European External Action Service (EEAS)

Foreign Affairs Council: Press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas upon arrival

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Check against delivery!

Good morning, everybody.

We have a full day ahead with the FAC and discussions.

First, we start with Ukraine and civilian detainees.

We have a lot of talk about the prisoners of war, also the children that have been abducted, but actually there are also civilians that are being really detained in the occupied territories. These are teachers, these are journalists. We have the NGOs here from Ukraine who are dealing with this, and we are also discussing what more can we do.

We are thinking of launching a platform where we can actually meet those requirements to get those people free, and also the information that we need about these people that are detained. It is much more difficult to have this information than about the children, for example.

Then, we move to discussion on Ukraine. Today we are hoping for that we get 250 listings agreed, and then we are also working for the 21st sanctions package, where we do not have agreement yet.

This is the biggest number of listings we have done so far. It is also [in] reaction to the attacks that Russia has had on the civilians recently.

Then, we have the discussion on the Black Sea strategy. We have the maritime hub there ready. Bulgaria and Romania are working together, really addressing the protection of critical infrastructure, but also the hybrid threats that are in this region.

We are going to also agree on a new Partnership Mission for Armenia to fight the hybrid threats and FIMI that they are really encountering with there.

Then, we have the discussion on the Middle East. We also have the lunch with the Gulf partners regarding the security of the Gulf region. It has been on top of everybody's mind. The MoU is there, but not really holding, and we are discussing what more can we do, what

kind of messages we can send that the Strait of Hormuz has to be opened, freedom of navigation has to be respected, there cannot be no tolls, no fees for navigation there.

And then our internal discussion on the Middle East, where we have now the Options Paper from the Commission on the table, highlighting the different options that we have. Let's see how this discussion goes. Whether the Member States really have an appetite for one of those measures to be more concrete to come from the Commission.

Then, topics that we will discuss: Western Balkans, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina and the new High Representative, and the process around this.

And then what is happening also in Sudan. We should not forget about this, and send clear messages to those who are mediating, but also those who are meddling there, because we should not lose sight [of] what is happening.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/media/video/I-292435

Q&A

Q. You just said that the 21st package, there is no agreement. Will there be other sanctions against Russia today that will be adopted outside of the package?

Yes, we have the 250 listings. There are different people, individuals that have been engaging in in different activities, so it is a vast list. This, I hope that we get to adopt today. When it comes to the 21st package, there are still some open questions, but we are working towards agreement.

Q. When you talk about the MoU, what practically can the EU do to try and help the implementation of that? I know you talked about messages and that type of thing, but can you give us a little bit more meat on the bones in terms of that?

That is also the discussion that we have with the Gulf countries because they also want to hope that this process goes in the right direction. The MoU is therefore having also the pause to negotiate the hard topics, and there, the EU has a lot of expertise when it comes to nuclear power, for example. We have offered our expertise, our people, that could be the ones who are negotiating and putting these issues together. Also, when it comes to other topics like the issues of proxies. And there again, we have the same interests with the Gulf countries. We are really discussing how we can make sure that we are around that table, so that actually our voices are heard, because Gulf countries are living in the vicinity of Iran, and all these threats are really having an effect, but they are also having an effect on us, and we are very like-minded there.

Q. Regarding illegal settlements, what would be your preferred option?

It really does not matter what is my preferred option because I try to put together the 27 where we have a common ground. So, let's see. There has been a lot of asks and requests from the Member States regarding the ban of the trade with illegal settlements, and let's see if these options that have been provided now will have a stronger push from Member states, and some of them also change their mind that we should take this approach. Because everybody agrees that the situation in the West Bank is really intolerable, and it is also clear that we are all supporting the two-state solution. What is happening in the West Bank is actually making it more and more impossible that this two-state solution ever can come to effect.

Q. Ukraine now is resetting its government again. How do you feel about it? How do you feel about resignation of Prime Minister Svyrydenko? And what do you expect in this case of a new government?

Of course, forming a government is everybody's internal political business. For us, of course, it is important that we have our interlocutors, and we can continue the work. For us, it is also important that the work with the reforms continues, because we also want to push the enlargement agenda, and therefore we also need to see that Ukraine is doing the reforms from their side. But we need to work with whoever the people or the government is put together. So, we need to work with those people.

Q. Last time you mentioned that now we have almost two Coalitions of the Willing. Now we have three maybe, because NATO is saying [inaudible]. How do you see this is going to work? All these Coalitions the Willing and there is no action?

That is a very good question, and that should be part of this MoU and the discussion forward, because right now, Iran is saying that they do not accept any kind of outside intervention in the Strait of Hormuz. So first, there has to be agreement that holds, and then, of course, all those can also move forward. I have always advocated for the Operation ASPIDES that is already there, that is already functioning and has a mandate - just needs to change the operational plan. But the Member States were saying that let the Operation ASPIDES stay in the Red Sea because there is also the freedom of navigation that is under threat. We have a lot of goodwill how to make it work in action when Iran does not agree to this, it is big question that needs to be solved in the negotiations and therefore we are offering our help as well.

Q. Regarding the political transition in Syria. What is the message you have right now for the Syrian approach?

The messages are actually the same with the Gulf countries. This is the inclusivity of the governance that is extremely important, and also that the accountability is taken into account. When we are talking with the Syrian authorities, they are also struggling with the build-up of the institutions. So, we have offered also our help regarding build-up of institutions, putting together the constitution that is actually really inclusive of all the groups that are there in

Syria, but of course they are also struggling. For us, it is important the stability of Syria and also considering that we have the camps there, that there is no spillover effect. So far, Syria has managed to stay out of this conflict, and it is also important that it stays that way.

Q. On Black Sea Security policy, and to take into account Georgian Dream's policy against the European Union. How do you see cooperation or involvement of Georgia, in this very, for us, very important project, and how do you estimate the situation, current situation?

Yes, the Black Sea Strategy we have in place already from last year. Now it is the implementation of this. The different countries around Black Sea are, of course, an important part of this. Now we are also struggling with Georgia, as we do not really have connections with the government. We do not want to support the government, we want to support the people of Georgia, and we have also had discussions how we can best do that, so that people do not lose hope in Europe.

Q. On trade with settlements, do you have a legal opinion whether it should be taken as unanimity as a trade measure as sanctions?

As I am a lawyer myself, there is a saying: when there are two lawyers, there are three opinions. So, do we have the same on the table? There are different legal opinions. We are here in the Council building, and the Council legal service, says that for this we need QMV because it is a trade issue. That is one of the legal opinions.

Q. [inaudible]

Iraq is also a major concern for us, considering what is happening in Iran and also in the Strait of Hormuz. Considering that the revenues for Iraq's government to provide the services within Iraq actually are coming via the Strait of Hormuz, via the oil export. So, if you cannot provide the services in Iraq, then there is also risk for these internal collisions and conflicts. That is why we are also in contact with the Iraqi officials in terms of what can we do, and of course that is also the concern for the regional partners.

Q. On the subject of sanctions, when we last spoke in Luxembourg, it seemed to me that we were both a bit optimistic that more could be done; now it seems that they are starting to pick and choose from among them - whether or not we will get that strong 21st package of sanctions.

We are working on this so that we can put together a strong 21st package. Unfortunately, the reality is that while everyone wants this war to end, no one wants to, so to speak, bear the short-term pain associated with adding one company or another to the list, but we are continuing to work on it. Today we are adding 250 different individuals to this list of those sanctioned by the EU, which will certainly have an effect.

Q. Regarding the ban on those Russian soldiers, there were reports suggesting a more nuanced approach, distinguishing, for instance, between a kitchen worker and someone

who actually fired a weapon. So, will there be a modified version of the ban involving such distinctions, or will we simply issue a blanket ban on anyone who has fought against Ukraine?

This once again demonstrates that opinions vary across European Union Member States, largely depending on how far removed—so to speak—one feels from the war; and we are not talking about geographical distance here. Therefore, it would be right for anyone who has participated in this war to be placed on the list of those barred from entering Europe, given that this war has effectively been waged against Europe as well.

Q. Is this the final word on the matter, or should we expect some kind of long-term ban if the sanctions fail?

This is certainly not the final word. I believe that the events here—even the attacks against Ukrainian civilians—may bring about a realisation that, for many of us, we must take very strong measures after all.

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council%C2%A0press%C2%A0remarks-high-representative-kaja-kallas-upon-arrival_en