

Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini at the joint press conference with Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov

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Thank you. Thank you, Sergey [Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation].

On my side also I found the exchanges we started this morning – and that we will continue after this press point – useful, constructive. It is always better to have a direct dialogue and, indeed, even if this is my first visit in my current capacity [as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission] to Moscow, Sergey and I had several occasions to meet during these last two-and-a-half years, to work together – as well as our teams – constantly coordinated on certain issues.

We always believe in the European Union that dialogue – constructive, open dialogue, frank dialogue – is the way. And this is true also for a relevant – not only neighbour – but a global player as the Russian Federation is.

There are some issues of disagreement. We are open and frank about that. For sure, we have a different assessment of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. But we have also on that crisis exchanged views on how we can move forward on an agreed roadmap, which is the full implementation of the Minsk Agreement by all sides, both on the security and on the political aspects.

We believe in the European Union that it is even more urgent to do so after the death of one of the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission] monitors yesterday in the east of Ukraine. We discussed ways in which we can work together more to guarantee a full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides and ways to put an end to the conflict in the east of Ukraine.

We also exchanged views on something that maybe you could refer to as a "systemic disagreement" – I think you [Sergey Lavrov] mentioned it like this – which is the position of the European Union of not recognising the annexation of Crimea. This is a principled position that we are going to keep – not only the European Union, but also other partners that we have in the world.

We had a long exchange on a series of bilateral issues. On some of them we have difficulties to overcome through cooperation and dialogue. On others we have a good level of interaction and cooperation, that is mutually beneficial to our people, both Russian citizens and citizens in the European Union. And we have decided to work on these common issues – the example of the counter-terrorism dialogue that has resumed in the

last months is a good one. But we also identified further areas of useful cooperation to be strengthened like cooperation in the Arctic or the Northern Dimension, or exchanges in the cultural, educational or research fields. I could continue on a long list.

We started to go through our common agenda of priorities when it comes to global and regional foreign policy issues. Starting with the situation in Syria, I thanked Foreign Minister Lavrov for the active participation of the Russian Federation in the Brussels Conference [Supporting the Future of Syria and the region] a couple of weeks ago, where we not only reaffirmed the very sustained humanitarian support of the international community to the Syrian people, both within Syria and in the region – the European Union is and will continue to be the first humanitarian donor for Syrians – and we share the same approach that access of humanitarian aid has to be improved.

We count on Russian work, including through the Astana process, to help to move forward also in this respect. And we shared views on how to work more closely on the political solution of the war in Syria. I believe we share an interest: that of putting an end to this war, that is costing so many lives, that is causing so much pain, to Syrians first of all, but also in the broader region.

And we share the interest to guarantee that that part of our neighbourhood is finally finding peace, stability and security, defeating Da'esh and guaranteeing a democratic, inclusive, secular, united future for Syria within the framework of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, through intra-Syrian talks that are UN-facilitated in Geneva and on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. We exchanged views on how to follow-up our work in this respect, especially on the political side.

Other issues of common interest and concern when it comes to foreign, global and regional security include Libya; the peace process between Israel and Palestine, where the European Union and Russia work well together within the Quartet and with our Arab partners, including with the Arab Peace Initiative; the full implementation of the nuclear deal with Iran; and, in general terms, the encouragement of a more constructive approach across the Gulf and in the broader Middle East.

But we will also discuss in the continuation of our talks some other issues of mutual concern where the Russian Federation and the European Union can constructively work together, not only for the sake of European and Russian interests but also for global stability and multilateralism and respect of international law when it comes to, for instance, the issue of denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula or the peace process in Afghanistan, and our common work on some key global issues for us, be it global responsibility-sharing when it comes to managing huge migratory flows or the work to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change or the Sustainable Development Goals.

In general terms, I believe our common work can be essential to strengthen the UN system and the multilateral approach and what we call a rules-based global order.

Again, this does not delete or overcome all the difficulties and all the disagreements we have, especially in some areas and especially on the issue of Ukraine, but there are also fields of cooperation, and we are determined to increase the level of coordination and cooperation, exploring possible ways in which Russia and the European Union can be useful to solve some of the crises we are facing in the world of today. We live in difficult times; times when not even one single inch, not one single centimetre of cooperation can be wasted or under-estimated. So, we have the responsibility to do the utmost to find common ground and common solutions.

We also have some other issues of disagreement or respective concerns that we also discussed in a friendly and open dialogue, but, as I said, overall I shared the Minister's assessment that this exchange was useful, constructive, positive and we will follow this up not only in the course of the day but also in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you.

Q and A:

Q. Did you discuss the issues related to mutual sanctions as well as the prospect of the revision of EU-Russia relations, which was suggested by the Russian side a year ago. And, a follow-up question to Ms Mogherini: Ukrainian officials do not withhold the fact that the current Rada will not consider the laws necessary for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. In this situation, do you discuss this issue with Kyiv? And is there a possibility that the sanctions will be lifted partly before the full implementation of the Minsk agreements provided there is progress in their implementation?

HRVP: Thank you. Well, I took note and put on my notes that "through our cooperation we might get, eventually, to settle everything". That would be already a good starting point. But - aside from that - our bilateral cooperation is not frozen. My visit here is the most evident demonstration of that, but apart from my visit here, Sergey and I met probably some twenty times in the last couple of years. If that is frozen cooperation... well, for you to assess.

It is true that it is not anymore what it used to be or what we would have liked it to be. For years, the European Union and Russia were working on the perspective of a strategic partnership. We would like to go back to a situation of that kind and, as I said, we are ready to explore all possible fields of cooperation on the basis, as Sergey [Lavrov] mentioned, of a pragmatic assessment of our respective interests. In many fields these respective interests coincide: bilaterally, regionally and globally.

But it would be quite surreal to be and to consider each other as strategic partners and to have respective sanctions. This is not the state of play that partners normally have. So we cannot pretend that there was nothing wrong going on in 2014 – we discussed it a length, not only today but over these years.

Our sanctions are not an objective in themselves. We have always said – consistently and united, as the European Union, all the 28 Member States – that we see this as only one part of a policy whose aim is to end the conflict in the east of Ukraine with the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Part of our sanctions are also related to the annexation of Crimea where it is quite clear that our views differ profoundly: we believe it is a breach of international law. But these are arguments we have exchanged among ourselves since then.

What we discussed today, in a constructive manner I believe, is the common work we can do to guarantee that the implementation of [the] Minsk [agreements] in all its aspects can move forward. Obviously we do discuss with our friends in Kyiv their side of the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, as we discussed together with our Russian friends what more they can do to guarantee that the Minsk agreements are fully implemented. So our objective is the end of the conflict in the east of Ukraine and the sanctions are linked to that, because – without wanting to go back to 2014 – we see very differently the origins of the conflict.

Having said that, we share I believe the interest in making our relations better, expanding the fields of cooperation, as I said, both bilaterally and on regional and global issues. Also because the world of today definitely needs – from an economic, a security point of view, a geopolitical point of view – cooperation rather than confrontation.

Q. Recently, you, Minister Lavrov, had negotiations with US State Secretary Tillerson where it was mentioned that the investigation into what happened in Khan-Seikhoun and in the Al Shayrat airport would be renewed. Is it really possible taking into account that the majority of OPCW voted against the proposal put forward by Russia and Iran? I also have a question to Ms Mogherini. What is your position on the fact that the Al Shayrat airport was attacked with 59 American missiles bypassing international rules, the UN Charter and all norms? And one more question. The parliament delegation of PACE visited Syria and its report mentions that there are positive developments, that there is progress in Syria. Does the EU have plans to send its own delegation to Syria?

HRVP: On that morning of 4 April, I was in Brussels meeting with some civil society organisations coming from Syria and some of them during the attack lost colleagues, friends, family. I say this because the war in Syria is causing an extreme number of civilian casualties and deaths. But when it gets to the use of chemical weapons, of chemical components, during the war, then we are at a different stage. We are at a different stage of atrocities and we are at the level of what amounts to a war crime if that is proven to be the case. This is why the European position on that is that a full transparent investigation has to be done by the OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] and full accountability has to be guaranteed within the UN appropriate system.

Coming to your question on the EU presence in Damascus. First of all, you started by saying that there are also some positive developments in Syria. Well, this is not the assessment we hear from our Syrian interlocutors. The situation in the country is still dramatic and even if there are attempts – serious attempts that we welcome especially in the Astana process – to have a ceasefire observed, still there are losses of lives and fighting on a daily basis in different parts of the country.

And the European Union is very clear in not being a military actor on the field, but only working for a peaceful political solution of the crisis and the humanitarian support to the Syrians. We have a European Union delegation to Syria that has never stopped working, from Beirut, including some contacts in Damascus - we have a humanitarian office of the European Union present in Damascus that is trying to help delivering humanitarian aid in the country, and we will continue to do so.

For us the framework is the UN framework, both for the humanitarian delivery of aid and for the political solution. And we will use and we will continue to use all contacts we have, all the power we can have, without having any European Union agenda for the future of Syria but only that of supporting and accompanying Syrians – all Syrians, none excluded – in finding their way to have a country where each and every Syrian, no matter what background they have, can feel at home. We believe this is the only sustainable basis for putting an end to the war but also for defeating Da'esh and eliminating any space for terrorist organisations to breathe in the country.

Q. Last night, you called Emmanuel Macron "a hope of the generation", speaking about French elections. But at the same time, around the same number of French voters rather apparently see Marine Le Pen as their hope and their future. If Russia calls one of the candidates "a hope for the generation", would it be accused of interfering in the French elections? And a second one: and are you concerned about the results of the elections that are already showing that around 40% of the voters cast their ballots for the candidates who were calling during their campaigns for a major review of the relations with the EU? Will Brussels do anything about that?

HRVP: What I

[{"service":"smk","type":"single","id":"856243559980314624","display_user":true,"display_user_pic":true,"auto_expand_photo":true,"auto_expand_video":true,"render":true}">tweeted yesterday night](#) was that, for me, seeing together EU and French flags welcoming the results of Emmanuel Macron was the hope of a generation. Seeing together the European and the French flags is affirming that a people's identity and a person's identity can be at the same time French and European. And this is how large parts of my generation – which is also Emmanuel's generation – feels about. One can feel a proud Italian, in my case, and a proud European, a proud French and a proud European, as Emmanuel feels, without denying the need to change and reform also our living together in the Union but putting all the energy we have into that. So, I am afraid I did not define Emmanuel as such as the hope of a generation but the fact of seeing European and French flags together.

This has to do with the second part of your question. You referred to the fact that a large number of French voters expressed or supported candidates who were putting into question the relation between France and the European Union. You know, it is not a relation, it is a community. The European Union without its Member States does not exist. And this is why commenting on the European Union and the French flags together is not interference; we are living in the same space. This distance that sometimes is perceived - inside or outside of the European Union - between capitals and "Brussels" is a fake one. I know that very well because I have been a Minister of a national Member State myself and I can tell you very frankly and very openly it is not ceding sovereignty being part of our Union; the only way we, in the European Union, can regain sovereignty in the globalised world of today, is by coming together.

So, the European Union is made of Member States and the sense of lack of distance is what allow us to work together. I chair three formations of the Council of the European Union: Foreign Ministers, Defence Ministers, and Development Ministers, and I know very well that the decisions the European Union takes are not taken by an alien living in Brussels. They are taken by the 28 relevant Ministers that form the decision and the consensus of the European Union. So, the European Union is made of us Europeans including our French friends who voted yesterday night. That is why it was only natural for me to comment and to welcome the fact that putting together the two flags – I would have commented in the same manner if they were appearing in any other rally or political meeting yesterday night – sends exactly the right message, both to the French people and to the European Union that we have a common responsibility to make our Union work and deliver for our people, because the European Union does not exist without the Europeans. It is as simple as that.

Q. Members of the gay community in Chechnya have made serious allegations about persecution, mistreatment, torture, even murder in Chechnya - in some cases at the hands of the Chechenian authorities. Has that matter been raised in your dialogue today? Second question: there are more than 30 members of the gay community from Chechnya currently in hiding in Russia, and they say they would desperately want to leave this country. Should the European Union or individual States from the European Union come up with a rescue plan to facilitate their exit?

HRVP: The issue of human rights came up in our dialogue this morning. By the way, before our meeting this morning, I met some representatives of the civil society organisations and human rights defenders with whom I discussed at length this and other issues related the work of civil society and respect of human rights in the Russian Federation.

I know that our Russian friends also have some concerns about some human rights issues inside the European Union. This is a frank and mutual dialogue where we hear each other and hopefully also listen to each other without only hearing. You might have seen the common reaction we have had on the specific case of the gay community in Chechnya and the need to protect it. Our expectation is that the Russian Federation does its part to protect its own citizens in full respect of human rights principles. This would cover also

the second part of your question. We believe that the authorities of the country hold the primary responsibility of protecting their citizens' rights and, again, this is an issue that we have raised and discussed.

See Also

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Languages:

Русский