

Remarks by HRVP Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council

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The Council took a little bit longer than foreseen - as is the case almost every time - but it was extremely good and fruitful in its results.

It started with a point that was not on the agenda, but I felt it was an absolute priority to update and brief the Ministers on the Implementation Day of the Iranian nuclear deal. We shared the assessment of the fact that this is indeed a turning point, not only for security and stability in the region, but it also opens new ways for bilateral cooperation. In this respect I shared with the Ministers the plans that we are preparing ahead of a visit that I will lead hopefully during the Spring to Tehran with members and Vice-Presidents of the [European] Commission, covering the different aspects of our possible cooperation with Iran and to study in detail with our counterparts what fields of practical cooperation we can explore, obviously after they have had elections.

We also adopted two Council Conclusions. One on Libya: you know very well that these are crucial hours; you also know that I met not only the Prime Minister designate but also all members of the Presidency Council just ten days ago. We started discussing priorities in the European Union's support to the future Government of National Accord. We expressed our common hope that this will come into effect soon, hopefully in the next hours, and we also shared unanimously the priorities for the European Union's support to the future government: to focus on support to the municipalities, also counting on the huge network of European municipalities and local authorities that Europe has - in coordination also with the Committee of the Regions; and on border management: that is another field that the European Union has a lot of competences, capacities and also means. But also other issues, including the security sector reforms that we will be ready to explore with the Libyan authorities once they are in place.

We also adopted unanimously Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process. You will see the text, which is a good and common basis for our common position, for our engagement in the Middle East Peace Process with the parties on the ground, but also with the international actors and the regional partners, in particular the Arab countries and the three ones that have already been working with us in this respect. There is also a reference to working with them on the Arab Peace Initiative and in the Quartet, obviously.

The whole morning was dedicated to our discussion on Syria and Iraq and the regional developments that we have seen in the beginning of the year, especially with rising tensions between Saudi-Arabia and Iran after the executions that were carried out in

Riyadh and the reactions in Iran. We shared the common goal of all Europeans to invite all in the region to calm the rhetoric and actions, to de-escalate the tensions and in particular to protect the fragile but very important process that we all started just a few months ago in order to bring to an end to the Syrian conflict with the Vienna talks. This includes the successful meeting we had in December in New York of the International Support Group, where both Iran and Saudi-Arabia were sitting, which was supported and endorsed by a Security Council Resolution that was adopted unanimously. That is the track that needs to be followed. The political talks among the Syrian parties in Geneva has to start. We have unanimously shared the priorities for us, as the European Union, in coordination with the Member States, to actively support the work of the UN special envoy, Staffan de Mistura who I met just a few days ago here in Brussels when I also met the opposition representatives who will participate in the talks.

Apart from that, let me also say that we focussed very much our attention on the humanitarian situation on the ground. Because we have to make sure that as we invest politically in the political process to start, the situation on the ground improves rather than becomes worse, which is sometimes what we see happening. That is why we have decided to focus on the confidence building measures, the humanitarian access, and we have unanimously condemned all attacks on civilians, especially those that are happening in these delicate moments where we are trying to begin the talks. It is very important that the political process starts, in parallel with some improvement on the ground, otherwise the credibility of the whole process, and somehow the resilience of the whole process risk to be undermined.

We had a very important exchange with the Jordanian Foreign Minister, who I also had the chance of meeting yesterday to prepare today's meeting. Jordan is one of the most, if not the most, relevant partners in a very turbulent region - an island of stability as they defined themselves - and we all agree inside the European Union that we need to invest in the resilience and the stability of Jordan. Because our job is not only to manage the crisis, but also to invest in the countries that are showing an enormous amount of resilience and stability in difficult times. We have discussed with him the regional development, the work we commonly do in Syria, and also on the Middle East Peace Process and on other issues in the region, but also our common work in the fight against Da'esh and radicalisation, and obviously also the issue of the refugees crisis that they are facing much more than we are.

We have prepared together the London Conference which will take place on 4 February. It will not only be a donors conference but also a political conference with the the Heads of State and Governments together with, on the European side, President Tusk and myself. It will constitute, I believe, a very important contribution to the stability and the management of the crisis inside Syria and around.

Last but not at all least, we had a discussion on Ukraine, restating our full and united support to the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements but focusing this time, maybe for the first time in this clear and focused way, not only and not so much on the Minsk implementation but on the reform process inside Ukraine and especially the reform of the judiciary, the reform of the public administration sector, the

decentralisation reforms and recognising the incredible, outstanding work that the Ukrainian authorities have done over the past months to move forward the reform agenda with very concrete steps.

We shared also the assessment that this works needs to continue, especially with the provisional application of DCFTA since 1 January, that the need for us to support the Ukrainian authorities in a better coordinated way between the European Union and Member States to make sure that the reform agenda continues, especially that it is implemented, and that the benefits of the reform agenda manage to reach the Ukrainian people, who just two years ago, exactly two years ago, were in Maidan asking for reforms and changes in their society.

So, time for the agenda to deliver - in very difficult circumstances - but this is exactly the meaning of our engagement with Ukraine to support and to sustain in I hope, I believe, an effective way.

Link to the video: <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I114991>

Q: On Syria, Geneva Conference and the HRVP's meetings with Riad Hijab and his delegation and with Mr de Mistura.

A: Let me first of all thank Saudi Arabia for the work they have done in putting together the conference in Riyadh in December and facilitating this difficult work. They were asked to do this by the International Support Group for Syria and I think they have managed to come with a process and with a result that is much more inclusive than expected in the beginning.

Having said that, there is a discussion within the International Support Group on how to coordinate the outcome of the Riyadh conference with the role that Staffan de Mistura has and has to keep, of leading the game in Geneva when the talks hopefully start.

Obviously, it is the UN through Staffan de Mistura that has the responsibility of issuing the invitations and organising the way in which he believes that talks can be fruitful. I do not know about the timing but today the Security Council is meeting with Staffan de Mistura to share different assessments on this.

I would obviously not take the place of the UN Special Envoy. This is his role, his responsibility. For us it is important that the outcome of the Riyadh conference is adequately taken into consideration - as it was a breakthrough - in bringing the unity to the opposition present at the conference. Also making sure that all the members of the International Support Group feel comfortable with more than the composition, but with the management of the talks that still have to be organised and this is not the responsibility for the European Union but of the United Nations.

What I can say is that our role is to support in very concrete terms, i.e. politically, logistically, diplomatically the work of the Special Envoy of the United Nation and also to support the opposition in their preparation in for the talks. We have discussed both with the opposition and Staffan de Mistura concrete ways with which the European Union and

the Member States can coordinate efforts in this respect. But the decision on how to organise the talks in Geneva is a matter for Staffan de Mistura who is currently discussing with the Security Council, as far as I know.

Q: On the EU visit to Iran and on Ukraine.

A: I started by saying that we were all united in applauding and encouraging the outstanding work that the Ukrainian authorities have done in the past months in order to introduce and start implementing reforms, so there is no doubt in this respect. This does not mean that we should not look at ways to first of all, encourage, support and sustain the reforms inside Ukraine from a social, financial, and a political point of view, without substituting the Ukrainian authorities, the government, the President, the Parliament, the local authorities or the political system. We must actively support this process because I think we have learnt from the past from the present. Once you start a process there is never enough, you also need to continue focusing on how you can better make it sustainable internally, externally and in the region. There is not at all a shift of focus: we have always said and continue to say that the Minsk Agreements need to be fully implemented by all sides. As you very well know, the decision by the Council last December to roll-over the sanctions against Russia for another six months was a clear sign of this continued commitment, of which there is no doubt.

On Iran: The plan to visit Iran is at a very advanced stage of planning. We don't have a date fixed yet but we discussed it both within the [European] Commission, in the College and in the Commissioners' Group that I coordinate every month to start preparing sectors of engagement between the European Union and Iran where we believe there could be open channels that could be mutually beneficial. We have also started to discuss this with our European counterparts, at my level with Minister Zarif in Vienna a few days ago, starting to define possible time and possible scope. Our visit will be prepared by a political dialogue not at my level but at political directors' level.

So the main point is: Implementation Day is a turning point first and foremost because after having the agreement we also managed to implement it. This shows that diplomacy works and delivers. Second, because it opens the way for different kind of bilateral relations. In the region hopefully; with other actors as we have seen on Saturday with the release of prisoners – it is always good when bilateral relations can be facilitated by multilateral talks and processes, even if it was two separate processes. Third: this opens the way for major European Union investment in our bilateral relations that we will need to explore in details with the Iranian authorities to make sure that this covers their interest, our interests and that we coordinate well among Europeans.

Q: Sono giorni abbastanza tesi per quanto riguarda i rapporti fra Roma e Bruxelles. Le ultime parlano di dichiarazioni arrivate da fonti europee, su la difficoltà di trovare interlocutori validi nel governo di Roma per quanto riguarda i vari dossier che sono pendenti tra la Commissione e l'Italia, si è detto anche che l'Italia offende la Commissione. Vorrei avere la sua posizione

su questo considerando che lei non è soltanto la vice-Presidente della Commissione ma è anche ovviamente il membro italiano di questa Commissione.

A: Questo significa chiaramente che io, per motivi di broadcasting, I am expected nel rispondere in italiano, volentieri. Innanzitutto su quest'ultima parte della domanda, è chiaro che io lavoro per tutta l'Unione europea e per tutti i cittadini europei, ma la mia storia politica, le mie idee, la mia nazionalità non per questo scompaiono da un giorno all'altro. I canali con il governo italiano ci sono, sono aperti, funzionano, sono costanti gli scambi e il lavoro comune tra le istituzioni europee e il governo italiano, per quello che io vedo quotidianamente sia, in quanto Vice-Presidente della Commissione sia in quanto Alto Rappresentante funzionano, quindi l'invito è a seguire le fonti ufficiali e non le fonti non specificate.

Vorrei anche aggiungere una cosa: gli interessi dell'Italia e gli interessi dell'Unione europea coincidono e su due settori che sono fondamentali e per l'Italia e per la Commissione in particolare, ovvero la flessibilità nel campo economico e l'immigrazione Italia e Commissione lavorano per gli stessi obiettivi e che in un anno di lavoro abbiamo introdotto misure politiche, strumenti che fino ad un anno fa non c'erano e questo è stato grazie al lavoro congiunto dell'Italia, di altri Stati membri ovviamente e della Commissione che sono in questo senso dalla stessa parte.

Questo non significa che tutto quello che è stato fatto vada bene, che tutto quello che è stato fatto basti, ma se guardiamo indietro di un anno né la flessibilità esisteva, né un inizio di un tentativo gestione comune dei processi migratori esisteva.

E' l'agenda politica dell'Italia sicuramente, è l'agenda politica anche di altri Stati membri, è l'agenda politica della Commissione. Quindi è chiaro – credo che sia chiaro, anche se a volte mi sembra che sfugga ad altri commentatori – che siamo dalla stessa parte.

On Syria – Content of the Geneva talks –discussing the unity government as a starting point?

A: It is quite clear in such a process that not only different points of view but also tensions - and even more than tensions - exist. We are dealing with the conflict, we are dealing with the war. You do not expect parties of a war to agree on something at the beginning of the process otherwise they would not be at war, most probably. What the process is about is first of all trying to define the political will and readiness of the parties, namely the regime and the opposition to come together and start a process. A process that from our point of view is clearly one of transition. Transition that starts in one place which is the current state of play, which is a disaster since for five years now in terms of people dying, of people internally displaced and of people outside of the country. A humanitarian disaster first of all with the risk of a full generation lost.

And the endpoint of a process that needs to start now is a place where probably not everybody will be friends and love each other, but find a way to put together the interests of the Syrians first and foremost, and try to overcome the civil war that is taking place in

the country now for five years and unite forces against Da'esh - which is the real threat not only to the Syrian people but also to the rest of the region and the world. This doesn't mean that there are no other threats inside Syria. On the contrary. The European Union's position, when I mentioned a transition, is obviously to see Assad not to be part of the future of his country. But five years ago he was there, today he is there and Syria is where it is: in a disaster. So the point is to start a political process with the Syrians taking the leadership of a difficult process, of putting an end to their own internal war and focus together, joining forces, also joining forces with the rest of the region and the international community against the threat of Da'esh.

I do not expect this process to be easy or even to be fast. But I expect this process to start in good faith and with enough political will inside Syria and outside Syria to allow it to start. Because I really believe the Syrians cannot sustain in any possible way another sixth year of war. We tend to forget the humanitarian dimension of this crisis; we tend to play geopolitics around this, with the different interests of the world powers, of the regional powers on it. Let's not forget that this is about children, women, men, people, every single day, being confronted with war.

Thank you!

Link to the video: <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I114992>