European External Action Service (EEAS)

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

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Good morning, everybody,

So, yesterday we had a good evening with the Belarusian leader [of the opposition], Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. We were talking about the sham elections that happened in Belarus and, of course, we are standing with the Belarusian people.

Belarus is still high in the European agenda. Today, in the morning, we will have a discussion over hybrid threats. We see things happening in the Baltic Sea. We see hybrid action all around Europe. We need to raise awareness. We need to discuss what more we can do in order to avoid this.

Then we will have a discussion on Ukraine; I expect a decision to roll over the sanctions we have.

Then, of course, it is good that we discuss what more we can do putting pressure on Russia to end this war. It is also good that President Trump has put pressure on Russia to say that it is in their hands to end this war.

Then, of course, the Middle East. A lot is happening there. We have a ceasefire in Israel and Palestine. It is of course a welcoming step.

It is a first step, but we need to build for a more lasting peace. We are working towards also helping Palestinians in Gaza.

We are ready to redeploy our mission to Rafah’s border crossing, so that humanitarian aid would reach Gaza.

Then, of course, on Syria sanctions, we are also expecting to really ease the sanctions. We are expected to decide today regarding this. It is a step-for-step approach; so, if they are taking the right steps, then we are willing to do the steps on our behalf as well.

So, there is a lot on the table today, a lot of discussions and I hope we will get to some important decisions.

Q&A

Q. On Syria, is the EU ready to ease the sanctions on Syria after the fall of Assad? How is the current relation between the EU countries and EU institutions and the new rulers in Damascus?

We expect to reach a decision today to put together a roadmap to ease the sanctions. So, it is clear that we go step-for-step. We start with the sanctions that they need the most to really start the buildup of the country. And then we see if the steps are going to in the right direction. We are also willing to make take steps on our behalf.

Q. Can you please confirm that the meeting [inaudible] and Marco Rubio [inaudible] will take part in this meeting?

Middle of February is very far away for the intense agenda that we have today.

Q. High Representative, about Syria, we are watching closely what the new leaders are doing. There has have been widespread violations against human rights, against minorities in a small town around Homs central city. Do you have a mission there? Have you been informed about this? What is your reaction?

We are working closely together with the regional actors, as well as the international actors, to keep an eye on what is happening. We are also ready to open the Embassy there, the European Union Delegation in Damascus, to really have our eyes and ears on the ground. So, like I say: Syria's future is fragile but hopeful. We need to also give space to take the right steps, but of course we need to see the right steps as well. Right now, they are saying all the right words, and they are doing also the right things. Therefore, we have this step-for-step approach; if they make the steps, then we are willing to take the steps as well.

Q. On Georgia, what can we expect today? How do you estimate the recent situation? It is already 2 months people are standing in the streets [inaudible]. So, what is your vision?

We will briefly discuss Georgia today as well. And of course, we have now the diplomatic passports suspended – [we have] the visa free regime suspended for the diplomatic passports. We have also taken the funds that we had in support of the government and given them to the NGOs, the civil society, I think, to support them in this mission. But it is in the hands of Georgian people to really get this right.

Q. President Trump has talked about clearing out Gaza. How do you respond to that? You have some critics say this is ethically [inaudible].

Gaza and the people of Gaza have suffered a lot. I think both the Palestinians as well as the Israelis deserve peace and that is why we really need to move on from the ceasefire to a more permanent peace, and therefore Europe being supportive of the two-state solution, of course supporting Israel's security but also the rights of Palestinians. Europe is the biggest

supporter of Gaza by its humanitarian aid but also of UNRWA in the United Nations, so we continue to support the people.

Q. What do you think of the mood of the European Union’s diplomats towards the United States and what is happening now with Trump? Is there panic?

No, we are willing to work always when there are elections. There is going to be a new administration, so we need to work with a new administration. Of course, the style of the different administrations is different, and we need to adapt also our working methods to theirs, but I expect very good cooperation also with the new administration.

Thank you.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-266424

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