European External Action Service (EEAS)

Foreign Affairs Council: Press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas ahead of the meeting

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Great to be here again, in a new capacity though.

Today, I am going to have my first Foreign Affairs Council.

We have three main topics. First, Syria; then, Ukraine; then, Georgia.

On Syria, on Saturday, I was in Jordan, meeting with the Arab nations, as well as Türkiye and the United States to discuss the principles of engagement with the new leadership of Syria and what is expected from them.

I think that it is very important that the regional actors, as well as the international actors, see the picture in the same way and want this country to be stable, peaceful and [with an] all-comprising government in place. Therefore, I think it was important to agree on these principles.

I have also tasked the European top diplomat in Syria to go to Damascus to make the contacts with the new government and people there. We will also discuss today in the Foreign Affairs Council how we engage with the new leadership of Syria, and on what level we engage with the new leadership. And of course, what [further] steps are we willing to take if we see that Syria goes to the right direction.

Syria faces an optimistic, positive, but rather uncertain future. We have to make sure that this goes in the right direction.

On Ukraine, the Foreign Ministers today will adopt [the] 15th sanctions package. It includes the shadow fleet, sanctioning the shadow fleet. It includes also sanctions on the North-Korean officials, as well as [on] the Chinese companies who are enabling this war. So, it sends a clear message that whoever enables this war to continue has a price to pay.

On Georgia: Of course, all the developments that we are seeing right now in Georgia are not going in the right direction where the candidate countries should be. We are going to discuss what are the consequences for the Georgian government, using the repression on the opposition, and all the tools that they are using there. What can we do on the European side.

One question is, of course, sanctions, and the other question is also limiting the visa-free regime.

Q&A.

Q: [On the possibility of] HTS to be removed from the terrorist [listing].

Well, first we have to discuss on what level we are engaging with the Syrian new leadership. Then, what kind of steps are we willing to take in order to have relations with them. For us it is not only the words, but we want to see the deeds going in the right direction. Not only what they are saying but also what they are doing. I think the coming weeks and months will show whether it goes in the right direction. I think then we are also open to discuss the next steps.

Q: What do you think about sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine.

Well, first, there has to be peace, in order to send peacekeepers and Russia does not want peace. That is very clear. I mean, if you look at Lavrov's interview, for example, to Tucker Carlson, they have not stepped away from their goals. So, we cannot discuss that.

Q: High Representative I want to talk about Georgia. What measures are you going to propose to the Ministers. Can you tell us more about it? Also, should we expect a deal or agreement today?

We have had those discussions and of course, we are 27 democracies with [our] own ideas. So, it takes time. Yes, we have proposed the list for sanctioning these people who are opposing or using force and violence against the opposition. We are also discussing the visa-free regime – how we limit that and [if] there are Member States also wiling to task the [European] Commission to come up with that proposal.

Q: [inaudible] still designated as a terrorist organisation.

Well, we are going to discuss today with the Foreign Ministers on what level we are engaging with the new leadership of Syria.

Q: As I understand correctly, today you will propose already a list of personal sanctions. Will you continue to support Georgia's president Salomé Zourabichvili after the so-called elections for new president?

Well, first of all, this list has already been proposed. So, we are discussing this list, but everybody needs to agree to the list – and we are not yet there. So, let's see if we are going to get there. When it comes to the presidential elections, the president is in place until December 29. A lot could happen in between.

Q: [inaudible]

I think we have been very fast, also in this process. On Saturday I was in Jordan and we were discussing with the Arab countries as well as with Türkiye, and as well as with the United States how to engage and what are the conditions for engaging, what we want to see. It is very important we see the picture in the same way. It is not only the international actors, but also the regional actors. I think we cannot leave a vacuum – and we have not. Our top diplomat in Syria will go to Damascus today, will have the contacts there. We are also going to discuss with the Foreign Ministers on what level of engagement and how we proceed from here. In terms of [the] European Union usually functioning we have been quite fast.

Q: How do you see what is happening in Syria will affect Russian performance. Do you see a deal between Russia, Iran and Türkiye.

Well, it clearly shows to everybody, and we can also talk about this freely that, you know, Russia and Iran, are not your friends. [They] are not helping you if you are in trouble. They left Assad’s regime and that is a very clear message, showing that their hands are full elsewhere and they are weakened. I think this is a positive message for the world.

Okay, thank you and we will see you later.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-265471

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