Lebanon: Joint press conference by High Representative/Vice President Kaja Kallas and Youssef Rajji, Lebanese Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants

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Thank you, dear Minister and dear Youssef.

Thank you for the warm welcome here in Beirut. I am really happy that this visit is taking place.

The European Union and Lebanon are natural partners, bound by historic ties across the Mediterranean.

The EU has clear interest in stable, prosperous, and sovereign Lebanon. We are backing this with substantial political, economic, and security support. In September, we announced €505 million in financial assistance until 2027, completing the €1 billion package announced in 2024. This will go towards economic recovery, enhancing security, border management, and essential services.

This of course requires reform. Lebanon took important decisions over the summer. Now, the focus must be on implementation, particularly in the economic and banking sectors. These reforms are essential to mobilise additional international support, attract investments to Lebanon, and improve the lives of Lebanese people.

Security is just as important. Earlier this year, the Iran war spilled into Lebanon with devastating consequences. Lebanon's security environment remains difficult. The security of Lebanon must remain the prerogative of the Lebanese government and people.

Europe supports the U.S. brokered agreement for the South and efforts that can bring lasting security and stability between Lebanon and Israel. For that reason, the European Union is stepping up its security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces, including through the European Peace Facility.

Total support through the facility now stands at €182 million since 2022. With this, Lebanon is already the third largest beneficiary of the European Peace Facility assistance, and more support is planned for 2027.

But there is another major upgrade in our security partnership that I want to mention. Planning for our new European Union Support Mission to train and advise Lebanese Armed Forces is now completed.

Minister, I thank you and your Ministry for the close cooperation and preparation of that mission. I am glad that we now have the formal invitation from the Lebanese authorities, which allows us to proceed.

On Monday, the 12th of October, I expect the EU Foreign Ministers to formally establish the mission, which will make a crucial contribution to Lebanese security. It will advise and assist the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces to strengthen territorial control, border security, and also internal security. All this will be done in line with the UN Security Council resolution 1701.

Let me also be clear what this mission is not about. It is not UNIFIL replacement, and it will not only focus on Southern Lebanon. UNIFIL has played an important role for almost 50 years. A continued UN presence in Southern Lebanon is under discussion, and we remain ready to work with Lebanon, the UN, and the Security Council members on what comes next. There cannot be a security vacuum when UNIFIL leaves. Lebanon must have a full control of its whole territory. That also means moving towards with disarmament of Hezbollah.

Finally, we discussed the security in the wider region. Lebanon's future and stability is closely connected to Syria's transition. The EU welcomes the stronger cooperation between Beirut and Damascus. We recognise the enormous burden that hosting Syrian refugees has placed on Lebanon.

As I saw myself in Syria last week, reconstruction must keep pace for people to return; they need schools, hospitals, roads, infrastructure, and of course also security. The European Union will continue supporting Syria in their reconstruction, refugees, and also their host communities.

Dear Minister,

Europe is invested in Lebanon's future. We will continue to support your institutions, restoring full sovereignty, and building lasting stability.

Thank you very much.

Q. Are you seeking to accomplish a certain political involvement in the Middle East war, specifically with Iran? Are you planning to play this role? And who do you think would be replacing UNIFIL? Security companies? Have you discussed this?

Thank you for this question. Clearly, when it comes to the war in Iran, we have been in close contact with all the regional partners because the discussions of what comes after this war is

over, what is the security architecture of the region, and there Europe has a clear role. The stability and security of the region is really in our interest.

When it comes to UNIFIL, then we are of the position that there has to be international presence to keep the stability and security. Clearly, the discussions are going on in what kind of format it is. Our European Member States that are also contributing to UNIFIL currently, are able to contribute to international force. But what I must stress is that this kind of international force must have a UN mandate because all our Member States are also democracies and they need decisions from their parliaments to send their troops in those missions. It has to be also very clear what the mandate is, what this international force is going to do. But first it would be best if UNIFIL's mandate will be extended because, like I said, security vacuum is not something that we want to see.

Watch the press conference and Q&A

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