European External Action Service (EEAS)

Foreign Affairs Council: Press conference by High Representative Kaja Kallas

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Check against delivery!

Good afternoon.

We just concluded a very productive meeting of Foreign Ministers. I will start with the outlook for 2026.

The past weeks have made abundantly clear that the world order is shifting. Unpredictability is no longer an exception - it was the word that defined 2025 and it is also the word that will define 2026. Russia poses a major threat. China is a long-term challenge. The Middle East faces constant instability. But the new variable is the fundamental reorientation across the Atlantic.

Ministers today discussed how we remain united in front of all these challenges. When we are divided, we are weak, and when we are weak, we can be pushed around. It is on us to stand our ground. What is clear is that Europe must become stronger, and we must deepen our partnerships. The agreements reached with India this week are a good example of how Europe can grow stronger. A new security strategy can help chart the course. I will make sure that the Member States are involved in this.

Now, on Ukraine. Russia is not making an even token effort towards peace. Its strike on a passenger train was a war crime, like it was a war crime also to attack civilian infrastructure, like energy infrastructure, hospitals, schools, apartment buildings. And with that, Russia is failing to win on the battlefield, so it tries to weaponise winter.

Now, energy is the new front line. The EU is responding with the biggest ever winter aid package, this covers emergency equipment, funding and energy deliveries. Just today, we provided an extra 500 generators and €50 million for energy support. Overall, our energy fund has surpassed €1.6 billion. But this is not enough, as the images from Ukraine show us every day.

This is why we are also proposing a task force with the teams in Brussels and Kyiv to better coordinate energy support. Member States must also dig deeper into their air defence stocks.

In parallel, we increase pressure on Russia. The EU today blacklisted Russia for risk of money laundering. This will slow down and increase the costs of transactions with Russian banks. Work is also advancing on the €90 billion loan and the 20th sanctions package. Any measure that limits Russia's war funding must be on the table. There is also a proposal to ban Russian ex-combatants from entering into Schengen, [due to] its security risk. Planning also continues on the EU's contributions to the security guarantees - from expanding training to Ukrainian territory to accession and defence industry support. EU will be there. Accountability remains essential. Last week, the EU allocated the first €10 million to help set up a special Tribunal for the crime of aggression. Russia started this war, and Russia must be held accountable for it.

Then, also with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, we also discussed about accountability, that accountability is essential for any peace. Ministers had a very good discussion on human rights accountability and vital work of the United Nations.

In Iran, horrific crackdown on protesters has come at heavy human cost. The EU already has sweeping sanctions in place, and today, ministers agreed to designate Iran Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization. This will put them on the same footing with Daesh, Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda. Those who operate through terror must be treated as terrorists. Ministers also imposed sanctions on those responsible for the brutal crackdown of protests, including the Minister of Interior. Repression cannot go unanswered. Beyond this, ministers adopted new sanctions on those involved in Iran's war support to Russia, and expanded export controls. Ministers were clear that Iran must release all those unjustly detained, including the European Union citizens. Going forward, we must be ready to further increase pressure on the authorities and continue supporting Iran's civil society.

On Syria. Syria remains fragile. The ceasefire and the opening of humanitarian corridors are positive developments, but the country is far from stable. ISIS poses a persistent threat, and overall Minister stressed that the inclusive political transition and national reconciliation are the best path to prevent Syria from sliding back into chaos.

On Gaza, our focus is on supporting the peace plan. The overdue reopening of the Rafah Crossing Point between Gaza and Egypt will be the clearest sign of progress yet. Our EU personnel is ready to redeploy. Our EUPOL COPPS mission can play a key role in training Palestinian police and justice institutions. We are moving ahead with expanding EU training activities into Jordan. Ultimately, the security of Gaza must lie in the hands of Palestinians. Ministers also discussed how to engage and support Gaza's new governance structures. As we know, Gaza's reconstruction will depend on Hamas' demilitarization.

Then, Sudan remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis. In response to the escalating violence, Ministers adopted new sanctions against members of the Rapid Support Forces

and the Sudanese Armed Forces. These measures alone will not end the war; but they will raise the cost for those responsible.

And finally, on the Great Lakes region, Ministers discussed how the EU can intensify diplomatic engagement, scale up humanitarian assistance and better support regional stabilisation efforts. We must be ready to consider further measures, according to the events on the ground.

And with that I am happy to take your questions.

Q&A

Q. You have just taken the decision to designate the Iran Revolutionary Guard as terrorists. Does this mean that the EU would back Donald Trump striking the regime in Tehran with his armada?

This decision means that if we list them as a terrorist organisation, then many Member States have criminalized any activity or interaction with the terrorist organisation. So that puts more pressure on this. When it comes to attacks, then I think the region does not need a new war.

Q. Today, the Ministers were supposed to talk about the security guarantees for Ukraine and the Prosperity Plan. And as we know, one of the best security guarantees is the membership of Ukraine in the European Union. And now there are a lot of discussions concerning the date, the year, when this accession is possible. There are a lot of talks around 2027 as the accession year. Do you think it is possible for Ukraine to join the EU in 2027 if not when? And recently, Prime Minister of Hungary, Victor Orban, he said that there is some secret document where 2027 goal is mentioned and he was criticised in that widely. Does this document exist? Is it a Prosperity Plan?

What is clear is that Ukraine's future lies in the European Union. We are working on this, the process of joining European Union. But I also want to stress that enlargement is a geopolitical choice in this geopolitical world. What we have right now. I think it is good to be the region where countries want to join us voluntarily, by the way, and there are many of those. But we also need to deliver on this. I think we need to see in coming years, really development and new countries joining to make us also stronger on the geopolitical sphere.

Q. High Representative, it is on the Board of Peace. You said the future of Gaza is up to the Palestinians. Can you share with us anything on the discussion among the ministers on the Board of Peace - if there is any news about this, on Trump’s Board of Peace.

Actually, we had the discussion with the ministers on the Board of Peace last Monday. We did the legal analysis of the Charter, and the position of Member States is that we are supporting the Board of Peace that would be in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution. If you read the Security Council Resolution, it is about Gaza. It is limited in terms of time - 2027 -, and it has a clear role for the Palestinians also in the process. Now, the Charter

of Board of Peace right now is much wider. It does not have the equality of States that most of countries have in their constitutions or in their laws, that they can only join international organisations, whereas the equality of the States is respected. If you read the Charter, then all the States are not equal in this Board of Peace. The approach has been to try to narrow the Board of Peace down to Gaza like it was meant to be in the United Nations Security Resolution. But what I want to stress, what the Ministers said, is that we really want to work in order to have a sustainable peace in Gaza. There is a willingness to work with that. But as we are all democracies, then we also are bound by the rules of these democracies, for example, regarding joining the international organisations.

Q. I have a question on Ukraine and Russia. I am sure you know, there has been a lot of talk lately about the possibility of reopening diplomatic channels with Russia. Emmanuel Macron and Giorgia Meloni are among those who call for this re engagement to happen, to avoid depending on the White House diplomacy, which, as you know, it is not always predictable. There is no immediate issue. But where exactly do you stand? Do you think the time has come to pick up the phone and call the Kremlin and who should do it? Should it be you? Should it be one of the 27 leaders, or should we spend six months trying to find a special envoy of some kind? Thank you.

We cannot be the demandeurs here that, you know, we go to Russia and talk to us. What is the picture right now is that the concessions that Americans are putting on Ukraine are quite strong. I do not think there is anything that we can offer to Russia on top of that, what they already sort of get from their understanding with the Americans. Which means: why should they talk to us? Because they get what they want in this relationship. Of course, what we need to see, and what we are working on, is putting more pressure on Russia so that they would go from pretending to negotiate to actually negotiate. And also to take into account the worries that we have with Russia, that this war will not continue, and this war will not expand to other territories. I think this is important to understand. If you look at these Abu Dhabi discussions, then Russia's were not present on the level that has the right to make decisions, so they are not really taking this seriously.

Q. Did you discuss the loan for Ukraine, how you are going to spend it? Because Minister for Foreign Affairs Sybiha, he said that Ukraine needs at least $15 billion per year to buy American weapons. Is it possible to buy American weapons with this money? And the second question on the Donbas region, the State Secretary of the United States, Rubio, said that it is a central issue in negotiation. Several months ago, you already commented on this topic. If there is some changes, what do you think should Ukraine withdraw the army, armed forces, or give up Donbas at the sake of peace? Because today morning, he said that some so-called concessions are possible in exchange of the guarantee of security, is it help to increase security of Ukraine.

So, first on the loan and how to spend it. If you recall the European Council decision on this loan, it had sort of a cascade principle. First, of course, if Ukrainian industry or European

industry are able to provide the urgent needs that Ukraine has, then it should be bought from there, but if not, then it could be bought outside Europe or Ukraine to answer the urgent needs that Ukraine has. So yesterday, I had a meeting with European defence industry, like a group of representatives from the defence industry, and I was also saying to them very clearly, that if you are not really ramping up your production and speeding up your processes, you are going to lose this money, because the urgent needs of Ukraine are the first and, and, if you are not able to provide, the money will go outside to those providers who can. Then, on the second question, it is up to Ukraine to decide what kind of concessions Ukraine is willing to make. What I was saying is that, if they are making concessions, then Ukrainians have been very clear that it has to be in exchange for tangible security guarantees, because it is also very hard to explain to your people why you have to make these concessions, unless you have the rest of Ukraine then in peace. That is what they have to decide. Now, the security guarantees that we are providing, the Coalition of the willingness providing are there, but there also has to be tangible security guarantees from United States, not on paper, but really very, very concrete. They cannot be also conditional, because, if you are making such hard decisions, then you also need to have security afterwards.

Q. It was really big shift on the IRGC this week. We saw a number of big States kind of change their position, really in a short timeframe. I wonder if you could just talk us through what you saw as the key moments for you, for putting this on the table. And you know what you understand and thinking in Paris and Rome, where they really changed their position. What sort of did it? How did the EU come together for this listing?

As you know, it has been quite a process. I cannot speak for the Member States, they speak for themselves. What is my opinion? The opinion is that, there was an internet ban, and everything was not clear - what has happened - and when the atrocities were clear, then also, it was clear that there has to be a very strong response from the European side.

Q. From the discussions today, do you think there is now a willingness from the member states to start actually blacklisting Russian soldiers or ex-soldiers into entry into the Schengen area. Are the Member States actually going to do this? And on your visit to India, did you manage to make any progress in convincing the Indians to stop purchasing so much Russian crude oil?

On the proposal of banning ex-combatants of Russia entering into European Union, the proposal was made, and many Member States around the table supported this. Because if you look how many ex-combatants are there compared to the war in Afghanistan, for example, there are a lot of them. And it poses a clear security risk to Europe. We agreed to take this proposal further and test the appetite from the Member States. But this is one of the steps that we need to prepare, if there is a ceasefire or some kind of solution. We need to have answers before. What do we do? What are risks then? Because the risks also change.

On India, we had very productive meetings and, of course, I raised this issue as well, understanding where they are coming from. I think it is also easier for them to have this agreement with us and diversify their partnerships, in this regard. What we also raised with them was the energy support to Ukraine. Because, like you see Ukrainians are really in freezing cold. Russians are trying to freeze them to death and even if you cannot give military support, then the energy support in terms of substations, cables, whatever is needed to repair, so that people would not be in darkness and cold. It is also a humanitarian issue that could be done by them.

Q. I have two questions, if I may. One is about the 20th sanctions package. Is it still the plan to approve this package, or rather, or propose this package, at least by the 24th of February, the fourth anniversary of the invasion? And, also regarding the Finnish and Swedish proposals; they proposed three things, the maritime services, ban, restrictions on imports of Russian fertilisers and a ban on exports of luxury goods. I was just wondering, what do you what do you make of these proposals? Do you think they are plausible? Will they be in the package? And the second question, about China. You praised Mark Carney's speech at Davos in your speech yesterday, but we have also seen both Mark Carney, but also Keir Starmer, attempt to improve relations with China, both politically and economically. So my question is, is this something that you think the EU should consider doing or not?

On the 20th package of sanctions, yes, we aim to come out with this on the 24th of February, and for that, countries are proposing different things, including what you mentioned, the full maritime services ban, and also issues on energy, energy sanctions and different fertilizers. These are proposals on the table. The work is ongoing. I cannot say that we have an agreement now. Otherwise, we would already declare that we have an agreement, but we had today a lot, so now we continue working with this.

On the other question, what everybody sees is that we really need to build our partnerships, but at the same time not creating any new dependencies, because your dependency is also your vulnerability. And we have learned the hard way that via this vulnerability, you can also be hurt. If you think about the dependency on Russian energy that Europe had. So, Member States are quite cautious in this regard. Actually, China is posing a long-term challenge because they are using the economic coercive practices towards our markets. We need to have a response to that, but at the same time, like I said, reach out to different partnerships with different countries across the world. What I can say also, is that there is much appetite for countries outside Europe to also work with us. Being predictable has become a virtue.

Q. I think a lot of us are quite curious about the Ministers-only discussion in the morning. Did you discuss the issue of Greenland? And are there any ideas on the table for how perhaps the European Union could contribute to addressing some of the security issues that have been raised around Greenland and the Arctic?

Yes, I would be also interested in that discussion, because it was a very good discussion, a very good and open discussion on the outlook for the 2026. Of course, we discussed Greenland and also the unified approach that we had, and also how it makes us stronger, if we are united. And clearly, also issues of security and more - what we can do for the defence of Greenland, but also other parts of Europe. It was a good, frank and open discussion, and I would also say quite clear-eyed.

Q . Could you give us a conclusion on North Syria, the Kurdish area we call Rojava? And second, I would like to give you the book as a gift. This book is ‘For History’. This book was written by President Barzani, and there is everything inside – this book – about Kurds. So, I would like to give it to you as a gift. Is it ok?

Yes, very good. You know, my reading list is quite long. I am not telling you what I am reading right now but it is also about the history of different regions. So, by the end, when I finish this job, I will be very smart.

On Syria, on your question. The discussion was: should we do something very concrete? So, what we agreed is to do the outreach to our regional partners. What more can we do to keep Syria on the right track? everybody expressed the inclusivity of the governance is a problem also, reconciliation of the society is a problem. When we have done the outreach to the regional partners, then we have also agreed or discussed how we can then help Syria. If they have a problem with the building up of the institutions, we can help with that. But let's then share who does what to keep them on track, because our common interest is the stability of Syria and the stability of the Middle East for that matter.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/media/video/I-284269

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