



REMARKS

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

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We had a very good Council today. There was full unity on all points we discussed, starting from the nuclear deal with Iran. The Foreign Ministers held a sort of follow-up meeting to the leaders' meeting we had in Sofia some 10 days ago, where all the Heads of State or Government of the 28 Member States [strongly reconfirmed our intention to continue the full implementation of the nuclear deal with Iran](#), on our side, as long as Iran stays committed as it is the case so far. You might have noticed that just a few days ago the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] issued its [11th Report](#) confirming that Iran is fully compliant.

We reconfirmed the strong political message of unity in this respect and we decided to continue the work in terms of coordinating the European Union's measures and mechanisms we are putting in place to protect the economic investments of European businesses that have legitimately invested and engaged in Iran, and also the Member States' initiatives that are under preparation or under consideration so that we create coordinated overview mechanism to accompany these measures. This, obviously,

continues to take place also in the framework of our deliberations under the [Joint Commission that we chaired last Friday](#) in Vienna, that was positive and had a positive outcome. This is relevant also for the work of other international partners, not only China and Russia, but also other players in the world that have, in the years after the agreement, engaged with Iran in a legitimate manner.

I would like to stress one aspect that was particularly underlined during the meeting and I think it is important for us to make the case for it: we are mainly discussing about measures to preserve the agreement and our economic commitments with Iran, but for us this is not about an economic interest, this is about a security interest for the European Union - because in the absence of the nuclear deal with Iran, we believe the security of the region and of Europe would be at stake. This is why we are insisting so much on keeping this agreement in place because we see no possible ways to have better security conditions in the region if the agreement is no longer in place. On the contrary, we would see a worsening of security conditions for the region and for Europe. On the basis of the continuation of the agreement from all sides - excluding the United States obviously that has decided otherwise - we believe we can build on that and also address other issues that are of concern.

We then moved to the situation in Venezuela, where [Council Conclusions were adopted](#). There was strong unity among Member States on the call for new presidential elections to be free and fair, respect the constitutional rules and allow all political parties to take part in the political life; and also a call to the release of all political prisoners. As you know, we also started working on the expansion of our reversible targeted measures, with a view to adopting them in the coming weeks. The purpose of this work is and continues to be to encourage and to create the conditions for a political dialogue, which we believe should be inclusive and meaningful, because we see that there is no other way out of the situation of tensions in Venezuela than a serious, meaningful political dialogue between the government and the opposition.

We also exchanged views in a restricted format on the situation in Gaza. Also here we registered a complete unity of views and positions among Member States. First of all, to act immediately in coordination with our regional partners to avoid further losses of lives and guarantee that humanitarian access to Gaza is created. As you know, we are doing all we can, as the European Union, to bring in humanitarian aid, also because in the absence of that humanitarian aid we might risk further loss of human lives. We believe this has to be avoided in all ways. We also discussed about the political horizon, because the tensions in Gaza happen in a context of a lack of a peace process and in the context of developments in Jerusalem, and namely the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem that has been a strong mobilising factor in Gaza and risks to be so in the broader Arab or Muslim world.

We confirmed in full unity the European Union's support for the two-state solution, including on Jerusalem that we believe must be part of negotiations, with its final status defined through those negotiations. We are still all committed, all the 28, to consider

Jerusalem as the future capital of the two states. This united, consolidated position of the European Union has been strongly reconfirmed, as well as our intention to continue to closely work with our partners, first and foremost obviously the Israelis and the Palestinians, the regional players, starting from Jordan and Egypt, and also, obviously, the United States and the others that are with us in the Quartet.

We then discussed the situation also in the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], reaffirming our strong coordination with the United Nations and the African Union to encourage and accompany elections that we believe should take place in an effective and inclusive manner, with a credibility that would allow everybody to respect its results. I shared with the Ministers the latest talks I had about this with, in particular, the President of the African Union, Moussa Faki, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, here in Brussels a couple of weeks ago. I think that covers it all and I am ready for your questions.

Link to the video:

Q & A

Q. On Iran. Was there any concrete offer from national governments today of what they will do, of what their central banks will do, or when they will step in? Because so far we have not heard any. And what is the timeline? We heard from a senior Iranian official on Friday in Vienna saying "next week." We saw the statement from the Joint Commission saying "in the next few weeks." Is the timeline of the European Council to finally say "this is what we can do"?

The answer to your first question is yes. A number of Member States have put on the table today concrete ideas of things that they can contribute with, complementing the concrete steps that the European Union has started to put in place and that you know already well. And one of the outcomes of the meeting today is the decision to set up a sort of network of contact points of all the Member States that would help us in Brussels to coordinate not only the European Union measures, but also the European Union measures together with the measures that single Member States will put in place. You are perfectly right.

In the last couple of weeks, we have been working very hard on putting in place a package of European Union's steps and mechanisms. This needs to be complemented by Member States' decisions. Today, the purpose of the meeting was exactly to start building the basis for that - I say "start building", but some Member States have started already - and guaranteeing that there is a coordinated approach to this effort. So, in this respect, yes, the work was fruitful today. Some other Member States might get inspiration or concrete ideas out of the meeting today. And we will continue coordinating this work at experts' level and coming back to this at a political level whenever it is needed.

In terms of timeline: as soon as possible. We have always referred to the coming weeks, not because we believe that we have a lot of time ahead of us. We intend and we want to act as fast as possible, not only because we know that the pressure in Iran is significant, but also because we understand that European investors need certainty, so we have an interest in working fast. But it is quite clear that we are facing certain complexities. We have never thought this would have been easy and we are serious about that. Serious measures in a serious complex situation take time. The important thing is that things are moving, in the right direction, and in full unity with a lot of political determination to make them advance. So I am confident that this can happen. I am still talking about "next weeks."

Q. You talked about "full unity." There have been public statements, from the Polish side for example, that actually cast doubt on this unity because they show some understanding for the US position. Was this not raised during the meeting? Are you concerned that this unity may not hold?

Let me say that the unity is there also in us sharing some of the U.S. concerns. This is also something that unites us, because when it comes to some of the regional dynamics or the ballistic missile program of Iran, obviously we do share, all together, some of the concerns of the US administration. And the first concern we share is the one related to the possibility for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon - and this is exactly why we are determined to keep the agreement in place. The agreement on some of the concerns of US administration is shared, but we have a different answer on what is the best strategy to meet these concerns and find a positive answer to that. The unity that was expressed first by the EU leaders and now by the Foreign Ministers was clear on the fact that we believe that the best way to address our concerns is keeping the JCPOA in place, keeping its full implementation, because this represents the best way to avoid that Iran develops a nuclear weapon.

Q. On the Post-Cotonou negotiations. I understand there was no negotiating mandate adopted today. Is that correct? Was it for a dispute on the subject of migration?

We were foreseeing to have a point for the adoption of the negotiating mandate today, with the assumption that Ambassadors would have finished and completed the job and the agreements by this morning. This was not the case, there were still some disagreements. More than disagreements, I would say that there was still some work to be done on the wording of the final negotiating mandate. I was reassured by the fact that all Member States - none excluded - indicated a strong political will to find consensus in the coming hours. So we actually skipped the point on the adoption of the negotiating mandate and we agreed to mandate and task our Ambassadors to finalise this job on the text in the coming hours, so that we can hopefully adopt a mandate in the coming days - maximum one or two days. And yes, one of the elements of discussion is the wording of the negotiating mandate on migration. But let me remind you that it is a negotiating mandate for the Post-Cotonou agreement; it is much broader

than migration. On all the rest, agreement has been found and I am confident that this will not be a problem also for that remaining part.

Q. Can the Blocking Statute protect companies against sanctions? And what is the human rights situation in Iran after the deal, who spoke with Iran?

The work we - the Commission precisely - have started to do, with a green light and a mandate from the Heads of State or Government of the 28 Member States is about amending the blocking statute that would provide, in this manner, a legal shield for the companies that have been and are legitimately investing in Iran, after the nuclear agreement was reached, and so this would obviously provide the legal framework for them.

The second part of the question was about human rights: We, indeed, have established a human rights dialogue with Iran that has been taking place in these years. It has proven to be sometimes difficult but productive, respectful and I believe that especially when we have issues of disagreement, as we do have with Iran, the correct way is to face them in an open manner, through dialogue and that can lead to some results. This has been the case in some cases. Let me also remind us all that when we are talking about the lifting of sanctions, we are talking about the nuclear-related sanctions, but there are a number of sanctions that are still in place from the European Union side, including some human rights-related sanctions. But we believe that engagement and dialogue is more productive than interrupting dialogue and going for confrontation. Normally it brings more results and we are committed to continue this way.

Q. You met with the Foreign Minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia this morning. Both Ministers have announced that there is some kind of breakthrough in the negotiations. However, statements and leaks have been made about certain countries that are still very much opposed to a start of the negotiations even if the name is solved. What are you doing to overcome this opposition and what will happen if indeed the name is solved but the negotiations are not granted in June or December?

Yes, I had very good meetings with the Foreign Minister [Nikola Dimitrov] this morning together with the other Ministers informally, and also yesterday evening I met him bilaterally. I was briefed both by him, but also by the Greek Foreign Minister [Nikos Kotzias] about the progress made in the name negotiations, which is indeed extremely encouraging and promising, but it is still not finalised. You know that I am an optimist and when it comes to the Balkans I am even more of an optimist, but I would say let us take it step by step. First, we expressed several times - and I personally confirmed - our firm intention to encourage, accompany and support an eventual agreement they might finalise in the coming days or weeks. The European Union will be there all the way to accompany the agreement once it is reached and announced.

This, I believe, will also have a powerful transformative effect, not only on the relations

between the two countries, but also on the entire region of the Balkans, on Europe, and on the global environment, because the name issue is an issue that has been there for a long time and that has created complications for years. If strong political leadership and courage, under UN auspices, with a strong European Union involvement in the accompanying steps, can bring a negotiated, diplomatic result on such a difficult and complex issue, I think this would be an inspiration also for others and it would prove that diplomacy, negotiations, the multilateral approach and context are the ones to invest in. And this, I believe, should be then recognised also by the European Council in terms of opening negotiations with Skopje.

Let me say that the Commission has already recommended opening negotiations not only with Skopje, but also with Tirana, on the basis of the merit of the reforms adopted, which, obviously, is then the substance of the criteria that are considered for opening negotiations. And let me remind us all that opening negotiations means the beginning of a process that then is long enough to monitor it very carefully. But I believe the power of the good news of an agreement reached on the name issue with Athens would be so overwhelmingly welcomed by the international community and by Europe that this would have to be, I believe, taken into consideration by all capitals.

Q. What do you think the appointment of Carlo Cotarelli? And a second question, Nigel Farage [Ex-leader of UKIP and Member of the European Parliament], Marine Le Pen [President of the National Front] and Steve Bannon [former White House Chief Strategist] have talked about a coup d'etat, globalisation. Is that something that deserves an answer or not?

I already commented this morning, expressing my complete confidence in the work of the Italian institutions, starting with the President of the [Italian] Republic [Sergio Mattarella], who is a guarantor of the Constitution, but also of the Parliament. I can only reconfirm those comments in Italian, since I made them in English this morning, but I would say nothing further. I think the people of Italy have full confidence in its President and its democratic institutions and that this will lead to a solution, which fully respects the interests of the Italian people.

Link to the video:

See also

[Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions](#)

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