

Remarks by High-Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference with Minister for Foreign Affairs

Valletta, 28 April 2017

Check against delivery!

Thank you very much George [Vella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta]. I would like to start by thanking you personally for the dedication and the professionalism with which you have prepared this meeting and you are running the presidency; and all your team, really extremely dedicated. Indeed I am now enjoying my third day in Malta, leaving [tomorrow morning](#), for what I considered to be a very useful, fruitful, constructive and important sequence, yesterday the informal meeting of the Defence Ministers who took some important orientations and today, our exchanges were particularly important.

Thank you for leaving the content to me.

On Turkey in particular, we had a long and frank, open exchange with the Member States on the future of our relations with Turkey. I will summarise some common points, five points if I am not wrong on which we have common orientations. You know that informal ministerial meetings are not for taking formal decisions or for adopting conclusions but we shared a common ground that I will report now to you.

First, we respect and recognise the sovereign right of any country, including Turkey obviously, to decide its governance system as Turkey has done through the referendum on the constitutional amendments. So, we respect the result of the referendum even if we acknowledge that there are appeals ongoing or foreseen. We expect that the implementation of the constitutional amendments will be done first of all following the Venice Commission recommendations and the observation of the OSCE-ODIHR [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights], especially when the final report of the referendum observation mission will come out. And second, we expect its implementation seeking the highest degree of

national unity and inclusiveness, given especially the very divided picture of the country, as the result of the referendum has shown, with the maximum attention of the Turkish authorities side to respect all political positions, including those who supported the camp that has lost the referendum, and seeking for the maximum degree of unity within the Turkish society and the political spectrum.

Second point, the European Union has a clear interest in a stable, secure, economically successful and democratic Turkey which is – as George was saying – a relevant partner, a relevant player on many different issues. Our intention is not and will never be of doing anything that could damage Turkey or the Turkish people. On the contrary, we are seeking cooperation – constructive cooperation on many different things – for the benefits of our citizens respectively: all Turkish citizens, all European Union citizens.

The Turkish people, the Turkish citizens, all of them, are at the centre of our dialogue and cooperation; we will continue to support strongly the civil society in the country. And people from Turkey, the citizens for Turkey, are at the centre of our talks and work also when it comes to negotiations on accession process.

Then, the accession process continues, it is not suspended, nor ended but as you might know, we are currently not working on opening any new negotiation chapter. And second, the criteria for accession negotiations are extremely clear, are very well known to Turkey. If Turkey is interested in accession negotiations – as Foreign Minister [Mevlüt] Çavuşoğlu told us today and I understand President [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan expressed the same views in recent hours – if Turkey is interested in accession negotiations, it knows very well what it implies, especially in the field of human rights, rule of law, democracy, fundamental freedoms including media freedom, obviously the death penalty, and the respect of international law and the principle of good neighbourly relations. These are core principles to which Turkey is called as a candidate country to the European Union but also as a member of the Council of Europe. We are determined as the European Union, together with all the Member States,

to work very closely with the Council of Europe in the follow-up of the process.

We will discuss with our Turkish interlocutors the way forward, from our side in a very frank, open, constructive, serious, but serene manner. We have started today; I will have a proper – let's say full-fledged – bilateral meeting with Minister Çavuşoğlu just after this press conference, we will continue in the next weeks at different levels to exchange with our Turkish interlocutors on the way forward on this very clear basis.

We had, as George mentioned briefly, a working session with all the candidate countries' Foreign Ministers

on our Global Strategy [for the European Union's Foreign and Security Strategy], because it is a common field for common work especially when it comes to security but also stability in our region. I updated the Ministers also on the work of the Defence Ministers yesterday so that candidate countries can have a direct insight to what the process entails, because they will one day be part of this work from the inside. And also because enlargement – what we call enlargement, the accession process, is in itself an element both of European Union security, of the European Union strategy to increase resilience in our region especially with our support to reforms – be it economic, institutional, political reforms or the support to rule of law.

Obviously the exchange was also the opportunity to discuss openly, frankly, constructively I would say among ourselves about different issues that are of concern for most of us around the table and I am sure we will continue this conversation even more informally during the evening as we will continue our evening still with the candidate countries' Foreign Ministers.

As George was saying, we had a session on how the European Union can help Europeans to manage the effects of globalisation. It is indeed through the European Union that Europeans can have an impact on managing and shaping some of the aspects of globalisation; when it comes to maximising opportunities, when it comes to solving or managing challenges especially in the field of international free and fair trade, when it comes to some of the big global agendas that are in this moment currently put under question, I think of the climate change agreement; of the overall approach to multilateralism and peacekeeping, the support to the UN system but also our strong and common commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, including our work on the G7 and G20 agenda, on financial regulations, on managing the outcome of the effects of the economic crisis of the last years, increasing competitiveness, reducing inequalities both in the world and inside the European Union. We have exchanged in details about that, sharing the view that we have to use even more our common Union, to bring the European interest and agenda and values also on the global scene, using our European Union to strengthen our impact on globalisation. And as you might know, I was already doing part of this work in the last week with my visit to China, India and Russia; I will continue visiting our major partners in the world on this agenda, also obviously on some bilateral issues but mainly on how the European Union and some global partners or interlocutors can strengthen rules based global order and a system of governance of globalisation that can defend our citizens better.

Thank you.

Q and A:

Q. The German Foreign Minister [Sigmar Gabriel] asked for a visa free travel for certain parts of the Turkish population – journalists, artists, intellectuals. Do you think that this would be possible and that this is a way to go? Is it your assessment that after implementing the constitutional changes, Turkey will be in a position to meet the Copenhagen criterion and eventually become a member of the European Union?

On your last question it depends very much on how the implementation will take place. When, first of all – I think that the calendar is not yet determined. We understand that some of the provisions might be taken in quite short time but others might take place during this year. It will depend on the way on which Turkey will implement amendments, when and how. That is why I stressed the fact that we agreed or we convened among ourselves that we see it as key that this is done in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission and also with the observations of the OSCE/ODHIR mission. So it will depend very much on Turkey.

On the first question on visa liberalisation, we have an ongoing dialogue and

negotiations with Turkey on visa liberalisation as such. We will have to see together with the Turkish interlocutors how we proceed on that, where we stand and I would leave this at that stage for the moment, also because you know the basic rule of any kind of dialogue and partnership is that you tend to get there with a very clear ideas on how you approach the table, but then you enter into a serious conversation and exchange with the other part and you bring that forward together.

Q. After this conversation today, knowing that there were no formal decisions and that it was just a discussion, do you have any clear sense of what a partnership with Turkey that was not oriented to membership at the EU would look like? Were there ideas floating of what a meaningful cooperation could look like without accession?

You know, I think I am on the record in the last couple of years saying that Turkey is not only a candidate country, that Turkey is also a strategic partner for the European Union on many different things. Turkey is essential from the European Union perspective when it comes to settling the Cyprus issue, Turkey is essential when it comes to counterterrorism cooperation, it is an essential partner when it comes to the crisis in Syria, it is a NATO ally, it is a member of G20, it is an economic partner. Actually, the European Union is the first economic and trade partner of Turkey. So our relation with Turkey goes beyond the accession negotiations and covers many other different fields relevant both for Turkey and the European Union. So when it comes to what type of relationship we have, this covers different fields, issues and can take different forms.

As I said, we today can say that on the European Union side the process of negotiation on accession continues. It is not suspended, it is not ended, but, as I said, at the moment there is no work ongoing to open new chapters. And there are, and this is always the case with all the candidate countries, extremely clear criteria, very well-known from the beginning to all our interlocutors – and especially those on the rule of law, human rights, democracy, freedoms are very well known to our Turkish counterparts.

So now it is on them to express their willingness to continue to be a candidate country, to continue to be interested or not to join our family. The rules of the club are clear, if you want to enter you know what you can expect. We would be happy to have them in, but a level of clarification is needed I would say on their side on this. On our side we are clear where we stand.

Q. Can you tell us exactly how frank and open the language was being used towards Turkey given that some EU countries felt deeply alienated by Nazi allegations President [of Turkey, Recep Tayyip] Erdogan made during the referendum campaign for example?

We had two different sessions. We had one session among us at 28 where we discussed the present and the future of our relations with Turkey, all very open and frank discussions but not particularly dramatic otherwise I would not have been in the position of presenting to you some common ground that is quite substantial.

But they were very frank, very open and this is exactly the spirit of the informal ministerial meetings which are not pressed to achieve a final communiqué, or agreeing on a wording or taking a formal decision. We have the luxury of taking our time, reflecting a little bit more in a strategic manner, listening to each other carefully and understanding what the sense of direction is, so extremely frank.

The afternoon session was not a EU-Turkey session. It was a session that we have regularly every time we have an informal meeting of foreign ministers together with all candidate countries. It would have been completely inappropriate for any of the candidate countries to somehow hijack or monopolise the conversation over bilateral issues between the European Union and any of them. This is not the spirit of the exchange and this was not happening.

Obviously we also raised from time to time some issues not only regarding Turkey by the way, but also some other candidate countries present at the table that are of concern or that are on our agenda. This being an informal meeting and being clearly not my role to disclose single positions expressed around the table, I would not do it, but I can tell you that the overall spirit was frank, open, but very constructive and very positive. Things that needed to be said were said but this was not the first time. We meet often, not only with our Turkish interlocutors, also with other candidate countries. I would say that this is the added-value of being able to be clear among ourselves and with our partners.

Links to the videos: