vers le début de l'année prochaine mais on pourra être plus précis sur cela dans quelques semaines.

Q. What is the European Union position on Gibraltar? Clearly, you named it in the Donald Tusk's guidelines issued earlier on this week. Is the European Union siding with Spain in this issue?

Sorry, it is not a Foreign Policy issue yet.