European External Action Service (EEAS)

Foreign Affairs Council: press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas upon arrival

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Good morning, everybody.

We are going to have a very intense day. First, we have the Foreign Affairs Council for Defence, where we are going to discuss the implementation of the White Paper. Then we will have the Foreign Affairs Council where we have [as] topics: Ukraine, Syria and the Middle East.

First on Ukraine. I think it is important, as we have all said, 27 of us, that there has to be a full and unconditional ceasefire. Ukraine has already agreed to this, 60 days, or more than 60 days, ago.

We have agreed that if Russia does not agree – what we saw yesterday – then we will put more pressure. So, we will agree on the 17th package of sanctions today, but we continue working on the next strong package of sanctions to put more pressure on Russia so that they would also want peace.

Then, on Syria I hope that we will agree on the lifting of economic sanctions today.

Of course, there is going to be a very hard discussion on Gaza and what is happening there. The Dutch Minister has put forward a proposal to do the review of article two of our association agreement with Israel, and we will discuss this.

I cannot predict the outcome of this discussion, but I think what is important – where we all have similar views – is that the humanitarian aid should reach Gaza as soon as possible. Of course, Israel's decision to let some of the aid in is a drop in the ocean – it is welcomed, but it is not enough. There are thousands of trucks behind the borders waiting. It is European money that that has funded this humanitarian aid, and it has to reach the people because the situation is extremely grave.

Thank you.

Q&A.

Q. What is your reaction to the call between President Trump and President Putin? Are you concerned that America and President Trump are too soft on Russia?

We all agreed and said, and we also heard statements from [the] United States that if they do not agree to unconditional ceasefire, like Ukraine has agreed over 60 days ago, there will be strong action. That is what we want to see, from all the parties who have said that they will act in accordance. Of course, on the European side, we have the statements of [the] 27 that if Russia doesn't agree, then we will put more pressure, so we will continue with that.

Q. [inaudible]

President [of the European Commission, Ursula] von der Leyen has mentioned, I mean, there are sanctions regarding the oil price gap, the energy, also banking sector, the sanctions that that will hurt Russia's economy. By the way, today in the Foreign Affairs Council, we also have the intelligence reports about how well Russia's economy is doing. And what we hear is that they are coming to the point where actually they have to rely on the supply chains. So, the effect of the sanctions will be even bigger in the coming months.

Q. [inaudible]

We have been working on regarding the lifting of sanctions for Syria already since the beginning of this year, trying to help the Syrian people, because when the Assad regime fell, it [was] clear that we wanted jobs [to be there] and livelihoods for the people, so that it would [become a] more stable country. That is why, in order to have that we need to lift the sanctions. Of course, we have had some very intense discussions, there are worries about whether the government is going in the right direction. But I think we do not have a choice. We actually either give them possibility to stabilise the country, or we do not do that – then we have something that we have in Afghanistan.

Q. On the sanctions against Russia, will they be forceful enough? You are talking about a price cap, about the financial sector, but you will still need unanimity, no?

Yes, this is true. We need everybody onboard, and we know that America is also working on sanctions for Russia, if they do not agree. We have seen clearly from the call yesterday that they do not agree. Of course, we are democracies and it takes time, and it is difficult and becoming more difficult. But I do not think we have a choice. We need to put more pressure.

Q. The Austrian Foreign Minister yesterday sent you a letter on starting an initiative to get a ceasefire going in Ukraine. Fourteen of the EU countries have supported this letter. What do you say to the letter of the Austrian foreign minister?

Like I said when we had the discussion, it takes two to want peace, it only takes one to want war. And Russia clearly wants war, whereas Ukraine wants peace. So, in order to make Russia want peace, we also need to put more pressure on Russia.

Q. After 15 years of fight between Türkiye and [inaudible], right now there is a new process, a peace process. Do you think this is important for [inaudible]?

So, this is important. This is one of the rare, good news from the region; that there is more stability there.

Q. How can you still believe in sanctions when we are at the 17th package, and nothing worked to stop Russia?

Well, they have not really proceeded with their goals either. I mean this war has been going on for three years and they have not achieved what they want to achieve. Their losses on their side are quite grave. What we see from the reports is that now they are coming to the point where they actually have to rely on their production that they are doing now, not the supply chains that were functioning before. So, I think the importance of the sanctions will be even more grave or severe. Today we have the intelligence reports about the Russian economy as well, how [sanctions] are affecting. Russians want us to think that sanctions are not working, 'they are hurting you more than they are hurting us'. This is not true. We see this from the intelligence reports. Of course, they are very good in propaganda, they always have been. We have to keep this in mind, but we see that actually, they are not doing that well.

Q. Do you want the United States now to move forward with more sanctions against Russia?

We heard, I think it was last week, when America said that if Russia does not agree on a full an unconditional ceasefire, then there are going to be consequences. So, we want to see those consequences also from the US side. We really have not seen the pressure on Russia from these talks.

Q. What your view [inaudible] do you feel the need for a majority of Member States or a significant number [inaudible]?

My view does not really matter here because I need to hear from the Member States what are their views. I know some of their views, but I do not know everybody's. So, we will have a very open discussion. My view right now is that we need to do everything so that the humanitarian aid would reach the people in Gaza. This is our first priority right now. All the other things come after that.

Q. On the US administration's decision, Mr Trump's personal decision to lift the sanctions over the new Syrian regime [inaudible]

You have been following this very closely since January. We have been talking about lifting the sanctions, and not only talking but actually also lifting the sanctions already from January. We have been doing this before anybody else. You know, from the last Foreign Affairs Council that we had the discussion that we were preparing for the lifting of sanctions. It is positive to see that other players like the US are also considering lifting of the sanctions, but we have been doing this work for quite some time already.

Thank you, and see you at the press conference.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-272397

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