Informal European Council: Press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas upon arrival

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Regarding the international crisis that we are in.

First, good news about Ukraine: the €90 billion loan we got done, and also the 20th sanctions' package. Now we should also revisit the previous red lines that have been there for blocking some of the sanctions, and what more can we do so.

Prime Ministers were really pushing to go on with the 21st package of sanctions, as well. It sends a very clear signal to Russia that they cannot outweigh us. It also sends a clear signal to Russia that Ukraine is more important to us than it is to them, and we will keep on supporting them.

Then, on the Middle East. The wars in the Middle East are, of course, affecting us all. And what more can we do in terms of peace and stability in the region.

What we are worried about is that the negotiations that are going on right now are addressing the nuclear issue, but also the missile programme should be addressed, as well as Iran's support to proxies.

Everybody was very clear that freedom of navigation is non-negotiable. So, the Strait of Hormuz has to be open without any tolls, and we need to make efforts to that.

And of course, as we have the Operation ASPIDES and ATALANTA, actually, in the region, the fastest way to put this Coalition of the Willing together is to use those missions to ramp them up, to strengthen them with ships and tools with capabilities that are needed.

So, this is basically the discussions that we had yesterday.

Q&A

Q. What do you think about lifting the sanctions against Iran [inaudible] the Strait of Hormuz?

Clearly we have to see what is the other side of this. If the talks are only about the nuclear and there are no nuclear experts around the table, then we will end up with an agreement that is weaker than the JCPOA was. And the problems in the region,

missile programmes, their support to proxies, also hybrid and cyber activities in Europe are not addressed. So, we will end up with a more dangerous Iran, and actually, we are then strengthening them. So, we have to see, and we have to be very vocal, together with the regional actors, that all these concerns need to be addressed and we can help in the negotiations.

Q. What would be the concrete talking points with the regional partners today?

Today, we have some of the regional partners, and of course, with Syria, we are planning to engage more. As you know, we unsuspended our cooperation agreement that we had with Syria, and we are having also the High-Level Political Dialogue with the Foreign Ministers in May already to see what more can we do there. They have managed to stay out of this war, but for us it is important that there is the inclusivity of the government in Syria and that they are addressing also the concerns of other groups and also Christians, but also that they are dealing with the camps and build-up of the institutions in Syria. So there, actually Europe can help with the Constitution, with the institutional build- up so that they would manage their country. With Jordan, we have had very good relations. And when it comes to also their support to Palestine and Palestinian refugees, it is interesting for us to hear their take, also from the war that is going on right now. And Lebanon, we discussed yesterday, also a lot what we can do with Lebanon. We know that the UNIFIL mission is ending, and it is clear that Lebanese armed forces need more help to also disarm Hezbollah and have a control over the country. So, we have been discussing with the Foreign Ministers as well as the Defence Ministers, whether we are able to put our own mission together once UNIFIL ends but not with the same mandate, to really address the needs that they have.

Q. [inaudible]

When we have had contacts with the American counterparts, then actually their asks for us have been exactly what we are able to offer after the cessation of hostilities: demining, escorting of ships, all of this that we have been discussing. So, I do not understand, since we are actually replying to their requests.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/media/video/I-288273

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