European External Action Service (EEAS)

CFSP/CSDP: speech by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas at the EP plenary on the annual reports on the Implementation of CSDP

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Opening Remarks

President,

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

The two reports, which provide the basis for our exchange today, are comprehensive and an integral part of the European Union’s work on foreign policy.

I want to thank the rapporteurs, Mr. McAllister and Mr. Pascual De La Parte, and every Member who contributed to these reports.

You have not only looked in depth at what we have already done on foreign policy but also looked at where we could go. And I think this is extremely important. I am grateful for your important insight in this regard.

As this is the first time, I am here to discuss this annual reporting by the European Parliament, let me start with a promise.

A promise, with the support of the European External Action Service (EEAS), to make the best use of the foreign policy toolbox at our disposal and to continue defending the rules-based international order including at the multilateral level. This year will be a big year for multilateralism, with the EU-African Union Summit and a Summit with the Latin American and Caribbean states.

But there are three clear challenges that dominate our agenda, which also the Rapporteurs pointed out:

First, our own security and defence; second, Ukraine; and third, the Middle East.

On the first, Europe must take greater responsibility for its own defence.

We have done a lot to boost European defence in 2024. However, more work lies ahead in 2025.

The White Paper on Defence/Readiness 2030, sets out what the European Union can do, including freeing up €800 billion for defence, pooling resources for joint defence projects and working closer with our partners.

The same goes for preparedness. Our new Preparedness Strategy paves the way for a more resilient Union to face the widest range of crises and threats against our territory and interests.

And I count on the European Parliament to contribute to turning these plans and strategies into concrete action. Like my colleague, Commissioner Kubilius likes to say, “it is all about the implementation, implementation, implementation.” This includes supporting the necessary financing to get the job done.

With regards to Ukraine, from the earliest days of Russia’s full-scale war of aggression, the European Union has stood shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine.

We have provided [over] €138 billion, including close to €50 billion of military assistance. We have trained more than 72,000 Ukrainian soldiers through our EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUAM).

Our civilian mission EUAM has continued to support Ukraine’s security, help stabilise liberated areas and strengthen accountability for war crimes.

We have recently adopted the 16th package of sanctions to put even more pressure on Russia. We are now discussing the 17th package and there is already a clear consensus we need this.

Yesterday marked three weeks since Ukraine agreed to an immediate 30-day ceasefire. Since then, Putin has stalled, obstructed and evaded efforts for peace. Ukraine has shown it wants peace. But Moscow is not negotiating in good faith.

We need to keep supporting Ukraine as much as we can to strengthen their hand at the negotiation table, when the time comes. European leaders have decided to “urgently step up efforts to address Ukraine’s pressing military needs”.

I have proposed a way to make that happen. Two million rounds of ammunition worth €5 billion. This is what President Zelensky asked for.

We are adamant that no agreement on Ukraine’s fate and Europe’s security will work without Europe or Ukraine at the table.

In the Middle East, the situation is very grave. We must be doing everything to stop the spiral of violence.

As I underlined to every interlocutor during my recent visit to the region, the European Union's priority is a permanent ceasefire and hostage-release deal, and the resumption of humanitarian aid deliveries into Gaza.

We will discuss this in more detail later. But the EU's positive contribution is already very clear.

Since October 2023, we have provided over €1 billion for Palestine and UNRWA, both through our humanitarian assistance and through our support to the Palestinian Authority.

During the temporary ceasefire, our Border Assistance Mission in Rafah has helped more than 4 000 people cross the border, including more than 1 600 requiring medical attention.

I regret that this has been stopped now.

We are also committed to raising our concerns at the highest level. The previous month I chaired a frank EU-Israel Association Council. This month we will hold a High-Level Dialogue with the Palestinian Authority.

Diplomatic work must continue. This is why we have also increased our political engagement to sustain the ceasefire agreement between Lebanon and Israel.

We have also increased our humanitarian assistance and, in December 2024, our financial support thought the European Peace Facility to the Lebanese Armed Forces in the sum of €60 million.

In Syria, where hope is hanging on by a thread, we have suspended some sectoral sanctions to give a boost to Syria's nascent economy. We also organised the ninth Brussels Conference on Syria, raising €5.8 billion to support the Syrian people.

Work now continues towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned inclusive transition process.

These two examples show that the European Union can be a relevant security provider across multiple crises in parallel.

But none of this important work would be possible without our network of European Union Delegations around the world.

As MEPs, you witness the added value of our Delegations first hand when you go on missions in the field.

And, in the current geopolitical context, I am committed to strengthening our network of Delegations and making them as efficient as possible and as modern as possible. Because in a time like this, the world needs more Europe, not less.

I count on your support in this crucial exercise, including through securing adequate budget for the remainder of the current Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), and the next one. These discussions will be very hard.

I also believe that none of the European Union's progress on foreign policy would be possible without the European Parliament and the work you do through parliamentary diplomacy. This is also a key component of our foreign policy.

Thank you, dear Members of the European Parliament for all the work you do. Thank you for the exchange. I am also looking forward to today's exchange.

Thank you.

Watch the video (starting at 10:43)

Closing remarks

Honourable Members,

Allow me to thank you for your continuous support to the European Union's common foreign, security and defence policy.

A few very specific comments and questions that were addressed.

Many of you on the left addressed that we should not talk about what is going on – [in spite of] the war in in Ukraine and the threat it poses, what the Russian threat poses to the whole of the European Union, because it makes people afraid.

But we have to be honest with the people. If you listen to what the intelligence services are telling us, what the Chiefs of Staff of armies are telling us, this threat is real. Russia is spending more than 9% of its GDP on the military. They will want to use it again.

And that is why we need to prepare, because if we prepare, then it acts as a deterrence. Then we do not need it. And the problem with defense spending is that you need to take these decisions before you actually need them.

You need to take those decisions when you have peace time and when it comes to fear that – no, we don't need fear, but how do you address the fear [shows] you are prepared. And then, you are not afraid, because you know what to do. That is why we prepare for this, that it would act as a deterrent [to ensure] that we would never have a war in Europe again. That is why we are doing these things.

Now [onto] the words I encourage you to not only listen to the first sentence, but actually to listen to the whole speech and all addresses that I had in the Middle East. I also got criticism from Israel, so maybe that shows that the approach has been balanced.

But what I want to stress is that I am in the position to represent the European Union. That means 27 Member States, and that is why we have to focus on those things that we agree on – and we agree on a lot.

We agree on the Two-State Solution. That is why we are pushing this, and we are part of the coalitions for the two-state solution, in order to have a balanced approach to talk about the security of Israel, but also the rights of Palestinians. Then we also agree that humanitarian law must be followed. That means that the civilians and civilian infrastructure cannot be targeted.

We also insist on stopping the killing in in Gaza. We also insist on the hostages being released. We also insist on the humanitarian aid not being politicised and humanitarian aid reaching the people in need. So, there are many things we agree on, and that is why I am also representing the 27 Member States - also [present] in this chamber. We have very, very different views.

On engaging with Israel, we have to do it, because we also need to address all these issues. Otherwise, we do not have the possibility to do it. That is why we have the Association Council where 27 Member States were also able to raise all these issues.

Then, to whoever asked on the Black Sea, we have the Black Sea strategy coming out the end of May.

Then, somebody talked about the quality of life deteriorating if we invest in defence. I can assure you, if you watch the news, then [you will see that] the quality of life will be much, worse when there is a war. That is why we need to do this, to preserve our quality of life.

Then, when it comes to Syria, there is this balance we have to do. So, we need to be in a position where this process is Syria-led and Syria-owned.

We welcome the Assad regime's fall. The people of Syria also need to have new opportunities, and that is why we were lifting sanctions, so that there will be jobs, there will be no radicalisation in Syria. Of course it presents risks, but I think we also need to avoid the mistakes we did in Afghanistan where we do not have the right and possibilities to address the issues that are common to, or are important to Europe. And we are not helping the leadership, we are helping the Syrian people. That is also very important to understand.

Then, on the European External Action Service’s (EEAS) budget, I thank you and also the European Parliament, for having been really pushing for the budget to be taken into account. Especially you, Mr. Sanchez Amore, for working for this. I think it is extremely important that on our side we are working on making the delegations more effective and more modern. I think this is also needed from our side.

On the Western Balkans. I agree with those who are speaking. This is definitely a very important region. It is in Europe, so we should not overlook them, and our neighbors'

problems today are our problems [of] tomorrow. We will work [on] that and on the EU-UK security pact. I work towards [having] that for the summit. I hope that everybody will also come on board.

And to conclude, I think we must do more for our own security and defence and we must take greater responsibility to become stronger. I really thank you for your continued support to make the European Union stronger. Thank you.

Watch the video

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