

# Video conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference

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*Check against delivery!*

Good afternoon or evening to all of you. Thank you for following this press point.

Today we have had an important Foreign Affairs Council with a video conference with the Secretary of State of the United States, Mike Pompeo.

The main point of the agenda was this: transatlantic relations.

We engaged in a strategic dialogue with Mike Pompeo on our relations and on the key foreign policy issues both for the European Union and the United States.

As you know - and it is unnecessary to stress it, but let me do it - the transatlantic partnership is one of the key pillars of the world order and today's video meeting reaffirmed the commitment of the European Union Member States to continue this close transatlantic cooperation. Maybe we do not agree on everything, but our commitment to transatlantic cooperation is as strong as ever.

We focused on three main issues: China, the Peace Process in the Middle East, and the Eastern neighbourhood, with an emphasis on Ukraine. And we discussed as a cross-cutting issue, the problem of disinformation, which is affecting the three of them – and mainly the ones related to the Eastern neighbourhood and China.

We also talked about the coronavirus pandemic.

We underlined that there is currently no better example of the need for international cooperation than this health crisis. That is why we have regretted the United States' announcement that they intend to withdraw from the World Health Organization. We expect that this decision could be reconsidered, because global problems need global solutions and multilateral tools. Multilateral cooperation is more needed than ever. It is in big demand and short supply.

We exchanged views on China and its growing assertiveness on many fronts. There are issues that we face together in the relationship with China and where our close cooperation is very important to address them jointly. This includes, for sure, the situation in Hong Kong.

I suggested to launch a distinct, bilateral dialogue focussing on China and the challenges its actions and ambitions mean for us - the United States and the European Union.

On the Middle East Peace Process, we made it clear that it is important to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to engage in a credible and meaningful political process.

We recognise that the United States' plan created a certain momentum about a political process that had stopped for too long, and this momentum can be used to start joint international efforts on the basis of existing internationally-agreed parameters. We, from the European Union, stand ready to help and to facilitate such a process.

We were also clear about the consequences of a possible annexation for the prospects of a two-state solution, but also for regional stability. On that I think that many Member States were very clear about it.

On the Eastern Neighbourhood, which was the third pillar of our conversation today, we confirmed that the strong European Union-United States partnership will remain crucial – particularly on Ukraine.

Of course, we still need Russia to do its part in the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, and our position remains clear and unchanged.

Some Member States also raised the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, where we are increasingly concerned about the recent escalations from Turkey. We agreed on the need for de-escalation and to return to a true partnership. There have been some incidents during the last days around Operation Irini. We are aware of that and tomorrow we will talk about it in the Council of Defence Ministers.

I also recalled that we are organising the Brussels Syria Conference [Supporting the future of Syria and the region – Brussels conference] on the 30th of June. It will be the fourth time that we do that, and I asked for the United States' participation.

Finally, disinformation – this is a shared challenge. External disinformation actors are targeting both of us and we agreed to look at ways to reinforce our partnership in responding to this growing problem. Truth has to prevail. Democracy is a system that works on the basis of free and fair information. If citizens do not have access to free information or if citizens are poisoned with fake news, then their participation in democratic processes can be jeopardised.

This is a brief outline of what we have been discussing during this three-hour meeting. Now I am at your disposal to take some questions.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-191991>

## **Q&A**

**Q. High Representative, you mentioned the issue of concerns for Turkey's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean. In your discussions with the [United States] Secretary of State Pompeo, did he agree to send a transatlantic message to Turkey for de-escalation? Practically, how are the United States going to be involved in this situation? What other steps are you planning to**

**take on this whole issue of the behaviour of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus or in the sea near Crete? Are you planning to discuss it again? Are you planning to start negotiations with Turkey in some kind of format?**

Yes, the issue was not one of the three main blocks under discussion but it has been mentioned by me and some Member States. The [US] Secretary of State has been considering the situation in the Mediterranean, but mainly related to the situation in Libya. In any case, the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean is becoming worse. Greece and Cyprus have been rightly complaining about the fact that there are drillings very near their coastlines and at the next Foreign Affairs Council, we will put the issue of our relation with Turkey on the agenda, taking into account all aspects of this complex relationship.

**Q. In Tarhuna in Libya, there are crimes which are amounting to crimes against humanity. Turkey is planning to open at least a couple of military bases and an air base in Al-Watiya and a navy base in Misrata. This is what the Turkish and the Libyans are discussing. Do you expect, based on the exchange you had with Secretary Pompeo, that the conflict will be intensifying and did you have a conversation on the way out of this crisis? Did you have contacts with the Prime Minister of Libya Fayed al-Serraj or his diplomats in the past days?**

I have a lot of contacts with everybody all the time. Today was a meeting with the Secretary of State of the United States and we have been discussing about these three main issues.

I will be very happy to inform you of the things that have been discussed today in the Foreign Affairs Council but we have not gone into details on the situation in Libya. It has been mentioned but I cannot answer your question because it has nothing to do with the Council today.

**Q. I have two questions. The first question is about what you have just described as “distinct bilateral dialogue on China with the United States”. Can you tell us a bit more about the idea behind it, the format of it and what you would specifically like to discuss with the United States side in this dialogue? About Hong Kong, the National Security Law is now being rumored to be introduced by the end of this week, which will be the weekend before the EU-China Summit. Under such circumstances, do you still think that it is the right time to have a dialogue with China and would the focus on the dialogue change in any way?**

We are going to have a Summit between the European Union and China. We are preparing this Summit. We had a structured political dialogue with the Foreign Affairs Minister of China last week. We continue negotiating in order to see if we can bring to this

Summit some deliverables related to our cooperation for the next five years – Agenda 2025. It is not easy to find an agreement. We do not have it yet, but we continue discussing with our Chinese counterparts until the last minute.

On the issue of our dialogue with the United States focusing on China, there are broad range of issues. For us, it is important to stay together with the United States in order to share concerns and to look for common ground to defend our values and our interests. We have not gone in to more detail.

**Q. Can you be a little specific, will this dialogue with China be at the level of yourself and Secretary Pompeo? Or what level will it be?**

We have been talking about three important issues. It means that we have been able to devote about 20-25 minutes to each one of them. You can imagine that we have not been able to go into very much into detail. I took the initiative during the conclusion of our discussions that, having not had so much time to go deeper in to this subject, I suggested the possibility to continue engaging in a bilateral dialogue [with the US] focusing on China and the challenges that the more assertive attitude of China is bringing to the world stage. It was a suggestion that I put on the table during my conclusion, but nothing more than that.

**Q: On annexation, did Secretary Pompeo give any indication that the United States is or will rein in Israeli plans to annex some Palestinian territory?**

On the Middle East Peace Process, it is clear that it is important to encourage the Israelis and Palestinians to engage in a credible and meaningful political process. For us there is no other way than resuming talks.

We recognise the merit of the US plan because it has created a certain momentum where there was nothing, and I think this momentum can be used to start an international process. But this process, from the European side, has to be on the basis of existing internationally-agreed parameters. It is not a secret because it has been said in several EU statements, that the initial plan presented by the US does not respect these parameters. It is maybe a starting point for negotiations. Theoretically a negotiation does not finish at the same point it starts, because if not it would not be a negotiation, but an ultimatum.

**Q. Ahead of the meeting, the German Foreign [Affairs] Minister, [Heiko Maas], said that he wanted to propose to [the United States Secretary of State, [Mike] Pompeo, to discuss all issues between Palestinians and Israelis in a new multilateral format. Has [Mike] Pompeo agreed to that proposal?**

Mister Pompeo has not accepted nor refused anything. It was not a matter of accepting or refusing, it was a conversation. He was taking notes, he was answering in general, but we have not gone into negotiations. It was an exchange of views.

I am sure that he has been taking good notice of the things that different Member States have explained to him. Among them the German Foreign Minister [Heiko Maas], who has been very concrete, presenting proposals and insisting a lot on the need of preventing

annexation, because it would not be without consequences. Mr Pompeo has been taking note of this point of view and of several others'. When you listen to Luxembourg and when you listen to Hungary, there are different points of view. And he noticed that there were different points of view among Member States. But, for sure, he has not said "I agree with that, I disagree with that. I accept this proposal, I refuse this proposal". This was not the mood of the meeting.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-191991>

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