

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council

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Good morning. Today with the Ministers the main issue on which we will work is obviously Syria.

I will propose to the Ministers some ideas on why and how the European Union can support more and better the work on the future of Syria. We will do this together with [UN Special Envoy] Staffan de Mistura whom I have invited to join us for a part of our work, because the European Union's role is in full support of the UN's work. We will focus in particular on the work the European Union is proposing for the humanitarian side, especially on Aleppo where the situation is dramatic, but also on the political future of Syria.

You know very well, and you have seen the developments over the weekend, the European Union is not a military player on the ground in Syria - I have to add personally, I am proud of not being one - but we encourage and we support all initiatives that lead or can lead to a cessation of hostilities, a ceasefire, a solution among those who have a direct influence on the ground with those who are fighting.

We are extremely engaged in fighting against Da'esh – and this is also why we believe that the work on the political future of Syria will be helpful also in the fight against Da'esh. We have also seen today some news coming from Iraq – and by the way I will have the Foreign Minister of Iraq [Ibrahim al-Jaafari] tomorrow (link is external) in Brussels and we will discuss about that as well.

So this will be the main topic for today - how the European Union can work more on the future, political future of Syria and on the humanitarian side.

We will also discuss migration: I will report to the Ministers the first results of our work with the Migration Compacts, within the Partnership Frameworks, in preparation for the European Council on Thursday and Friday – also the point on Syria will prepare the European Council for sure. Then we will also have a point on the implementation of the Global Strategy with concrete implementation plans I will present to the Ministers and we will have a short but positive point on Tunisia, because we always have to keep the focus on what goes relatively well also in our neighbourhood and this is why we will work on our support to a country that is doing pretty well and obviously still needs all of our support.

Q: *On Syria: will sanctions against Russia be discussed?*

A. This has not been proposed by any Member State. I have seen this has been very much in the media but not in our meetings. In none of our meeting this issue was raised by any of the Member States. But we have sanctions on the Syrian regime, as you know and there are discussions on that, for sure; that could be possible.

Q: What do you personally think on sanctions against Russia?

A. You know, I personally tend to focus on the fact that the European Union does not only have sanctions in its toolbox. We have many other instruments we can use, we have the instruments for pressure, we also have leverages for good. And so a good mix of the two, I think, is always wise and useful. So today we will focus on all tracks, but again, on sanctions on Russia, that was not proposed by any Member State at the moment.

Q: Any signal from Russia or from Iran over the weekend that they are willing to compromise in Syria or from Russia that they are willing to stop the bombings on Aleppo?

A. You know, we have discussed issues related to the cessation of hostilities now for quite some time, months, and it is extremely important that those that have a military presence or a direct influence on those that are fighting on the ground engage among themselves, seriously, to find a way. On the political will of the different partners around the table it is not for me to judge, it is for results to judge. We will see if the political will is there once the results will come. To me, and I think to all Europeans, what is important is that we avoid any escalation that could lead to more dramatic scenarios. I think Secretary Kerry said it yesterday in London as well. We have always to be mindful to the fact that an escalation in Syria might lead us to different kinds of scenarios that go, could go easily out of control.

So it is very important for me personally but I think also for all Europeans - and it is a direct interest for all Europeans, that first the fight against Da'esh is kept high on the agenda and second, that those who have a military presence or influence on the ground find a way, first of talking to each other, second of finding solutions. If people talk, normally it is because there is political will to find solutions. But we will see from results. Thank you.

Q. Aspettative sul dossier Syria nella riunione di oggi?

A. Oggi proporrò ai Ministri di concentrarci su quello che l'Unione europea può fare sul futuro politico della Siria. Non siamo un attore militare sul terreno in Siria, giustamente dico io, ma siamo una forza regionale e globale che può iniziare a lavorare con gli attori della Regione, con differenti parti dell'opposizione, ma anche della società civile siriana per iniziare a discutere di quale sarà la Siria del dopo conflitto. Questo potrà anche aiutare a trovare una soluzione al conflitto, credo. Poi chiaramente proporrò a loro un'iniziativa umanitaria innanzitutto per Aleppo. Lo faremo insieme all'Inviato speciale delle Nazioni Unite Staffan de Mistura, perché il sostegno che l'Unione europea dà alle Nazioni Unite è il modo per cercare di salvare vite umane ad Aleppo, non soltanto ad Aleppo e in tutta la Siria.

Q. Il tema delle sanzioni di cui si parla a proposito di quattro Stati che le avrebbero in qualche modo determinate, qual è la sua valutazione?

A. Il tema delle sanzioni oggi non è sul tavolo, non quelle sulla Russia rispetto alla Siria, nessuno Stato membro le ha proposte e non credo che sarà al centro del nostro lavoro oggi. Abbiamo delle sanzioni sul regime siriano che manteniamo e che sono sotto costante revisione. Ci potrà essere una modifica nel senso di un inasprimento di queste sanzioni nel corso delle nostre discussioni di questi giorni.

Q.L'agenda è molto ricca, riuscirete a parlare anche di flussi migratori e quindi di problemi legati al migration compact e d'intervento nei paesi di partenza e transito dei flussi?

A. Sì, oggi presenterò ai ministri una prima relazione sui primi risultati del *migration compact*. Avremo una discussione con i Ministri, soprattutto con quelli, come il Ministro Paolo Gentiloni e altri, che si sono recati nei Paesi di origine e di transito a nome dell'Unione europea. Questo nostro discorso avrà una funzione di preparazione anche del Consiglio europeo di giovedì e venerdì a Bruxelles, dove appunto relazionerò sullo stato di avanzamento del *migration compact*. E' fondamentale che su questo l'Unione europea si muova unita con tutti gli Stati membri pienamente partecipi di uno sforzo che non è di un singolo paese, ma dev'essere di tutta l'Unione europea.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I127827>