

Informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers: Remarks by the High Re



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Good evening.

Today, we have had the first physical meeting of Defence Ministers since the outbreak of the coronavirus in March.

I am sure that coming together has allowed us to go deeper into the several sensitive issues that we have to deal with in this difficult summer.

First, I would like to thank the German Presidency and, especially, the Minister [of Defence of Germany, Annegret] Kramp-Karrenbauer for the excellent hospitality and for the excellent organisation of this meeting, and allowing us to meet under the current difficult circumstances.

We have had several topics.

First, the cooperation between the European Union security and defence missions and operations and the United Nations and NATO partners.

We had with us the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, and also the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations of the United Nations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

Allow me to remind you that the European Union has 17 civilian missions and military operations worldwide. And out of these 17, 13 work directly with or alongside in cooperation with the United Nations and/or NATO.

It shows how much we work together in order to provide peace and security around the world.

Unhappily, tensions and conflicts are more frequent than ever and this will require a stronger partnership.

Mali was an important item on the agenda. We discussed the situation in Mali. We condemned the coup d'état on 18 August. The priority now is to support the efforts of ECOWAS in order to look for a solution in accordance with the aspirations of the Malian people.

The important thing is to stress that our civilian and military Missions in Mali [[EUTM Mali](#) and [EUCAP Sahel Mali](#)] have been temporarily put on hold, because the circumstances did not allow them to continue their normal activities. But they are still there and will start working again as soon as possible.

These activities are crucial. The European Union has invested a lot in Mali and we do not want to waste this effort. So, the work will continue and we will resume the activities of these Mission as soon as possible with the support of other countries in the Sahel region.

We also talked about Libya. We reviewed [Operation IRINI](#) and its contribution to implementing the United Nations arms embargo.

I think that Operation IRINI has proven its utility, its value and its impartiality. It is following the mandate of the United Nations. It cannot go further than this mandate. It has collected information involving actors on both sides of the conflict. More than 500 hailings have been conducted and 10 special reports have been submitted to the United Nations Panel of Experts.

We also exchanged about the recently-agreed ceasefire and we hope that it will last.

We will be working closely with the United Nations Mission in Libya and we are ready to support this ceasefire as much as we can.

We already have a civilian mission deployed in Libya [[EUBAM](#)] and this military operation [Operation IRINI] at sea. We will see if we can do more.

And finally, we have had our second session devoted to the new Strategic Compass on security and defence.

In November, we will have the first assessment of the threats that the European Union is facing. It will cover crisis management, resilience, capability developments, and partnerships.

The Ministers exchanged views about these four areas, but the important meeting will be in November.

On the European Peace Facility, we are going to have €5 billion – quite an important amount of money – and we study how to use these resources.

This is what I can summarise from this meeting.

Thank you very much, once again, Minister [Kramph-Karrenbauer] for the excellent organisation.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194202>

Q&A

Q. Can you tell us which options will you present to the Foreign Affairs Ministers tomorrow in case the mediation efforts will not be fruitful?

I cannot tell you what I am going to present to the Ministers tomorrow. Let me tell you tomorrow after presenting [the options] to the Ministers, but it will be a wide set of options.

Q. On Mali, the coup d'état started at the military academy in Bamako, what was Germany's and the European Union's role in training these putschists? Do you see any conclusions to be drawn regarding whether the operation can be continued at all?

Well, we do not train the armies to be putschists. 90% of the Malian army has been receiving training from our mission, but I checked and none of the four most important and prominent leaders of the military movement against the President [of Mali] IBK [Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta] has been trained by our mission.

We hear that they have been training in Russia and in the United States. But given the age group, they have not been trained by us. It could have happened, but it has not happened. They have been trained –two of them, or one of them, the most important one, the leader, in Russia and the others, I am told, in Great Britain and in the United States.

We have more than 400 soldiers training the Malian army, coming from more than 10 European Member States. I think that we do the right work, we cannot pretend to have stability in a country like Mali, without having a military capacity from the government. That is what we are doing there.

I think that whatever the government will be, according to the will of the Malian people, we will have to continue doing this work. But we do not feel responsible; this coup d'état has been by no means related to the training that we are offering to the Malian soldiers.

Q. Do you think that a list of sanctions could be helpful here, in our talks with Turkey?

Well, as High Representative, I have been asked by the European Council to present options.

But the purpose is not to decide which kind of sanctions are going to be implemented, because as the Minister [Kamp-Korrenbauer] said, it is still a work in progress.

There are other sanctions that have to be considered, not with respect to Turkey, but with respect to Belarus. There, we are going to go further than just presenting options. We are targeting specific people that could be sanctioned, at different levels of responsibility regarding what has happened in Belarus.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194204>