

Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini at the joint press conference with Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov

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Thank you. Thank you, Sergey [Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation].

On my side also I found the exchanges we started this morning – and that we will continue after this press point – useful, constructive. It is always better to have a direct dialogue and, indeed, even if this is my first visit in my current capacity [as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission] to Moscow, Sergey and I had several occasions to meet during these last two-and-a-half years, to work together – as well as our teams – constantly coordinated on certain issues.

We always believe in the European Union that dialogue – constructive, open dialogue, frank dialogue – is the way. And this is true also for a relevant – not only neighbour – but a global player as the Russian Federation is.

There are some issues of disagreement. We are open and frank about that. For sure, we have a different assessment of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. But we have also on that crisis exchanged views on how we can move forward on an agreed roadmap, which is the full implementation of the Minsk Agreement by all sides, both on the security and on the political aspects.

We believe in the European Union that it is even more urgent to do so after the death of one of the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission] monitors yesterday in the east of Ukraine. We discussed ways in which we can work together more to guarantee a full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides and ways to put an end to the conflict in the east of Ukraine.

We also exchanged views on something that maybe you could refer to as a “systemic disagreement” – I think you [Sergey Lavrov] mentioned it like this – which is the position of the European Union of not recognising the annexation of Crimea. This is a principled position that we are going to keep – not only the European Union, but also other partners that we have in the world.

We had a long exchange on a series of bilateral issues. On some of them we have difficulties to overcome through cooperation and dialogue. On others we have a good level of interaction and cooperation, that is mutually beneficial

to our people, both Russian citizens and citizens in the European Union. And we have decided to work on these common issues – the example of the counter-terrorism dialogue that has resumed in the last months is a good one. But we also identified further areas of useful cooperation to be strengthened like cooperation in the Arctic or the Northern Dimension, or exchanges in the cultural, educational or research fields. I could continue on a long list.

We started to go through our common agenda of priorities when it comes to global and regional foreign policy issues. Starting with the situation in Syria, I thanked Foreign Minister Lavrov for the active participation of the Russian Federation in the Brussels Conference [Supporting the Future of Syria and the region] a couple of weeks ago, where we not only reaffirmed the very sustained humanitarian support of the international community to the Syrian people, both within Syria and in the region – the European Union is and will continue to be the first humanitarian donor for Syrians – and we share the same approach that access of humanitarian aid has to be improved.

We count on Russian work, including through the Astana process, to help to move forward also in this respect. And we shared views on how to work more closely on the political solution of the war in Syria. I believe we share an interest: that of putting an end to this war, that is costing so many lives, that is causing so much pain, to Syrians first of all, but also in the broader region.

And we share the interest to guarantee that that part of our neighbourhood is finally finding peace, stability and security, defeating Da'esh and guaranteeing a democratic, inclusive, secular, united future for Syria within the framework of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, through intra-Syrian talks that are UN-facilitated in Geneva and on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. We exchanged views on how to follow-up our work in this respect, especially on the political side.

Other issues of common interest and concern when it comes to foreign, global and regional security include Libya; the peace process between Israel and Palestine, where the European Union and Russia work well together within the Quartet and with our Arab partners, including with the Arab Peace Initiative; the full implementation of the nuclear deal with Iran; and, in general terms, the encouragement of a more constructive approach across the Gulf and in the broader Middle East.

But we will also discuss in the continuation of our talks some other issues of mutual concern where the Russian Federation and the European Union can constructively work together, not only for the sake of European and Russian interests but also for global stability and multilateralism and respect of international law when it comes to, for instance, the issue of denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula or the peace process in Afghanistan, and our common work on some key global issues for us, be it global responsibility-sharing when it comes to managing huge migratory flows or the work to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change or the Sustainable Development Goals.

In general terms, I believe our common work can be essential to strengthen

the UN system and the multilateral approach and what we call a rules-based global order.

Again, this does not delete or overcome all the difficulties and all the disagreements we have, especially in some areas and especially on the issue of Ukraine, but there are also fields of cooperation, and we are determined to increase the level of coordination and cooperation, exploring possible ways in which Russia and the European Union can be useful to solve some of the crises we are facing in the world of today. We live in difficult times; times when not even one single inch, not one single centimetre of cooperation can be wasted or under-estimated. So, we have the responsibility to do the utmost to find common ground and common solutions.

We also have some other issues of disagreement or respective concerns that we also discussed in a friendly and open dialogue, but, as I said, overall I shared the Minister's assessment that this exchange was useful, constructive, positive and we will follow this up not only in the course of the day but also in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you.