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REMARKS

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

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I097769>

As you know, we started our work with the point on terrorism, reacting not only to what happened in Paris earlier this month but also to a common threat that is there not only for Europeans but also countries and people in the Arab world, in Africa, in Asia. I have to say that, probably for the first time, there was a real deep awareness of the need to work together and – I was surprised to know for the first time – the Foreign Affairs Council had a discussion with our EU Counter terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove. I think this was not only a good exchange of views but also discussions on some decisions to take that is obviously only the first step. We will reconvene in the format of Home Affairs ministers later in the month and then the next Foreign Affairs Council in just three weeks, then we will make full recommendations to the informal meeting of Heads of State of Government on 12 February.

When it comes to decisions we have taken, first of all on the security level - which is obviously, clearly a dimension for the Interior Ministers and for Commissionaire Avramopoulos - we took the decision within the Foreign Affairs Council to coordinate in a much more active way than it has been the case so far. First of all, with an input to share intelligence information not only within the European Union but also with other countries around us starting from the Mediterranean and the Arab world, Turkey, Egypt, Gulf countries, North Africa but also looking to Africa and Asia.

The second point on the security level is that we have re-invited the European Parliament to work on the Passengers name record, the PNR. This is not the competence of the Foreign Affairs ministers, but still they are politicians and members of the national cabinets; so our Council gave a strong call for moves in that direction, as well as the need to increase our work preventing financing of terrorist networks. A joint meeting of experts organised by EU and US together with Australia, Canada, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and the UN agencies is going to take place in Brussels on counter-financing of terrorist organisations, in particular Da'esh.

The second level of decisions we have taken is to raise our level of cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally with Arab and Mediterranean countries starting with the League of Arab States. You know I have had a meeting today with the Secretary General, we signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen our cooperation to make sure that it is carried out on a more structured and regular basis on a series of issues. First on counter-terrorism, we are looking at specific projects to launch with specific countries to increase the level of cooperation on counter-terrorism; I would name Egypt, Yemen, Algeria, Gulf countries. And not only on the level of League of Arab states, let me also mention that we need to work more and more on Africa. Today, I released a statement on Boko Haram on behalf of the 28, and that is to me, to us, a very important part of our counter-terrorist activity because we need to tackle the narrative saying that we have a double standard, that we only care about

victims in Europe.

This is not correct. We know very well that the first victims of terrorism and terrorist acts are Muslims and Arab countries. So as I said this morning we need to work on developing a dialogue, an alliance of civilisation and avoid any kind of perception of a clash. Second, we also have decided to work together, in particular with Arab countries and the League of Arab states, on open conflicts and open crisis. Because it has two elements in it that touch on the capacity of terrorist activities and organisations on one side - the creation of failed states or areas without any kind of control for state authorities that makes it easier for terrorist networks to work, to have access to resources; this is something we have to prevent.

Additionally, open crisis and conflicts in the area feed in a very strong way the narrative that may attract more and more young people to terrorist organisations and actions.

And third, we have decided to work on the cultural message. As I said – and I know the secretary General of the Arab league has also said it - what we need is an alliance, a dialogue, work together because we are all facing the same threat. This dialogue should not only take part between the European Union and Arab Countries but also inside the European Union with the Muslim communities.

And then last but not least at all, we need to work together more and more - and the European union has all the instrument to do so - on the root causes of some of these phenomena - and in particular the economic and social situation of the younger generation in many of these countries.

Obviously all these measures will require further work and preparation - when I say we are going to launch projects on counterterrorism together with some other countries, we will need to work in the coming weeks to identify more precisely which projects and which instruments.

When it comes to concrete, immediate actions that I can personally take, there are two things that I have agreed to the Ministers: on one side, to have security attachés in the European Union Delegations in relevant countries. This means regular contact among professionals on our side and on the country that is hosting the delegation's side to develop cooperation on security issues and counterterrorist issue.

On the other side, the second thing that I want to do is to improve our communication with Arabic speaking populations, be it in the European Union and with the larger Arab communities in the World. I think we need to improve our capacity to speak Arabic, read Arabic, explain to the Arabic-speaking population our policies and also to listen to the messages that are coming from the Arab world. And I think this is a basic communication strategy that we need to implement from the very beginning.

Another point that was raised, and we will work on that in the coming weeks, is to have an exchange of best practices that are realised at national level – to see how some of those can be implemented at the European Union level. On this particular issue of counterterrorism there are some things that are working well in Members States that we could share much more at European level.

We then had a long discussion on our relations with Russia. As you might remember, we had a discussion on that already in November that was focused on Ukraine and at that time ministers agreed on the need to have more to start a strategic discussion on some open questions in EU-Russia relations. This was also something that was indicated as useful by the European Council in December which, as you might remember, discussed the issue of Russia. And to follow that up, and also to start preparing the European Council in March – that would need decisions on the first set of sanctions expiring – I had agreed, together with President Tusk, with President Juncker and with the Latvian Presidency, to submit an issues

paper for Ministers to reflect. Some of you had the paper before the Ministers, but this is another story, and today we had a long, very in-depth and useful discussion about many of those questions that are open.

Let me start by saying that starting a strategic debate does not mean and has not meant changing the course of our relations with Russia. We stay the course, as it is stated in the issue paper for the Ministers. And we are united on this. Those who were expecting divisions, major divisions today on Russia, I think will be a little bit disappointed, because we are united. We were united and we are still united on this. Our relations with Russia can only change if and when – I hope when, but at the moment it's if – commitments that were taken in Minsk are implemented. And let me say that the latest developments on the ground are definitely not encouraging, rather the contrary.

I know that the value of our position is unity, so the early discussion in the beginning of the year was also meant to prepare an ownership that can allow sustaining the unity among ourselves on different things.

Our support to Ukraine, and not only to Ukraine, but also to all our Eastern Partners, is there and it is not going to change.

Our pressure on Russia, with the sanctions policy, where as I have said several times: any decision will be based on, first of all, the non-recognition policy of the annexation of Crimea and on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, on the situation on the ground. And again today, the situation on the ground is definitely much worse than in the last weeks.

The discussion today was rather on what we add, not on what we change. This, what I mentioned, is not changing and is most probably not going to change. What we can add – and what we agreed that would be useful to add on our side – is on one side more diplomatic efforts, in any format, to contribute to solving the crisis. And on the second level, a political dialogue on global and regional issues, being it Syria or the Iranian talks on nuclear, or the Middle East Peace Process or again some of the regional crises we have – be it in Afghanistan or in Libya – and major global challenges like climate change and counter terrorism where we do have an interest in having a political dialogue on global and regional issues with Russia.

And to explore further, at technical level, some options for sectorial dialogues on, in particular, a couple of fields: Energy – as you know, this is not new – this has been a dialogue that has been going on all through the crisis, in particular in the last months and is going to continue. And to explore elements for people-to-people contacts that could be useful to engage not so much the Russian authorities but the Russian population with the European Union.

We also have decided to have the European Union working on a strategic communication to promote correct, impartial and independent information in the region.

So, as you see, and as you have heard - from I guess all the Ministers, I have not checked their declarations coming out - the consensus in the room was definitely higher than in many other occasions in the past.

There is no normalisation; there is no back to business as usual in any way. There is a reflection on how to use in the best possible way our tools, our role, in addition to the policies that we have been following in the past.

And we will definitely come back to this in the coming Foreign Affairs Council meetings before the March European Council. As you know, we have another Foreign Affairs Council in three weeks and then again in March.

Let me also touch upon two issues very quickly that were also on the agenda. We endorsed a Climate Change Action Plan that will help us reaching a good result in Paris at the conference in December. And the European Union is not only ready, but also willing to take the lead on this.

And the second, we had a short but important update on the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where you might remember we discussed and decided in December to follow a way of a written commitment from the Bosnian Presidency and then signed by the political leaders and voted by the Parliament to re-open the way. And we assessed the fact that the work done by the Presidency and shared with the political leaders in these very same hours is going definitely in the right direction, so that helps to conclude on a rather positive note, which is something that from time to time in these times you need.

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