European External Action Service (EEAS)

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

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Check against delivery!

We started the Council today with something positive - I know this is news - which is the follow-up work the European Union has prepared for the climate change agreement reached in Paris last December. This was indeed a huge result of a coordinated effort of the European diplomacy, all together: European level, Member States, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Environment, [European] Commission, all together and we feel the responsibility to follow this up this year with a concrete implementation of the decisions taken in Paris and looking forward to the COP22 this year. We had Commissioner Cañete joining us and we adopted an Action Plan for Climate Diplomacy at the European level for 2016.

I know you might be surprised that I started with that but we have to also remain focused on the positive results of our work.

We also adopted as an A point – so consensual decision -, an extension and an amendment to the mandate of EUBAM Libya that will allow us to hopefully work on some planning for support to the future [Libyan] Government National Accord. This issue will be most probably a point for a decision and discussion at the next Foreign Affairs Council in March.

The main point of discussion of the ministers was obviously Syria. I took this opportunity to fully debrief all the ministers on the results of the [International Syria] Support Group we had in Munich just four days ago. We are clearly facing setbacks. We knew already on Thursday evening in Munich that it was a difficult process, we knew it all along these difficult months. If it was not difficult, we would have not created that kind of huge diplomatic coordinated effort at the international level. We will probably continue to face some setbacks. This is not a reason to change policy just four days after we took common decisions. There was a complete unity in the Council on this: on the need to stick to the commitment made in Munich, to expect from all parties that were present in Munich to stick to their own commitments and also to work for others on the ground, to work on the cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access and the beginning of a political process leading to a transition in Damascus.

As we see this gap between the commitments taken politically and the reality on the ground, let me say that we all shared the view that it is fundamental to protect civilians on the ground, in particular to guarantee security and protection for medical facilities, the work of NGO's on the ground and humanitarian delivery. In this respect, what happened today to the hospital of Médecins Sans Frontières is completely unacceptable. We will continue to pressure all the parties to respect basic principles of humanitarian law and focus on the protection of civilians.

In the same spirit, the European Union is taking a fundamental role in the taskforce that has started to work already in Geneva on the delivery of humanitarian aid. You know that the European Union, together with the Member States is, by far, the largest donor on Syria and we were sharing with the Ministers today the fact that EU plus the Member States represent two third of the pledges that were done at the Syria conference in London two weeks ago. This is humanitarian aid not only for the refugees outside of Syria – in Jordan, in Lebanon, in Turkey - but it is also, in a substantial way - for humanitarian action inside Syria itself. We are doing that in full cooperation with the UN, the UN agencies and NGOs operating on the ground from our office in Gaziantep, at the Turkish border with Syria, and with the humanitarian office, opening soon in Damascus to try and work on the access of humanitarian aid from the ground. Again, we do not expect this to be easy but we are the ones taking the responsibility and the burden, hopefully we will manage to do something useful for the people of Syria, because the humanitarian situation there is dramatic. As I said, there was unity among all Member States on the need to insist on the decisions taken that are also in line with the content of the UN Security Council resolution adopted in December and to insist on the fact that there is no possible military solution to this crisis.

It needs to be done through the beginning of the political process accompanied by cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access. Modalities for this are being discussed currently, difficult process, but we do not move from that track. Moving from that track, I repeat, four days after having taken decisions, would not be responsible. We also discussed this issue as well as bilateral coordination and cooperation, with the Foreign Minister of Lebanon who was with us for a working lunch. We had very intense and productive talks, and as you know, our support to Lebanon is substantial not only from a financial point of view but also from a political point of view.

We then had other two points on the agenda. One is Moldova for which I imagine you have seen the Council conclusions we have adopted and on Belarus for which we adopted Council conclusions that I think you had the chance of seeing. And on this in particular, Ministers agreed on the fact that, we see a situation in the country that is showing a positive trend, trend that we need and we want to encourage, in the last months: resumption of the EU-Belarus human rights dialogue, the negotiations on visa facilitations and readmissions agreement and on Mobility Partnership. Third, the role that Belarus has played, being constructive in the region, in particular on the Ukrainian conflict, and, probably most of all, the release of the remaining political prisoners last August. This is clearly not a rosy or a perfect picture, far from that, that was the general assessment of all the Ministers, but we agreed on

a critical engagement. Some might underline more the critical some might underline more the engagement, but the point is that we have decided with the Council conclusions to lift most of the existing restrictive measures, in particular on the 170 individuals and the 3 companies whose listings were suspended.

This is it. Obviously later this week we also have a European Council, and in particular Syria should be on the agenda. I will make sure that the work of the Foreign Ministers will fit in the preparation of the European Council as well obviously as with all other points that will be relevant including migration and refugee crisis.

Link to the video: http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I116153

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