

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference after the Foreign Affairs Council

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Thank you very much.

I guess that by now you have been debriefed by the Ministers coming out of the Council and also I guess that you had the chance of having a look at the Council conclusions we have adopted, on the three issues that were on our agenda today. An agenda that was focused very much on the top priorities of the international agenda. First, Migration, with a view to feed in the preparation of the European Council that is going to discuss this issue again next Thursday. We adopted Council conclusions on the external part of our action on migration, having a comprehensive view of all the things that have been done as we were tasked in previous meetings of the European Council, or in the European Agenda on migration. In the Council conclusions on migration, you find all the things that have been followed up in these months on an operational side: on the Eastern route and on the Southern route at the same time, giving the same level of importance to both; and also taking stock of the results of the Western Balkans Conference that was held here last week as well as the preparation for the Malta Summit in November. We discussed with the Ministers today the way forward to further implementation of these decisions.

On the other two points on the agenda, Libya and Syria: it reflects somehow the need we often refer to, to tackle part of the root causes of the refugee crisis and the migration crisis. Not the only ones obviously, but we know very well that conflicts and crises around us are one of the main reasons for instability that lead to this huge movement of people through Libya in the case of Mediterranean route and from Syria in the case of the Eastern route.

When it comes to our discussion on Libya, Ministers often discussed this issue since I started my mandate almost one year ago. We have started a preparation, with a certain sense of anticipation, already in the beginning of the year to prepare what kind of support the European Union can provide to a Government of National Accord once it is formed. Today, the main point was, and is, to pass a strong and united message from the European Union and the Member States all together, to all the Libyan parties in these crucial hours, to invite all of them to endorse the agreement that is on their table for the sake of the Libyan people first of all, and the country. We are ready, as we have stated several times, to give all the possible support that the Libyans would require and ask for, in a spirit of partnership. We have prepared a certain number of options on different kind of support being it on basic services, municipalities, health, border control, and on the migration flow - not necessarily on the sea border, but also and mainly on the land borders, meaning the Southern border of Libya. A whole series of issues, including the

counterterrorism work against Da'esh, on which the European Union, as such, is united and ready to support, but obviously that we need to discuss with the new Libyan authorities once a government is formed in a true sense of partnership.

The main message today from all the 28 Foreign Ministers and from me personally, is a plea to the Libyans, all the Libyans, to unite and give their country a chance to get out of the chaos they have been experiencing in the last years.

On Syria, we had a long discussion. It was not the first one in recent times, as we dedicated our Foreign Ministers informal meeting in New York, in the margins of the General Assembly of the United Nations, to discuss this together with UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. Somehow we have built on this informal discussion to shape our common position today. I often hear, that on Syria in particular, Europe is divided, so I guess the news today is that "Europe is united" on a common stance, on our role, to trying to facilitate a political solution to the crisis on three elements.

On one side, the humanitarian aspects. As you know, the European Union is the first donor and is continuing to be. We are increasing the level of our contributions, not only to cover projects inside Syria that are going on in very difficult circumstances, but also and mainly to the neighbouring countries. We are determined to increase the level of our humanitarian assistance. And we also have two other tracks, highlighted in the Council conclusions we have adopted unanimously today.

On one side, the security track: the European Union as such, and the Member States, are engaged within the global coalition against Da'esh. Not only against Da'esh, let me also mention the other terrorist organisations that are defined as terrorist organisations by the UN Security Council resolutions, and in particular al-Nusra. But the European Union itself is not involved in the military activities. We are participating in the coalition with complementary activities that contribute to the fight against Da'esh and terrorist organisations, and to the efforts to stabilise not only the situation in Syria, but also the fight against these entities in Iraq.

Our main focus today was the one on the political track. Because, if there is a huge political space for EU to play a role, it is to actively, efficiently, pro-actively, support the UN-led process.

Let me be very clear on this.

There are two ways of supporting a UN process. There is a neutral, easy way. No one normally argues that UN processes are not worth supporting, but there is a sort of distance. So, the UN is doing its work and we support it. We decided today to *meanit*. So, when we write full political weight, full diplomatic weight from the European Union to back and to support actively and efficiently the UN-led process, that means that from tonight onwards, we will work hand in hand with UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura on starting the political process leading to a transition.

This is what we have discussed obviously with Staffan de Mistura in these days. We are going to engage or to reach out to different regional powers, involved in or that can have an influence in solving the conflict. I will receive tomorrow morning a visit by an Iranian delegation in Brussels, with whom we will start discussions on this. This will take place at the same time as Staffan de Mistura will be meeting Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on the same issue. We have decided to coordinate our actions very closely, and to do a little bit what the European Union has done in these recent months on Libya with the UN-led process led by Bernardino Leon: active, daily, common work, support to have the political process not only kept as an objective, but also started. Starting a process leading to a political transition is even more urgent now that the security situation is deteriorating on the ground.

There is sufficient unity within the European Union to allow us to play a significant facilitating role at the side of the UN to facilitate the transition that can involve all the relevant actors inside Syria, in the region and in the broader international community.

This is what we are going to do.

Questions and Answers

On Syria and engaging with Al-Assad

When I say, and when we say in the conclusions, that it is the UN that has to lead the process - and is leading the process - we mean that it is for the UN to run some of the talks and for us to run others. We will do some of them jointly.

I don't exclude that, in the near future, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and myself might have joint meetings with some of the actors in the region or internationally. UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, and the UN in general, are talking with the Syrian regime, and this is something that we can support in the context of our support to the UN-led process.

When we talk about the need to start urgently a political process leading to a transition, it means that we have to have a reality check. We have to understand that 4,5 years after the beginning of the conflict, the situation on the ground is still the one of having Assad sitting in Damascus and terrorist organisations, in particular Da'esh, gaining ground in Syria, and also in Iraq.

So, the reality check means that it is not more of the same that is going to lead to the political process to start and to end with a transition, but we need to have a different kind of approach, which means involving also representatives of the regime at the negotiating table led by the UN.

On the EU mandate in Syria; and on the EU's work with Russia.

On the mandate: actually the Council conclusions recall a previous mandate I received already in July. If you look at the Council conclusions we adopted at the end of July regarding the Iranian deal, there was already a reference to that precise tasking to me: "to

explore ways of building more constructive and cooperative regional dynamics."

I am going to do it.

I had already started to fulfil that mandate in the last months. Obviously first with Iran. We have played a role of mediation during the nuclear talks that can give us sufficient confidence from their side to have open talks with us, also on this issue. This is going to be the first step we are going to take. Then we will also engage with the Gulf countries, starting with Saudi Arabia. I visited Riyadh already in the end of July with exactly the same purpose- to explore possibilities to build a more cooperative regional dynamic.

Having different kinds of relationships between the regional powers in the Middle East that can lead to decreased tensions and conflicts in the area is clearly in the European interest, because it is also an area that is very close geographically to us.

I have had in New York, in the margins of the General Assembly, talks with both the Saudi Foreign Minister, but also with all the other GCC countries' Foreign Ministers precisely on this. We are following that up, both at my level but also at senior official's level.

I would add a third element that I would explore, as a result of my mandate in the region, which is the one of Turkey. Turkey is a country that has a clear important regional dimension, a clear regional power. We tend to refer to Turkey in these days and in these weeks, mainly in relation with the refugee crisis.

But what we need with Turkey is mainly a high-level foreign policy and political dialogue also on the balance in the region and on the crisis in Syria. The discussion we can have, as we have started last week, with Turkish authorities on the way forward to find a political solution on the Syrian crisis is going to be very relevant. Turkey is one of the countries with whom, as the European Union, we have intense contacts and many interests that we share. We are used to exchange intensively and very often for different reasons. Turkey is going to be one of the key actors with which I am going to work to explore these regional possibilities.

When it comes to Russia, I believe that on one side - you find it on the Council conclusions- there is some worries on the fact that military activities might either be not targeted against Da'esh or other UN recognised terrorist organisations and on the other side not coordinated with other actors that are playing a military role in the area, which is something dangerous in itself. But on the other side, I have to underline that very few of you, if any at all, have noticed that reference to the role that Russia can play in exercising a sort of involvement of the regime in the political process itself; that is going to be a very significant and important role that Russia can play. I believe that, in parallel to the work that the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is doing with them, we, as the European Union, can engage directly with Russia to see if a political process can start, guaranteeing that everybody sits around the table for defining the political process that will lead to a transition. But first of all, we need to start the process.

And for doing so, the role of the regional actors as well as the role of the United States and of Russia are going to be crucial. I discussed this with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in New York during our last bilateral meeting.

I discussed it again recently with the Russian ambassador to Brussels a few days ago and we will discuss it again the next time we will meet.

So, direct engagements with Russia on this, seeing the opportunity for Russia to be a relevant actor to start the political process.

On Turkish calls for safe zones. And on NATO's role in Libya and the region.

We have discussed the issue of safe zones first of all with our Turkish friends but also with our American partners and obviously here today with the Ministers.

I have to say that my personal impression is that the developments of the last days, weeks or so, and especially the increase of military activities in precisely that part of Northern Syria, might make the plans that our Turkish friends were elaborating relatively in need for readjustment. Because the situation on the ground is moving fast and the idea of somehow creating safe zones exactly in the area where Da'esh is concentrated and the Russian military presence is concentrated might not be an easy task to achieve at the moment. So, we will need to re-discuss this with our Turkish friends in the coming days.

In general terms, the European Union as such is not involved in military activities in Syria and is not going to be. And, let's say, that one thing is to explore ways to guarantee humanitarian access also to the North of Syria which is something in which we are very much engaged. As you know, we have an office in Gaziantep, on the Turkish – Syrian border, exactly bordering the area that the Turkish authorities indicate as a possible safe zone. It has been constantly working to find possible ways for safe humanitarian access to Syria, sometimes with some significant work done. I was visiting the office myself last December with Commissioner Stylianides. So, we are always in favour of finding ways of increasing humanitarian help and assistance inside Syria.

It is another thing to imagine that we can create -or that someone can create - humanitarian zones free from risks and free from Da'esh and other terrorist groups presence, in a moment when the clashes, the terrorist activities and the military activities are very much acute in that area.

I would explore this option with a certain caution, but again, I have the impression that recent developments are also creating, let's say, a different environment for our Turkish friends to consider them or not - but this is not for me to elaborate on.

Also, because as many Europeans might remember, we have to be careful, when defining a zone safe. We have had some sad experience, in the Balkans in particular, that we definitely do not want to repeat. At the end of the day, the real way for allowing the Syrian refugees to go back to their country safely would be to put an end to the war in Syria and to put an end to the presence of Da'esh in Syria. This is going to be the real safety of the entire zone of Syria and the real condition for them to go back.

The second question was about the NATO lunch.

That lunch was actually dedicated mainly to NATO adaptation. So, something completely different from our discussions today. Obviously, we also exchanged views on both Syria and Libya.

I don't personally see a major role for NATO, as such, neither in Syria nor in Libya.

However I know that particularly on Libya, NATO Secretary General has expressed several times his readiness to work for preparing some sort of support if, only if and when the new Libyan government might require so. We do not have a Libyan government yet. I hope we could have one very shortly. So, it would be up to the Libyans to decide and up to NATO to work on this, it is not for me to do it. But I can tell that you that on the European Union side, we have started our planning, especially on the humanitarian, development, civilian and border management assistance support we can give to the future Libyan authorities. This includes institution building, support to deliver public services and even something on security side is very much advanced and is ready for discussion with the Libyan authorities. Because this is something I believe we have to take as an absolute starting point for us. We have shared this with the Ministers today. Whatever we might be ready to do, it will have to be discussed with the Libyan authorities [once a Government of National Accord is established]. There is not going to be any possible way for the European Union to plan something to be done on Libya alone.

That is why we need to have -as a starting point - a government, taking responsibility for the country and discussing with them what kind of support they might need, in which sectors, in which forms, in which timing. It is a partnership. It is not a decision taken in Brussels and being implemented somewhere else. It is an offer that can be financially important and that we are ready to mobilise. But this is only depending on the will of the Libyan authorities and on the formation of a Government of National Unity that I sincerely hope can see the light in the coming days.

Watch the video:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I109869>(The remarks)

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I109870>(Questions & Answers)