

# Informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (Gymnich): Remarks by H



*Check against delivery!*

Thank you very much for being here today.

First of all, I would like to thank very much my colleague and friend, Heiko [Maas, Foreign Affairs Minister of Germany], for hosting us here in Berlin for the past two days. It has been an extraordinarily well prepared Gymnich and the Germans showed their capacity to host this meeting. Thank you, Heiko [Maas].

We have had a summer of crises. During August, we have been very busy, and it has been extremely useful to be able to meet in person to address in a concrete and result-oriented way some of the most pressing issues that we are facing in the European Union today, from the point of view of external relations.

We have been addressing the situation in **Belarus**. The European Union does not recognise the results of the election and considers the actions of the authorities unacceptable.

We, once again, express our fully support to Belarus' sovereignty and independence, condemn the violent repression of the Belarusian people and we ask the authorities to engage in an inclusive dialogue to move out of the crisis.

The important things in concrete terms: First, Belarus being a member of the OSCE, we think that the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office's proposal to visit and facilitate a dialogue should be accepted by the authorities. As the European Union, we support this in any way we can.

There was political agreement among Ministers to designate selected individuals responsible for the fraudulent elections in Belarus and for the subsequent crackdown under the existing Belarus sanctions regime. These

designations shall include individuals at the high political level.

Now, the detailed list and the respective legal acts will be prepared by the competent Council Working Groups in the coming days with a view to be adopted [by the Council] as soon as possible.

With regard to that, I have just received a letter signed by 11 members of the Council asking to do it as soon as possible, and pressing for quick decision-making. But we have to do that according to all the legal procedures.

Finally, we push for a national dialogue that is the only way to see democracy and fundamental freedoms respected in Belarus.

On the **Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey** we also had a good discussion. We are clear and determined in defending European Union's interests and solidarity with Greece and Cyprus.

Turkey has to refrain from unilateral actions. This is a basic element to allow the dialogue to advance.

What we want is to find paths towards a healthier relationship. It is in the mutual interest of both the European Union and Turkey.

For this reason, we must walk a fine line between preserving a true space for dialogue and, at the same time, showing collective strength in the defence of our common interests.

We want to give a serious chance to dialogue, and I very much appreciate and thank the efforts deployed by Germany in this attempt to look for solutions through dialogue between Turkey and Greece and Cyprus.

As High Representative, I will try to create space for negotiations on all issues of our complex and difficult relations with Turkey.

It is equally clear that there is a growing frustration in the face of Turkish behaviour. On that, the Council expressed a political consensus to ask the relevant Council Working Groups to speed up their work in order to add individuals suggested by Cyprus to the list of the existing regime for illegal drillings in the Eastern Mediterranean, with a view to a rapid adoption.

Finally, we also agreed that in the absence of progress in engaging with Turkey, we could develop a list of further restrictive measures that could be discussed at the European Council on 24-25 September.

Thank you, Heiko [Maas].

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194214>

## **Q&A**

**Question: On Turkey, you mentioned that Member States agreed on a list of**

**further restrictive measures. Could you please elaborate on this? Which further measures do you consider ahead of the 24<sup>th</sup> September [European Council] meeting?**

The European Council asked me to present a series of proposals in case the negotiations and the diplomatic work with Turkey does not succeed. We hope that this is not going to be the case. But yes, I presented what we can do in general terms.

First, you know that now we are listing persons. We can move to list assets – ships. We can move to sanction the participation in the activities that we consider illegal, meaning everything related to the work on this kind of activities: mending, prohibiting the use of European ports, European capacities, technology, supplies. We can also look at the finance needed for these kinds of illegal activities. Everything related to the problem itself. And we can go to measures related to sectoral activities, in the fields in which the Turkish economy is more interrelated with the European economy. That is what we can do.

But in general terms the important thing is to focus on everything related to the activities that we consider illegal. For the time being, [we list] only the persons. But there is a lot of economic infrastructure, a lot of economic and financial things related to these activities. And these should be the first things to be targeted before thinking about a broader approach from a sectoral point of view.

**Q. On Belarus, there was a description of a gradual approach of sanctions. With how many individuals are we now starting? If in the next weeks this escalates further, do you have any idea about how many individuals you want to eventually put on the sanctions list?**

I am not in a position to give you a precise number or to give the precise names of the people that will be listed.

First, because this information needs to be protected until the sanctions are legally adopted and in force.

Secondly, because the Member States are still providing more input. In order to sanction someone, you have to provide evidence that can be used in front of the [European] Court of Justice, in case the person who is sanctioned says “Why do you sanction me?” and goes to the Court. In some cases the evidence is clear and in others it has to be collected. And Member States are still providing names. The initial list was short; it has been increasing during the last days. It was 12 at the beginning, then extended to almost 20, and I think it will still escalate further in the following days.

And thirdly, because we want to have a progressive approach in order to show to the people who are already very much engaged in this kind of activities, both on the fraud of the elections and on the unacceptable repression of the protests. If my neighbour is being sanctioned, it could be me tomorrow. So, it is a kind of warning. That is how we want to use the sanctions.

Everything will depend on the development of the events. It will depend on how things develop in Belarus and on the attitude of the regime.

The initial list [of people to be sanctioned] has been increasing [in number], as I told you, and it will continue to increase. And it will extend in terms of the level of the people responsible according to the development of the events.

**Q. On Turkey, should the dialogue between Turkey and Greece, according to the European Union, only focus on the Exclusive Economic Zones as the Greeks wanted? Or should it also involve other topics that Turkey might want to raise? And on Belarus, regarding the punitive measures you were referring to and the gradual escalation, will they also include Mr Lukashenko from the start?**

About Belarus, as I said, I am not in a position to give you the precise number nor the precise names. For sure it will include high-level officials, but it will depend on the evolution of the situation.

On the other question, I think we have to make a clear difference between the problem of drilling and exploration in disputed waters, where there is a real danger of having a clash and it requires mediation, like Germany is doing very well. Another thing is the complex relationship between Turkey and the European Union. It is clear that one thing belongs to the foreign affairs policy – it is a clear issue that is for the Foreign Affairs Council to deal with – and the other is something that has to be solved together with the participation of the [European] Commission's services, because a lot of other issues are related to sectoral policies.

For sure, we will have to talk with Turkey about everything. We will have to talk about a lot of pending issues that are poisoning our relationship. But for the time being, the most pressing and urgent thing is to solve the question of the drillings and the presence of Turkish boats in Greek and Cypriot waters, which is something dangerous. I do not think that the other things are not important, but they are not so urgent.

**Q. President Putin made it clear that Russian security forces are prepared, if needed, to enter Belarus to stabilise the country. From the European perspective, would that be acceptable? What would the European response be?**

[I have been talking with Minister \[of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey\] Lavrov last week](#) about Belarus. Belarus is not a geopolitical issue and should not be a geopolitical issue. Belarus should not be a second Ukraine.

The Belarusian people are not discussing about whether they want to be closer to Russia or to the European Union. This is not the issue. The issue is about democracy, freedom and human rights inside Belarus. I have heard many times from Russia the mantra that this is a domestic, internal affair for Belarus, and that they do not want external interference. I suppose it is also valid for themselves. It is solely for the Belarusian people to determine their own future. If Russia believes in the independence and sovereignty of nation states, it will respect the wishes and democratic choice of the Belarusian

people.

I think that this is what Russia says and also [President Vladimir] Putin said that, for the time being, he does not consider necessary any kind of intervention and I hope this is what is going to happen.

I think that Russia is well aware [of the consequences] that an intervention like the one you have foreseen – and that I hope is far away from reality – could have.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194216>