European External Action Service (EEAS)

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

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Good afternoon,

It is good to be here again.

So, together with the European Foreign Ministers we addressed many pressing security issues today, starting with Ukraine’s security.

Europe is Kyiv’s largest international donor. We have provided over € 134 billion in total, but it is clear that Ukraine needs more. The front line is moving west but it should be moving east.

Ukraine requires more ammunition, air defence, trained soldiers – points that Foreign Minister Sybiha reiterated also today via video. More military support for Ukraine and stronger sanctions on Russia are two sides of the same coin. More military support for Ukraine is very important for our own security as well.

So, I welcomed that the Ministers today agreed to extend sanctions on Russia. This will continue to deprive Putin of revenues to fund his war.

At the height of winter, the Kremlin is using also energy to blackmail Moldova. So today, in response, the European Union decided to provide €30 million to help Moldova to buy and transport national gas.

At the height of winter, the Kremlin is also using different tools, so we will help to restore electricity and heating for over hundreds of thousands of its people, Moldovan people.

In times of need, you will always support [your] friends, so we are there for our friends.

We also discussed enhancing Europe’s own security, [since] Russia's hybrid actions are increasing in frequency and intensity. We saw this across the European Union. The Baltic Sea has seen major cases of damage of undersea installations. Our failure to deter such actions sends a dangerous signal to any aggressor. Weakness invites them in. That is very clear.

Together, we are strengthening our situational awareness, preparedness and resilience. Failure to act now risks further aggression – not just from Russia but also from others. Raising the costs for those behind these attacks is essential. This must also include stronger sanctions against Russia's shadow fleet.

Developments in the Middle East were also high on the agenda. Today we reached the political agreement to begin easing sanctions on Syria. This could give a boost to the Syrian economy and help the country get back on its feet. While we aim to move fast, we also are ready to reverse the course if the situation worsens. In parallel, we will scale up humanitarian aid and recovery efforts.

On Israel and Palestine. The release of Israeli hostages is good news. Palestinians are returning to the north of Gaza. The ceasefire is fragile, but it is holding. We are supporting its implementation, including by redeploying our civilian mission to Rafah to supervise border checks. Reopening the crossing will allow the transfer of injured individuals out of Gaza for treatment.

On Lebanon, we already scaled up our support with €60 million for its armed forces and we also agreed today that the situation is ripe to have a European Union-Lebanon Association Council during this year.

Then, we also discussed Iran’s continuing threats to international peace. Member States made clear that Teheran’s practice of detaining foreign nationals for political leverage must end. But we also will have a deeper discussion on Iran, and European Union-Iran policy, in the very near future.

On Africa, the European Union closely follows the crisis in Eastern Congo. Ministers urged Rwanda to halt is support to rebels, and withdraw its troops. Attacks on United Nations peacekeepers are unacceptable.

In the Western Balkans we continue to prioritise stability. I am glad to announce that the Council today appointed Peter Sørensen as the European Union’s special representative for the Belgrade Pristina Dialogue.

Finally, Ministers also discussed the European Union relations with the United States. The new administration’s policies have major implications on the European Union. As the United States shifts to a more transactional approach, Europe needs to close ranks.

We are stronger when we are united. That was the view that everybody shared. Europe is an economic heavyweight and geopolitical partner. The United States is our closest ally. Our adversaries are cooperating very closely, so should we. Europe and North America are stronger and safer together.

There were a lot of issues today, but we were quite effective.

Thank you.

Q&A

Q. Madame High Representative, I would have a couple of questions on the sanctions on Syria. Would you please elaborate which economic sector, what sanction will be lifted or suspended? Among these sectors, are you including today the political agreement on the banks, plus energy and transport? Could you elaborate on that? And my second question is about the United States suggestion to transfer part of the Palestinian population from Gaza to Sinai and probably from West Bank to Jordan. Both countries, Egypt and Jordan, refused that categorically yesterday and today. What is the European Union's reaction to this suggestion, please?

Of course we have a lot of sanctions for Syria. So, we have grouped the sanctions to make this roadmap for a step-for-step approach really to start with the sanctions that are most hindering the early build-up of the country and to move from there. What we are not relieving, of course, is anything related to arms, and arm dealing. We are still concerned of the radicalisation and what might happen. So, right now we have a political decision, we have the roadmap, we have a step-for-step approach so that if we see some steps going in the right direction, we are also willing to ease the next sanctions. What I must say is that this is a political agreement. There are also technical issues to be solved, but I hope, because the political will is there, that these issues will be solved in the weeks.

Q. President Trump suggested that part of the Palestinians could be transferred to Sinai and probably to Jordan. Both countries refused that categorically.

I think the Palestinian people have suffered a lot and both Israelis as well as the Palestinians really deserve peace. Right now, we have the ceasefire in place, but it requires also the next steps to be taken so that peace would be permanent, and that there is stability and peace in the region. From our point of view, that requires the two-state solution and that requires that the two states are on a more equal basis. And that is why also the European Union is supporting the Palestinian Authority, supporting humanitarian aid, Gaza, UNRWA, for that matter, so that all the services are provided to the people in need there. So, this is our approach.

Q. My question is about Greenland. First, I want to ask if the issue was discussed today, perhaps at lunch. Secondly, General Brieger yesterday spoke about a possible military mission there, with some sort of Team Europe approach. Do you agree? And could this be the smart move to placate Trump?

Thank you. If I will tell you what we discussed over lunch, then you will ask whether we discussed other issues. We discussed the European Union and the United States relations, and how we should really either change our policy or not change our policy towards the transatlantic relations. Also, we discussed what the new administration and the cooperation

with the new administration would look like. It is clear that we are strong also in Europe when we are together, when we are united – also supporting each other in whatever hardships there are for different Member States. But it is also crucial that the United States is our important ally, and we need to cooperate with them on several issues. So, it was a very interesting discussion. [There were] a lot of good ideas on the table on how we could also enforce our policy so that we are looking it from the side of Europe, not so much reacting to what the United States is doing.

Q. First, on Syria, you were not really precise on the sectoral sanction lifting, if you could elaborate more? Second, on DR Congo, I was wondering if you foresee a role or function for the European Union to try to mediate what is going on in Eastern DR Congo.

On Syria. So, as I said, we have a lot of sanctions in place and there are different levels. In Europe everything is public, so I guess this document will be public as well, the roadmap with the different steps. I actually took all the papers, but I did not take this very exact one. I do not think that I have the time to go over it all. [What I mean is] that we start with the sanctions that are really hindering the buildup of the country. Energy was there and [other sectors as well], but it is a step-for-step approach. Really, we need to see the developments going to the right direction.

On Congo, we had a very brief discussion. Attacking United Nations peacekeepers is totally unacceptable, that was clearly voiced. [There is] a lot of concern on what is happening. So of course, the question for us is what kind of role can we also play there. But you know, all these events are very quickly developing on the ground and we are trying to send signals to Rwanda and Congo on what we want to see. How we do not want to see any escalation of the situation. But, as you know, it is very complicated.

Q. You describe the United States as your closest ally, but at the same time this closest ally is making a very big threat against the integrity of the European Union – or at least one of its Member States, taking Greenland by force if necessary. Do you think the European Union should take this threat seriously, that they should start preparing for a military invasion of Greenland? Or do you think Trump is somehow laughing and trying to make a deal that even may be detrimental for the European Union? What is your position exactly? Could you tell us if you are ready to make a trip to Washington any time soon to meet with the new administration?

I think what is clear for everybody is that the new administration really speaks the language of transaction, and that means negotiating always on different issues. So, we need to speak that language as well. In negotiations, it is always a question of whether you reveal your hand and the positions – when you go to the negotiations – or you do not, because that weakens your hand, if I may say so. One Foreign Minister said also that we should of course listen to what the United States President is saying, but maybe it is not always necessary to take all the words, word by word. But clearly we are listening to what they are saying. When it comes to

our relations, I have extended the invitation to the Secretary of State Marco Rubio to also join the Foreign Affairs Council to explain the views of the United States, and I am also willing to visit Washington as soon as possible.

Q. On behalf of many Georgian journalists, we want to express our full solidarity and support to our independent colleagues, Mzia Amaglobeli – she is under illegal detention already 16 days and she is on a hunger strike. So, what is your opinion about the situation in Georgia regarding independent and critical journalists? And the second question, we saw a press release from the European Union about decision to suspend visa facility agreement for some kind of diplomatic passports and also service passports owners. So when will this decision work? From which time we can expect this decision working?

Of course, we are following the developments in Georgia closely and we see with great concern, of course, what is happening. So that is why we also discussed this today: what more can we do to send signals to the Georgian government that this is not really going to in the right direction in terms of the European path. Of course, there are also things that we can weigh on what more can we do. When it comes to the visas, or the visa liberalisation suspension, the decision was adopted today. Now it is for the Member States to implement this in their internal rules. So, this is how Europe in this regard works.

Q. High Representative, you mentioned that you agreed to rollover the sanctions against Russia and how important that was. One Member State, of course, until today was reserving its position, that is namely Hungary, and it agreed to change its position after a statement from the European Commission. Does that statement actually mean anything in concrete terms? Did Hungary get anything out of this or is it just European Commission doing its job?

Well, it meant to Hungary, so that mattered.

Q. I have two questions on EUBAM. I was wondering whether the deployment of the mission is a precondition to reopen the Rafah border. Also, could you give us a little bit more details about the mission? When is it meant to be deployed, whether it is going to have a limited role for the transfer of injured people or it is going to go forward into trying to transfer also humanitarian aid, whether it is going to stay in time. What are the details that we can know about the mission?

On the EUBAM Rafah mission. So, we had the invitation letters from both Palestine as well as Israel, also Egypt agreed to this, saying that this is important for the implementation of the ceasefire as well. We had a mission before, so we are redeploying the mission within the same mandate that we had. If I remember correctly, it is starting already from February, so the people are ready to go and start to work.

Q. A clarification on the statement that you issued today for Hungary. Are you asking Ukraine to reopen the gas pipeline that was basically closed because the contract with Gazprom expired? And the second clarification, if I may, you said that you should speak the

same language of transactional language of Trump’s administration. Do you mean that the EU should negotiate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Denmark with the US? What are the consequences of that for the international order and for what Russia is doing in Ukraine?

First on the statement. So, it was statement of energy solidarity with landlocked countries. This is what it is meant to be. It has, points also referring to Repower EU, that is also saying that we should get rid of Russian fossil fuels and provide our help with the diversification of the energy picture. On the negotiation’s comment, so no, we are not negotiating on Greenland. Of course, we are supporting our Member State Denmark and its autonomous region, Greenland, but we should not also go into speculation about what ifs, because this is not the situation right now. What I meant with my comment was more general. This is the language that we have understood that the new administration speaks. So, we should also take into account what is our strength. We are an economic power. We are very much interlinked with America, with all the economic relations that we have, the different relations regarding security, regarding different important connections that we have. So, it is not that America does not have interests in Europe. We are very much interlinked, and this means that we also have something in our hands. It is not like somebody telling us what to do and we are following, but we are also strong and should not underestimate our own power when it comes to whatever, [from] talking to partners but also acting towards our adversaries.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-266356

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-kaja-kallas-after-meeting_en