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Türkiye: Press remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas at the joint press conference

Ankara, 24/01/2024

EEAS Press Team

Check against delivery!

Thank you, Mr Fidan [Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey], dear Hakan. It is a real pleasure to be here in Ankara, today. So, thank you for the kind words, thank you for the warm welcome.

Before I begin, I want to express my sincere condolences for the families that were affected by this horrible fire in the hotel that took place recently.

We stand in solidarity with the Turkish people in these difficult times.

Türkiye is one of Europeans’ most important partners as a candidate country, and a major NATO ally. You play a central role in the Europeans’ security.

Our economic partnership is stronger than ever and there is immense potential for cooperation across a wide range of issues – from trade, innovation, to fighting terrorism.

There are differences too, particularly on issues like Cyprus and closing loopholes around Russia sanctions. [Further] steps forward on the human rights are essential to move forward on the European path. I believe our shared goals provide a foundation for more high-level dialogue and cooperation.

So, we discussed several issues that concern our bilateral cooperation between the European Union and Türkiye – but we also have a lot in common, a lot of points of cooperation when it comes to the foreign policy issues.

We discussed Syria. The fall of Assad’s regime comes with incredible hope but also many challenges. The Syrian people need a government that represents a Syria in all its diversity.

This is also the European Union’s call. We want to support Syrians’ economic recovery, and the European Union is ready to ease sanctions on Syria – contingent on the new government's actions.

The path to Syria’s future also runs through Türkiye. I commend Türkiye for really helping a large number of Syrian refugees and welcoming them here. It is clear that the refugees can return to Syria when Syria is a stable country, and there are jobs, and it is possible to make a living.

So therefore, it is also in everybody's interest that Syria’s future will be hopeful. There is hope and future in Syria.

We recognise that Türkiye has legitimate security concerns in Syria. Terrorism poses a grave threat to both the European Union as well as Turkey. We agree that ISIS must be kept down. Any actions in northern Syria must take the delicate balance of serious, hopeful and fragile future into account.

A second issue was Gaza. The ceasefire offers a chance to break this cycle of violence. We urge both sides to implement this agreement. Of course, the ceasefire is temporary, but we need sustainable peace. Israelis and Palestinians deserve peace in the long term.

The European Union remains a strong supporter of Palestinian people. We are also ramping up our aid. We are in talks about redeploying our mission EUBAM Rafah. We are also committed to the long-term reconstruction and development. We believe the Two-State Solution is the only way forward.

Third, Ukraine. Russia’s invasion will soon enter its fourth year. Our priority is to strengthen Ukraine’s position, because there are no signs that Putin wants peace. We provided over €134 billion to Ukraine, making us Kiev’s largest backer. We will have also trained 75,000 Ukrainian soldiers by the end of February. We have imposed the most the wide-sweeping sanctions in the European Union history.

And on Monday, the European Union will discuss ways to further ways to step up our support for Ukraine. Of course, we all want peace, but we want the peace also to be sustainable. I do not know anybody else who wants more peace than the Ukrainians, that are constantly bombed.

So, to conclude, our cooperation between European Union and Türkiye has so much potential. I am looking forward to really enhance our cooperation and relationship even further. So, thank you again for hosting me and I look forward to cooperating together.

Thank you.

Q&A

Q. In Turkish

On Monday, on the 27th of January, we will have a meeting of Foreign Affairs ministers, and we will discuss this. So, what we are proposing is a roadmap to ease the sanctions and do it the step-by step approach. So, if we see the steps of the Syrian leadership going to the right direction, then we are also willing to

ease next level of sanctions. So, we start with those that are really necessary to start the build-up of the country and then we are willing to make our steps if the Syrian leadership is making steps on their behalf. We also want to have a fall-back mechanism if we see that developments are going to the wrong direction, we are also putting the sanctions back. So, as I said, Syria’s future is both hopeful but also fragile; so we need to see this in place. I am happy that, together with regional actors and also Türkiye, also the United States, the United Kingdom, we have really sent the same message of what we want to see in Syria, what are the developments of what we want to see. But yes, the initial decision will be made it on Monday.

Watch the video (starting at 6:55):

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