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REMARKS

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference with Etienne Schneider, Luxembourg Defence Minister, following the Informal meeting of Ministers of Defence, Luxembourg, 3 September 2015

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Merci beaucoup Etienne (Schneider),

Je voudrais commencer par te remercier pour l'excellente coopération, comme tu as dit, et aussi pour la façon dont la présidence luxembourgeoise a commencé ses travaux. Je dois dire que c'est un plaisir de pouvoir travailler ensemble dans un esprit véritablement européen, dans ce domaine mais aussi les autres.

Let me switch to English to say that in the second part of the morning, we focused discussions on the EU operations in general terms, covering all different aspects and all different ongoing operations and missions.

Obviously the main focus today was our work on the most recently launched operation of the European Union, the one we have in the Mediterranean Sea against the smugglers and the traffickers. It was not only a discussion on the operation itself but obviously also a broader discussion on the refugee and migration crisis that Europe is facing. I apologise for having been able to join the ministers only later today - and not already yesterday when the meeting started. However yesterday, in Brussels, we had an all-day working session with President Juncker and the Commission on the new package on the refugee crisis and migration crisis that we will present in the coming days. The operation we are running in the Mediterranean against the smugglers and the traffickers of human beings is a fundamental part of our strategy; but we always have to keep in mind that it is one aspect of our work, a very important one for two reasons: first, because it has already contributed to save 1500 people at sea. This is in itself obviously a value that one cannot measure. We have always said: "priority number one is saving lives", and I am proud to say that the fact that we managed to launch this operation in only one month, that this operation has managed to reach its full capacity four weeks after its launch and that in the first weeks of its operation at sea, it contributed to rescuing 1500 people is a reason to be proud - and, as Europeans, when it comes to the refugee and migration crisis we do not have many reasons to be proud after the last weeks and months. This is one element that we have to keep in mind: that when the European Union acts united and fast, supported by strong political will by all 28 Member States, we see the results. And this operation is therefore one of the elements where this level of action is evident.

Now the operation has fulfilled all the military objectives of Phase one, that were related to the collection of information and intelligence. That is why I have proposed to EU Defence ministers today to discuss the transition to Phase two of the operation - that would mean going to the capture and disposal of vessels, including those escorting the migrants and refugees. Let me give you an example of the fact that we are ready to build on the good results that were achieved already in these first weeks: the intelligence that was

gathered throughout phase one highlighted that, on at least 16 occasions in these last five weeks, we could have gone after smugglers and traffickers already. So transitioning to Phase two would allow us to do so in an effective way, already operating in high seas.

The proposal I made to the Ministers during this first round of discussion would mean that the operation would be able, once the decision would be taken and once the capacity of the operation would be increased - hopefully in the coming weeks - not months, weeks -, to operate in high seas to capture and dispose of the vessels and obviously also contribute to the arrest of smugglers. This is one fundamental link of the chain in our fight against the trafficking of human beings. Because making the lives and the activities of the traffickers and the smugglers more difficult - if not impossible - is, we know it very well, a very important element of our work.

I am glad to say that from the round of interventions of the Defence Ministers of the 28 Member States today, I see a broad consensus on the need to start Phase two of the operation. I will discuss this and also other issues that are related to our strategy on migration and refugee crisis with the Foreign Ministers here in Luxembourg tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. I expect our discussion in the following two days will also focus on other elements of our strategy, which are obviously first and foremost related to our work with the countries of transit and origin, with our work to prevent crises and most of all to try to contribute to solve crises that are ongoing around us, mainly the Syrian one and the Libyan one, which we know very well are two key elements of the puzzle that, if we manage correctly, will contribute in a significant way to diminish the flow of people. But not only the flow of people, also the dramatic situation of men, women and children - I think we are all shocked by the last picture we have seen - The fact that we see the pictures reminds us of the dramatic reality of millions of people. But I would like us to remind ourselves that even when we do not see the pictures, the dramatic events happen in any case.

I have had the chance of saying many times over the last months: our job is not expressing sorrow or holding one minute of silence when we see these dramatic events happening. Our job is to take decisions - first make proposals then create the political conditions to take decisions and make sure that these proposals turn into concrete actions; and act fast and united.

I have to say Defence Ministers today showed a high degree of awareness of this need. I hope that the same level of awareness of the emergency, of the urgency of our action and of the fact that our action has to be united as Europeans, will come also when it comes to the decisions of the Foreign Ministers, Interior Ministers and at the end of the day the Heads of State and Government, united.

We will not face this unprecedented crisis with single approaches, not with single approaches of single Member States, not with one policy only - be it internal or external. We need a mix of measures and we need most of all Europe to act, fast, in solidarity and taking responsibility. And maybe, finally, we are about to understand that this is not something we can take the luxury of postponing anymore, on all the different issues we have to take decisions on.

Watch the video:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I108183>

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