

Remarks by HR/VP Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council

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First of all, it is going to be a very long day. We have several issues on the agenda, all of them are extremely important.

I would like to start from the first one that will be the main highlight of the day: Syria. We will adopt Council Conclusions; we will reiterate our common position that I stated on behalf of the 28 Member States in the last couple of days, especially on the use of chemical weapons and our reaction to that. But most of all, we will work to prepare the second Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the region" next week, so that it can be the opportunity to relaunch the UN-led political process.

I had the opportunity to discuss this yesterday with Staffan de Mistura [UN Special Envoy for Syria] and all our Arab partners in Saudi Arabia, where I was invited to open the League of Arab States Summit, and it seems to me very clear that there is the need to give a push to the relaunch of the UN-led political process in this moment. Next week, we will have more than 70 delegations for an EU-UN chaired Conference that, next to the humanitarian pledges, will also focus on how to relaunch the intra-Syrian political talks - meaningful political talks.

So, this will be the main discussion we will have today with the [Foreign] Ministers.

We will also discuss again the situation in Iran. Obviously, this will also be part of our discussion on Syria. And I expect here that the Member States will reiterate our strong, unequivocal commitment to the full implementation of the nuclear deal with Iran by all sides. Obviously, the E3 [France, Germany, United Kingdom] will share with the other Ministers their efforts, in particular with the American administration. I will debrief also on the work we are doing with the other international players that are key to the deal, and obviously our ongoing work with Iran to keep up compliance to the deal.

We will also have a discussion on Russia, mainly a review of the five principles that have been the guiding principles of our common action and relation with the Russian Federation. I will tell you more at the end of the day.

And we will have an important point - even if I understand this might go a little bit down on the headlines in these days, but I think it is going to be very important – a discussion on the Western Balkans in view of the preparation of the Sofia Summit. Tomorrow there is also an important decision to be taken by the College on the enlargement package. It is a strategic region for Europe, it is Europe, even if not all is part of the European Union. I

plan to visit the region from tomorrow night, so we will have a chance with the [Foreign] Ministers to exchange views on how to better work with our partners in the Western Balkans for our common security and prosperity.

We also have a point - last but not least - on the financial framework for the next European Union Multiannual Financial Framework but I guess this is less exciting for you at this stage.

Q. Sanctions on Iran: are you likely to do that today?

I do not foresee any decision to be taken today on this. As you know, we have already sanctions in place on Iran - non-nuclear related. I do not expect [Foreign] Ministers to take decision on this today.

Q. On the EU position on the peace-process for Syria.

We have always been not only pushing for but also accompanying the Geneva talks with very concrete measures. We have been working to unite the opposition, to prepare their delegation for negotiations and talks. We have always also been working with civil society organisations, women. I know this sounds surreal in the context of war, but if there is one hope for Syria, it is the people of Syria that are fed up of conflict and war that could give the push for serious negotiations.

And then, we have always been the ones consistently behind and together with the United Nations, trying to facilitate these meaningful negotiations. We have always seen a reluctance from the Syrian regime to enter into meaningful negotiations in Geneva. We clearly call upon in particular Russia and Iran to exercise their influence on Damascus to start serious and meaningful discussions under UN auspices in Geneva.

As you know, we have always made it very clear: we are ready to start planning financing for the reconstruction of Syria. It needs an enormous amount of resources, but this will come only - only - when a political process is firmly under way under UN auspices in Geneva. The economic leverage is definitely there, but most of all is the humanitarian one, because people are suffering, people are dying, and I think all the international community has to take responsibility for stopping this.

Q. On the Iran nuclear deal.

First of all, I understand 12 May is the deadline; any decision could come before that or by that time. We are doing all we can to work with our American friends to make sure that all parties stay fully committed to the full implementation of the agreement, as it is the case so far. As you know, the last Joint Commission [of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)] we chaired was positive. Everybody recognised that Iran is fully compliant with its nuclear commitments, as has done the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] for 10 times.

Let me add that preserving the [International Atomic Energy] Agency's credibility is crucial, especially in a time when we enter maybe, hopefully, some interesting discussions with the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. So, work is ongoing and we believe it would be essential to stay united in this. Let me also add that the Europeans have always made it clear, the European Union has always made it clear that, for us, keeping the agreement in place is vital. It is a strategic interest for the European Union and we will stick to it.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I154Q33>