European External Action Service (EEAS)

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

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Check against delivery!

We really had an intense day at the Foreign Affairs Council that will now continue also with our Defence Ministers on Libya. I will come to that in a moment.

The main point on our agenda today were the external aspects of migration, and we also had a working session with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [Fillippo] Grandi. We discussed the Eastern Partnership, we had an exchange with the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace and, as I said, now we will continue with a point on Libya.

On migration: The main outcome of our discussions was about the need to continue and even increase the focus we keep, as Europeans, together, on both routes:

- The Eastern Mediterranean one with an assessment of the implementation of the agreement with Turkey that we also discussed with the UNHCR High Commissioner [Fillippo] Grandi. A report will be discussed and I believe adopted in the College next Wednesday and the Interior Ministers will discuss this at length later this week. We had a first assessment on the external side of this and we stressed the fact that now, what it is essential is that all commitments, especially on the resettlement and relocation, are key to make the implementation sustainable and to have it really working.

- A lot of the discussion also focused on the Central Mediterranean route where we have focused on our constant ongoing integrated approach. Let me remind you that on this day exactly one year ago we were facing the more than 800 victims in the Mediterranean that somehow provoked finally a reaction on the European level with the European Council deciding many different steps to be taken. So we reviewed all the external aspects of our migration work, focusing especially on the Central Mediterranean route. We reviewed all of them together with the ministers, assessing what and how far we have gone on the intentions we had put forward one year ago and also the way forward to some of them starting from the work we are doing to dismantle the smugglers and traffickers business model.

I reported to the Ministers the outcomes of my visit to the flagship boat of Operation Sophia last Friday in the Mediterranean Sea, on the shores of Lampedusa. An operation that has so far, in the last six months, contributed to apprehend 68 suspected traffickers and smugglers, neutralised 104 vessels and saved 13 000 lives in the Mediterranean, in the international waters where we are operating, among which 800 children.

I think this is particularly important because we often focus on the limits of our common action in welcoming and protecting the lives of people. I think that we can be proud of a common European Union action at sea that is able to save lives, when exactly one year ago we were observing minutes of silence looking at people losing their lives in the Mediterranean.

The second part of our very important work on that route is the work with Africa. Following the Valetta Summit, the Trust Fund has started. We have already allocated more than €700 million to projects that have already started in different countries and are targeting to sustain not only the national authorities, but also mainly local projects in targeted regions where we see most of the flows originating from, to make sure that alternatives in terms of economic opportunities are offered, but also food and water security and a cooperation with our partner countries of transit and origin.

This is part also of our engagement with our African partners - not only African partners, also Asian partners - when it comes to High Level dialogues. You might remember one year ago I was tasked to initiate High Level Dialogues on migration with a selected number of countries. We have done basically all of them so far. Netherlands Minister [Bert] Koenders for the Presidency, on my behalf, just came back yesterday night from Mali, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire where he had these High Level Dialogues at highest level with Presidents and Foreign Ministers. I did myself over the last weeks similar dialogues with Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Niger; and many others have been done in the past months. So we basically have covered all of them, which results in most cases on structured mechanisms to exchange ideas and ways to have an effective cooperation on the management of the flows - including returns, but not only returns and readmissions - and also developing economic opportunities for the people of these countries.

Another element of our work on the Central Mediterranean route is the work we are doing with the Sahel. This is an element that we will also discuss now as we will be dealing with Libya. We see a clear interest on the European side, but also on our African friends' side, to strengthen our cooperation with the whole Sahel region, particularly the G5 Sahel. This is a matter of security for the Europeans, but this is also a matter of border management and control of the territory. It is a territory that is larger than the territory of the European Union and it is a desert - so it is challenging.

We have decided to continue investing very much - even more than we are doing now - on our presence and support to our partners in guaranteeing that they manage to control the territory better. In Agadez, for instance, around 80% of the flows going to Libya pass by Niger.

We have started our EU presence on the ground. You might remember Agadez was the first visit I paid in Sub-Saharan Africa - I think that was during the summer - to meet the local authorities and plan with them alternative projects we can do for the youth of Agadez to try to dismantle the business model of the smugglers. We have decided to work on the regionalisation of our CSDP missions in the area. We have both EU and member States' presence in the region of the Sahel. We have decided to work on coordinating much more our presence there and to support our partners in the Sahel to face the challenge of migration and refugee flows through their territory.

Italy - under this point - has shared its non-paper with proposals that we welcomed. Most of these elements support ongoing work and activities that we are doing already. We believe that it constitutes positive political contribution to keep the focus on the current work and to increase the combined engagement of European institutions and of Member States, that are called now to complement the strength of work that we have put in place at the European level.

Shortly on the other points: With the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [Fillippo] Grandi, we obviously discussed about the implementation of the agreement with Turkey; about the cooperation we have with the UNHCR in Greece, all along the Western Balkans route but also on the work we do together inside Syria - which is essential if we want to tackle the issue of the so many Internally Displaced People in Syria -and also our common work in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

We started looking at possibilities to work jointly together - the European Union, the UNHCR and the IOM - with the Libyan authorities in Libya once the security conditions would allow this. But let me say that he [Fillippo Grandi] shared with us the fact that the UNHCR, together with the IOM, has always been working inside Libya and we have been supporting this work all along these difficult years and we might look at increasing our cooperation there as well.

We also discussed one of the outcomes of my recent visit in Iran, which is about working more on the Afghan refugees that are present on the Iranian territory, as well as on the Afghans that are internally displaced inside Afghanistan, in order to, together with the UNHCR, help stabilise the situation and address their needs. Obviously we also talked about the internal refugee crisis inside Africa and inside different African countries that is something where we cooperate a lot with the UNHCR on a daily basis.

We had another point - on the Eastern Partnership, one year after the Riga Summit. We will have an important Ministerial meeting on 23 May. We had today an in depth discussion with the Ministers to prepare the Ministerial meeting and we had a very good common ground following similar discussions we had in the last months on individual relations we have with the six Eastern partners. Today the approach, was more on the Eastern Partnership as a whole, as a regional approach.

Last but not least at all, let me stress that - actually, we started with it - we had the opportunity to be debriefed by the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace [Sergio] Jaramillo on the state of play of the Colombian peace talks in Havana. I had the occasion of meeting with him and with the Foreign Minister María Ángela Holguín when I was visiting Havana a month ago. He shared with us the state of play of the peace process. We discussed together with him the European support to the peace talks, to the finalisation of the negotiations and most of all to the work we are ready to do together to make sure that the agreement can be sustainable and successful from day one of the implementation, working on the early wins that will come for the Colombian population.

I know this seems to be far away from the European political agenda today. But I am convinced that the European role is also to identify its own added value in crises that geographically may seem far away from us but where the European Union can change significantly the mood or the capacity to finalise an agreement. In this case, if we manage to support the process and to get to an agreement it would be the end of a 50 years old conflict that would benefit not only the region and Colombian population, but also Europe as we have strong links with the country.

Now we will proceed to the video conference with the Libyan Prime Minister [Fayez] al-Sarraj that I already had on the phone this morning. We will hear his assessment of the situation in Tripoli, the political but also security and social-economic situation in the country. We will use this opportunity with the Defence and Foreign ministers to express our political support but also to discuss with him priorities for concrete projects in different fields: in the economic field, in the security field, on the humanitarian aid, on institution building. Following that, we will have a discussion with the ministers with the possibly, hopefully, - Insha'Allah - , to adopt Council conclusions after which I might be meeting with you again to share the state of play on this particular issue.

I apologise for being long but it has been a long day - and I did not cover Tunisia because we did it before.

Link to the video

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