Foreign Affairs Council: press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas after the meeting

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Thank you, it is good to see you here in Luxembourg. It is my first time in this building, so it is interesting and different.

We had many important topics that we discussed today. First, of course, Ukraine. It is clear that all Member States want peace. And, remember, we had 27 [EU] countries who supported the ceasefire. Also, Ukraine agreed to unconditional ceasefire already a month ago.

Yet, we are seeing that Russia alone wants war, because we [saw one of] the deadliest attacks yesterday: Sumy air strikes over the weekend. It is clear that they are stalling and [do] not want peace at all. So, the only way to get Russia to negotiate seriously is putting some more pressure on Russia.

Then, second the military aid to Ukraine. I mean, one [part] is putting pressure on Russia, but then the other part is also helping Ukraine to defend itself. It is clear that we are the biggest provider of military aid, we are also the biggest buyer from the Ukraine defence industry and the biggest supporter of the defence industry. We also have the mission of training Ukrainian soldiers [EUMAM Ukraine], [we have already trained] over 73,000 soldiers. So, today we also discussed what more we [can] do when it comes to the missions: should we expand the mandate of the missions that we have in order to contribute to the security guarantees of coalition of the willing. Then, when it comes to the initiative of delivering 2 million rounds of ammunition to Ukraine, I am happy to see that we have already reached the two- thirds of the target. We still do not have 100%, but we definitely need to move forward with that. The large majority of Member States agrees that we need to do more. I am also happy to see Norway contributing with €400 million part, so [the support] goes beyond the European Union. When it comes to the support for this year, then already this year, Members States [of] the European Union have contributed more than €23 billion to Ukraine. Last year, it was [€] 20 billion together with the help of United States, altogether [€]40 billion last year. So, we still have room to go.

Then third: putting the pressure on Russia. It is clear, that we are working on the 17th package [of sanctions]. Also, the shadow fleet and different elements there to put it together for the Foreign Affairs Council in May.

Then, the second big topic is [the] Middle East and there of course we discussed the situation of Gaza. We will later today have a first ever High-Level Dialogue with Palestine, also discussing its future. What all the Member States agree is that we support the Two-State solution and. We have also proposed €1.6 billion support for three years for Palestinian Authority, who should be the one providing those services to the Palestinians.

When it comes to the overall situation, then it is very grave and of course we really want the mediators to come back to the negotiation table, and resume the ceasefire and release all hostages. The humanitarian aid we are giving to Gaza and Palestinians it should not be politicised. What it means is that it has to reach the people that are in need. Israel has the right to defend itself, but its current actions go beyond proportionate self-defence. We welcome the Arab Plan for reconstruction of Gaza, but at the same time it lacks three important elements which are funding, security, and governance of Gaza. But we are willing to work with our Arab partners, international partners to develop on these topics.

Then, we had a very intense discussion on Syria and whether to go on with the easing of the sanctions. And there it is clear, that in order to reconstruct Syria, they need access to services. But it is also clear that we have not seen many steps from the new leadership. And [the] future of Syria is still very fragile, but still hopeful. We agreed that we will evaluate the process so far because we have done some lifting of the sanctions. But we will also work to propose next steps, of course, keeping in mind the conditionalities, the red lines that we will put, or the conditions that we really want to see. So, we will work on the technical specifications there and then come back if we are ready to agree and move forward with this step.

Then on Iran, we adopted sanctions for state sponsored hostage taking. [Seven individuals and two entities]. were sanctioned. And when it comes to the Iran nuclear talks in Oman, these are a step in the right direction because we do not want to see a nuclear weapon developed by Iran.

Then, we had a discussion on Africa and there I thanked all those Member States who have represented also the European Union on their side on different events in different parts of Africa. What is clear is that all the Member States want more engagement with African countries and not to lose them to any outside influence like Russia or China.

We definitely have something to offer. And as we have the African Union - European Union Ministerial [meeting] coming - it is the third of a kind - then we were discussing what could be the deliverables. Of course, also in Africa we see some very worrying developments, like the worst humanitarian crisis in Sudan. We also discussed what more can we do. We condemn the attacks on the Zamzam refugee camp by the Rapid Support Forces. These assaults on the most vulnerable are utterly unacceptable and must stop. We also have tomorrow in London a Sudan aid conference where Commissioner Lahbib will represent the European Union and it is organised together with France, UK, and Germany.

And then last point, we discussed yesterday, but also today. We also had the Western Balkan ministers with us. And today we had very good discussions on Western Balkans. It is clear that the stability and security of the region is essential. If you look at the map, Western Balkans are in Europe geographically. They should also be in the European Union. And that is why the enlargement process is super important, and we need to move forward with that. We see Albania and Montenegro doing good steps and good reforms. So hopefully we will have some success stories from there.

Then, in Bosnia Herzegovina, it is in [a] constitutional crisis and it is clear that any attempt to break Bosnia Herzegovina is unacceptable. The political leaders must bridge divisions, not to widen them. And when I was there, I was also seeing that enlargement is something that they all agree on. So, they should move with the decisions in this regard because the international intervention could be phased out if everybody sees that they are able to make their decisions on their own.

And then, finally on Serbia and Kosovo, it is clear that the normalisation of their relations is of utmost importance. And that is why the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue must continue. We have appointed a new Special Representative for Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, and I will also visit [them] later in May. But what was also discussed and very clearly said by different Member States is that any participation in the 9th of May parades - or celebrations - in Moscow will be not taken lightly on the European side, considering that Russia is really waging a full-scale war in Europe.

I will stop here, and I am ready to take your questions.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-270520

Q&A

Q. Are you tracking which countries or candidate countries intend to visit Moscow on the 9th of May? And of course, it will be a huge celebration in Moscow, for Putin. Do you plan some visit to Kyiv on the same day or the date near to 9th of May?

Thank you. We made it very clear that we do not want any candidate country to participate in these events on the 9th of May in Moscow. So that was very clear, the message was there. When it comes to visits to Kyiv, then of course, I have called, on all the Member States, but also on representatives of the institutions to visit Kyiv and Ukraine as much as possible, to really show our solidarity and that we are with Ukraine. Of course, we are always looking for options to visit and go also together with deliverables to Ukraine. Thank you.

Q. I have a question on Iran which you mentioned in your introduction. The HRVP traditionally has a lead mediation role on talks on its nuclear program. So, I was wondering if you could tell us about coordination efforts with the E3 so that you could maybe be included in the ongoing talks, considering they are going to continue in Rome on Saturday. Might we see a

stronger EU involvement there? And overall, how confident are you that these US-led talks can help contain the nuclear program without new strikes?

Thank you. At the last Foreign Affairs Council, we had a deep discussion on Iran and how Member States really want to proceed with it. Therefore, one of the outcomes are actually the sanctions that we put today on Iran regarding the state-sponsored hostage-taking [of European citizens as well. When it comes to the nuclear talks, then of course we are constantly talking with the E3 countries [about] what the position could be, because the deadline of the snapback is really approaching. But there, we also need to discuss this with the United States, and we did so also at the G7 meeting because it is important to have a really unified approach to this, and because nobody wants to see Iran developing a nuclear weapon. So, we are concentrating our efforts on that. Thank you.

Q. HRVP, you mentioned this morning two-thirds of progress towards your ammunition initiative. Could you give us a sense of whether any meaningful progress has been achieved today, and by when you expect to like hit the 100%? And could you give us a sense of when this ammunition would be delivered? Because now we are talking pledges. Is there a sense of when they could actually arrive in Ukraine?

Thank you. As soon as possible is the short answer, because they need it now. Because these attacks are going through, there are civilian casualties in great numbers. That is why they need the ammunition. That is why they also need the air defence. The calls by Ukraine to have more air defence have been really vocal as well. So, that is why the short answer is: as soon as possible. [There are], of course, commitments, but commitments also need to be followed. So, some Member States have already proposed ammunition and some have proposed funding for ammunition. The Czech initiative has mapped the ammunition that is available and the external action service has done so, too. So, we can move quite fast. Thank you.

Q. Two questions, one is on Ukraine. This morning, some of the ministers, when they came in at the doorsteps, underlined the fact that the attack in Sumy was not only horrific, but it was intentional. Then, we have different words from the US, where President Trump said that they made a mistake. So, I was wondering which is the true and correct assessment of that. Secondly, on the Balkans again, this morning one Member State said that there were worrying signs, possible conflicts in the area. You yourself said that there are tensions rising. So, do we need to worry?

On Western Balkans, I think we should always worry about the tensions rising, and that is why we need to keep the tensions down. I think the best way to really proceed is to have them all in [the] European Union. Then there are less tensions, because the European Union is a peace project and works in calming the tensions between those countries. But I think also the meetings we have had are very good in this regard, giving very clear messages also from our side and all the Member States being very united. So, if you think that their support in

their countries is generally very high for the European Union. This is what the people want to have hope for. We can also stress on that. Now, on the first question, I think it is in everybody's interest that, Russia realises it made a mistake, but it made a mistake by attacking Ukraine, that it cannot win in Ukraine because the will of the Ukrainian people is not broken. And European countries will - and not only European countries but many other countries - will stand by Ukraine. And I hope that it is also clear to everybody now that if you want the killing to stop, you should put the pressure on Russia who actually does the killing. Thank you.

Q. A number of countries have been calling for a while to stop LNG imports from Russia. Last year, I think Russia gained around €7 or €8 billion with these shipments. Now the EU is offering to the US to replace some of those imports by US imports - or imports from the US. Is there a new case now for sanctions on Russian LNG in the 17th package?

Thank you. Like I said, we are working on the 17th package. So, of course, putting the sanctions on oil and gas and putting more on that side would have a bigger effect because this is how they are funding also their war. The discussions are ongoing, but you know very well that we need 27 countries to agree. But my point is that we should put as strong a package together as possible, hopefully also with our international partners. Thank you.

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