European External Action Service (EEAS)

# Remarks by the HR/VP Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference with Mr Adel Al-Jubeir, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

2016-05-30

Check against delivery!

Thank you very much. It is a pleasure for me to be in Jeddah, for the second time in an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the last year. We meet very often in multilateral meetings and regional events, but it is always a pleasure for me to back for an official visit. I understand that it is also a special time, on the eve of GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Summit that is going to be particularly important. So I am particularly glad to be here in this moment.

As the minister mentioned, we discussed a whole range of bilateral issues. The relation between the European Union and Saudi Arabia is strong and deep in many different fields and we focused particularly on issues related to visa but also economic differentiation and economic and trade relations, in particular the opportunities that Vision 2030 offers for our bilateral cooperation in a series of technical fields. We also mentioned the possibilities of working on experts exchanges or technical cooperation. We also discussed issues of human rights -as we always do - and the possibility of deepening our counter-terrorism coordination and working together on anti-radicalisation. You know very well that in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, we are facing some challenges in that respect. They are common challenges that we share, so this could be a field of common work for the future we agreed to explore.

We, in Brussels, are also looking forward to hosting the next GCC Ministerial in July. It will be an excellent occasion to discuss also with our other friends of the Gulf the regional issues, including cooperation through the GCC, but also regional crises and some of the regional opportunities that have been at the core of our discussions this evening. I will not repeat the list, but for us it is key to work together on Syria where we share the work of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). We hope that the cessation of hostilities can be respected at full, that humanitarian aid can have full access to the whole territory and that political talks can resume in Geneva hopefully soon to lead to a transition in Damascus that could bring peace to the country and security to the area.

We also shared an interest in defining a political solution for the crisis in Yemen. The European Union is first of all thankful to Kuwait for hosting the talks and encouraging the parties to continue with determination and courage. They can count on all our support, together with the Gulf countries and the rest of the international community to find a way of putting an end to this terrible humanitarian situation. We are together starting to look at possibilities obviously for post-conflict and reconstruction of the country.

We also share an interest in having a stable Libya. This is for Europe a particularmy challenging issue but also a country that is close to our heart. As we see on a daily basis the victims dying in the Mediterranean out of a territory that has been and is too much out of any kind of control. The European Union is doing all that it can to save lives but also to dismantle the networks of traffickers of human beings. Our first duty is to guarantee human security but also security of the country and of the region . This is something we are currently doing with the Government of National Accord based in Tripoli under the leadership of Prime Minister [Fayez] al-Sarraj whom I met just recently and who has started to work with us. We are providing him all the support we can.

We also discussed the situation in Lebanon where we hope that the institutional stalemate could be overcome and the country could find its stability. It is a key country for us that needs to be supported by all its neighbours and all the countries in the region.

Last but not least, we also discussed the Middle East Peace Process, the situation with Israel and Palestine. The European Union in this respect is looking forward to a very strong cooperation with Saudi Arabia in particular in the framework of the legacy, but still the current value of the Arab Peace Initiative. You know that the European Union is working together with the rest of the Quartet on a report, including some recommendations and among them obviously we take good lessons of the Arab Peace Initiative that we believe in the European Union should be among the basic principles at the basis of a solution to the Middle East conflict. I will stop here. For sure I forget many other things, but we can count maybe on your questions to answer to some of the issues we did not raise.

Q. On the resignation of Mohammad Alloush - is it a result of the collapse of the peace process ?

A. No it isn't. Obviously we work with a lot of determination, knowing that the situation is very difficult and very complicated. First of all let me start by saying that the European Union is the first donor, by far, in terms of humanitarian support for Syrians, inside Syria and in the region. This is because we feel it is our duty to support our Syrian friends and their lives. Because we are talking about a war, we are talking about women, children, men, losing their lives or living in terrible conditions.

So the first objective, the first determination for the European Union is to provide humanitarian support first of all inside Syria. This is why we are working day by day, together

with the United Nations, to try to have access to all areas in Syria, all areas, none excluded, to save the maximum of lives.

Second, we know very well that this will be only one part of the work and that there is, then, the cessation of hostilities that has to hold and be respected; and in parallel, political talks that have to start. I say "start" even if we had already some rounds in Geneva but never direct talks.

We risk a "chicken and egg" exercise. For sure, we need some conditions on the ground for the talks in Geneva to start in a credible and sustainable way - because it is very clear that the Syrian people have to see good results or good steps in their daily lives to allow their representatives to engage into Syria's talks on the political side. But on the other side, we have to protect the possibility of having political talks leading to a political transition without exposing them to the risk of having those who, on the ground, from different sides – but you can imagine, especially on one side – would maybe oppose to a political process to start. So we have to protect the possibilities for the political talks to be damaged or to be made impossible because the situation on the ground is not going to the right decision.

We are therefore working on the different levels. We are working consistently on the humanitarian level and we are working very hard on having the political process, and in particular the political process leading to a transition, to start.

This is our objective. I know very well the sense of frustration that is there, especially after so many years of conflict; and I understand very well that this could come to a sense of willingness to leave. But the encouragement we give to all parties or negotiating teams in Geneva is that of staying committed. They are supported by the international community, their work is included in the framework of the UNSC resolutions, in the framework of the International Support Group for Syria, the regional and international communities there to facilitate this process. It is not an easy one, it will not be an easy one but it is the only process that we have and, I will add, it has been the result already of a very difficult political process that was not there one or two years ago. We cannot waste it, we cannot make it fail. It is the responsibility we have to the Syrian people.

So the European Union will put all its efforts in sustaining, facilitating, helping, this political track to start consistently, together with the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

I met recently with different leaders of the opposition, in particular obviously in Vienna where we were together for the last meeting of the International Support Group, and also with other leaders of the opposition recently. It is fundamental for them to know that the Europeans are at their side. We will support them in all ways in the negotiations; they need to engage in substantial negotiations, not allowing anyone to have this open process to fail before starting.

Q. On the trade agreement between GCC countries and the EU

A. I really hope so [that it will be signed in the near future]. We are in a stage where negotiations were, somehow, suspended, not on the European side but on the side of our friends in the GCC. On our side we are flexible to find ways of accommodating different views, to find a solution. We left each other today with our friends of the GCC knowing that we will meet each other again in July in Brussels, saying that if there is political will, we can find the ways to solve this.

We do not want those negotiations to break the record of length but rather fruitful agreement that we can reach. On our side, [there is] all the determination, all the flexibility, all the openness, to accommodate concerns; only minor issues are left.  [And there is] on our side, all the willingness to come to a positive conclusion and I found the respective willingness also on the GCC's side.

Link to the video:

ttp://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I121859

<div

---

Source: http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2016/160531_01_en.htm (EU Web Archive capture 20160624095120)