European External Action Service (EEAS)

European Council: Press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas upon arrival

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Good afternoon,

We have two busy days ahead - European Council meeting.

First, we start, of course, with Ukraine. We see that Russia is not doing well in this war, and we see that Ukraine is stronger on the battlefield, as well as on the other issues. We were just talking in the Ukraine Support Group - what more can be done to support Ukraine, but also pressure Russia, so that they would sit down to a negotiation table. And we will discuss this today.

We have the 21st package of sanctions on the table and I really hope that we can move swiftly with the adoption of that because that goes hand in hand with also the deep strikes that Ukraine is doing so that the pressure would mount on Russia to stop this war.

Then, of course, tomorrow we will also have the discussions on the Middle East. There we have seen now the signing of the MoU with US and Iran. It gives really a good basis for stopping this war and opening the Strait of Hormuz. But of course there is also this 60 days for negotiating more complex subjects like nuclear, for example, where we have also offered our expertise because we have done the nuclear negotiations before.

Lebanon, we are concerned what is happening there, and of course, we are also supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces, so that there would be stability, and they would be able to disarm Hezbollah. We know that UNIFIL mission is going to end this year - the talks are ongoing also to have a separate mission - with the different mandate - also to cover that.

Then, we are also discussing the Peace Plan for Gaza. There is not much moving on the peace agreement or the implementation of it, so this is what we will talk about - what more can we do in order to advance peace.

Q&A

Q. Some Iran sanctions might be lifted now [inaudible]

We have clear conditions in place. We have different sanctions on Iran. Those that are related to nuclear; if the conditions allow, if there is a nuclear deal, then I think the Member States will discuss this. Then, there are also sanctions on human rights violations, and we see the human rights situation is actually more severe than it has ever been. And then we also have sanctions on the freedom of navigation or hindering the freedom of navigation. Once the conditions allow, Member States will discuss whether the lifting of sanctions is in place, but we are not there yet.

Q. High Representative, any reaction regarding the statement of the Israeli Foreign Minister, saying that he will block any communication with you regarding your last statement?

First of all, you have tens, if not hundreds of statements on Israel and Gaza by me on the record and you see what I have been saying. I have been representing the European Union, and it is true that we do not see always eye-to-eye with the Israelis, for example, regarding the violent settlers and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. We have been very critical. I have had very good, open, and frank and sometimes very difficult discussions with Minister Sa'ar that I found very much constructive. We are willing to continue with this, but we cannot deny also the criticism, and these talks have to be open.

Q. [inaudible] Do you believe what they are committing is apartheid?

What our position is, you know very well. This is what we have been stating. We are supporting the two-state solution. We are also really asking the humanitarian aid to get into Gaza to help the people, and we are condemning the violent settlers on the West Bank, because it is actually making this two-state solution impossible. So, these are our positions and I cannot fight the shadows all the time. You can take all the public statements that I have made and I will not go down that road, that I will comment on anything, what was made, said or not said behind the closed doors, because we have already seen so many cases like this. I will fight this every week; somebody says I said something somewhere. Let us stick to those statements that I am making, and you have access to me all the time, every week. This is the European position that I am representing.

Q. [inaudible]

We have been discussing this with the Defence Ministers, as well as the Foreign Ministers, and we have the Operation ASPIDES that is operating in the Red Sea, and now it actually has already the record number of ships that it has not had before. There is also the Coalition of the Willing of France and UK, that is willing to help in the Strait of Hormuz. I think these two Coalitions of the Willing can work hand-in-hand. And with the Operation ASPIDES we are ready to work, and I think the Coalition of the Willing is also quite far.

Q. [inaudible]

We also are in constant contact with the Syrian authorities to stress that the rights of all groups represented in Syria have to be taken into account. We know Syria is a very diverse community. We had the High-Level Political Dialogue, where we also were raising and also asking, how can we help, so that the Constitution would reflect how the minorities or the groups in Syria are treated, and how they can actually work with the institutional buildup, because you need also for the protection - the judicial system that works, the police that works, accountability for that matter. We are also working together with the regional actors who can do what to help Syria on this stable path.

Q. [inaudible]

It is important what we have been discussing with the Foreign Ministers. It is about the substance. What are the core asks of the European Union for Russia in these talks? What is very clear is that the EU cannot be a mediator because we have been clearly on the side of Ukraine and we have also our own security interests that we have been discussing with the Foreign Ministers. So, after the last meeting I have also updated the paper where we have listed different core interests, and I think it is important that also these asks are made to Russia.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/media/video/I-291548

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-council-press-remarks-high-representative-kaja-kallas-upon-arrival-3_en