

Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini upon arrival at the informal meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers

 eeas.europa.eu/delegations/syria/39913/remarks-hrvp-mogherini-upon-arrival-informal-meeting-foreign-affairs-ministers_en

Check against delivery!

First of all, let me say how pleased I am to have this ministerial meeting in Sofia, starting with the Foreign Ministers the work under the Bulgarian Presidency. The first point we have on our agenda is the work we do with the Western Balkans, which is a top priority for the Bulgarian Presidency but also for all European Union institutions.

It will be the first opportunity for the Foreign Ministers to discuss the Strategy on the Western Balkans that we just presented last week in Strasbourg at the European Parliament. We will see how to work to strengthen the EU perspective of the region and will also start working on the preparation of the [Western Balkans] Summit that we will have here in Sofia.

The day after, which means tomorrow, we will also have the candidate countries here and in particular with the Western Balkans we will discuss about one of the flagship initiatives we have presented in the Strategy - the work on security and defence - which is a very important field for our cooperation.

We will also discuss Syria with the Foreign Ministers. We are preparing the second Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. First of all, from humanitarian point of view. The war is still going on in the country, the humanitarian situation is still a dramatic one and we aim at mobilising humanitarian support for Syrians both inside the country and in the neighboring countries - namely in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

I discussed this with the UN Secretary General [António Guterres] a couple of days ago in Kuwait and we will co-chair this Conference between the European Union and the United Nations. With the Ministers we will discuss about how to mobilise this humanitarian support but also how to use the convening power of the European Union to support the UN-led political process that, as you know, is facing difficult moments in these weeks.

We will also have a point on the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. We have seen encouraging steps during the Olympic Games. I know that the attention of the public opinion on the Olympic Games has now moved to sport - which is relevant as well - but at a certain moment, the Olympic Games will end and the European Union is ready to continue its work.

First of all, with our partners, with South Korea, with the United States, with Japan, but also with Russia and China to have a strong pressure on the DPRK - we have a very tough system of sanctions in place - but also to engage on the diplomatic track. I discussed this with the South Korean Foreign Minister [Ms Kang Kyung - wha] just before the beginning

of the Olympic Games and with [US] Secretary [of State, Rex] Tillerson the day before yesterday in Kuwait. So we will have a discussion about how to increase the level of work of the European Union to help finding a solution for the de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Q. Do you support the French President's words?

I have seen President Macron's statement, that seemed to me more related to the issue of chemical weapons. Let me say that as European Union, we have always been extremely firm. First of all, in our support to the work of the UN system to monitor eventual use of chemical weapons and we have always believed that any movement on that side, on that level, has to be monitored and followed up in the UN system in the most serious manner. The European Union has always been a strong supporter of the work of the organisation that monitors the use of chemical weapons.

This is extremely serious. When I mention the fact that the humanitarian situation - the situation on the ground in Syria - is far from being solved and going better, I refer to the ongoing fights that are still happening and the fact that civilians are still targeted in many parts of Syria. This is something that the world should not forget. The European Union for sure does not forget this.

Q. On EU unity.

I have to say that in these years – not only in these months, but in these years - if there is one field where the European Union and its Member States are speaking with one voice, are singing the same song, and most importantly are acting together, it is Foreign and Security policy. On defence, that was self-evident, with the decisions we have taken in the course of this last year, with the launch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation [PESCO] - we have finally launched the European defence.

In Syria, for the second year in a row, we are the ones organising the major humanitarian but also political Conference to try to support the future of Syria and the region. Yesterday I was in Kuwait, chairing together with the UN Secretary General [António Guterres] the Conference on the Reconstruction of Iraq, where the European Union is a leading player, not only from a humanitarian but also from a political and security point of view.

If you look at Libya, if you look at the work we are doing with the Sahel countries where we are hosting the High-Level Conference at the end of next week in Brussels; if you look around you, the Europeans are speaking and – most importantly – acting together as one.

The real thing is that the world is not moving in the right direction. We see a proliferation of conflicts - it is true many of them do not find a solution -, as we are trying to find a solution to these conflicts. You can blame it on the European Union; you can blame it on the UN; you can blame it on the United States; you can blame it on the international system.

We are doing our part. And let me say: if the European Union was not there with its humanitarian, development, political, diplomatic, security work, the situation in many parts of the world would be much, much worse. I know that this is not satisfactory but I have to say that I am satisfied with the level of unity that Member States are proving in the field of Foreign and Security policy. Then, on internal issues, it is another story.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I151076>

Adam KAZNOWSKI (link sends e-mail)

Press Officer for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

+32 (0) 2 29 89359

+32 (0)460 768 088