

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs

Brussels, 15 May 2017

Check against delivery!

Je vais commencer en français pour dire que le Conseil aujourd'hui a surtout été dédié au partenariat avec l'Union Africaine et à notre travail avec l'Afrique. Nous avons eu le plaisir d'avoir avec nous le Président de la Commission de l'Union africaine [Moussa Faki Mahamat] que j'avais déjà eu l'honneur et le plaisir de connaître dans ses fonctions précédentes, comme Ministre des Affaires étrangères du Tchad et surtout dans le contexte du G5 Sahel, et à qui j'avais rendu visite quelques jours après sa prise de fonction à Addis Abeba en signe d'investissement de notre part pour un partenariat privilégié avec l'Union africaine. Sa décision de venir nous voir ici avec tous les Ministre des Affaires étrangères des 28 a été très importante. C'est l'une des premières visites qu'il ait fait, juste deux mois après avoir changé de position. Il y a eu un message très fort de notre part – la volonté de l'Union européenne de faire de l'Union Africaine un partenaire crucial, clé, stratégique – et de leur part aussi, cette volonté politique forte de travailler avec l'Union européenne sur toute une série de questions qui vont bien au-delà des dossiers traditionnels – c'est-à-dire l'humanitaire et l'aide au développement –. Nous voulons inclure dans notre partenariat, de façon centrale, le travail commun sur la paix et la sécurité sur les crises ouvertes dans la région, qui concernent aussi la sécurité de l'Union européenne: cela va de la Corne de l'Afrique, au Sahel, à la Libye et d'autres. Cela passe aussi par les questions de développement économique, de l'énergie, de la digitalisation, et surtout par un focus sur la jeunesse et la femme dans le contexte africain. Nous avons bien préparé avec Moussa Faki [Mahamat] le sommet que l'Union européenne va avoir avec l'Union africaine fin novembre en Côte d'Ivoire.

Le thème principal sera la jeunesse. Ceci nous permettra de travailler sur des projets très concrets ainsi que sur la création d'emplois et sur l'offre de possibilités, d'opportunités pour la jeunesse africaine – ceci est une forte volonté politique des deux côtés – Afrique et Union européenne – . L'Afrique est un continent extrêmement jeune, le plus jeune du monde, avec une tendance démographique très importante. On considère en général cette réalité comme un problème, mais c'est aussi source d'opportunités si il y a des décisions politiques, des projets, qui rendent possible le développement de ce potentiel pour la jeunesse africaine. C'est cela le but principal de notre coopération avec l'Afrique.

Nous avons aussi discuté l'importance d'un partenariat fort sur la

gouvernance, la démocratie avec Moussa Faki [Mahamat].

Vous l'avez peut-être aussi entendu dire un mot d'appréciation sur les partenariats sur la migration que nous venons de développer entre l'Union européenne et certains pays africains. L'Union européenne et l'Union africaine vont continuer à travailler ensemble dans ce domaine, de façon constructive, respectueuse et utile, pour résoudre les questions qui sont à la base des mouvements migratoires dans un vrai partenariat.

Je dis souvent qu'il y a beaucoup de pays africains qui sont en même temps pays d'origine, pays de transit et pays de destination de mouvements migratoires; nous avons un intérêt commun à travailler ensemble pour gérer les flux, combattre le trafic, mais surtout pour offrir des opportunités économiques et sociales, de participation politique à la jeunesse africaine.

Le titre [headline] pourrait être qu'aujourd'hui nous avons vraiment tourné la page d'une relation qui était déjà bonne, mais qui maintenant devient centrale, à la fois pour l'Union européenne et l'Union africaine. C'est une amitié renforcée et l'Union européenne considère vraiment la relation avec l'Union Africaine et l'Afrique comme sa priorité. J'étais heureuse de constater l'existence d'une conviction, d'une unanimité, autour de la table des 28 sur ces sujets. La présidence maltaise et la présidence estonienne qui va commencer à partir du 1er juillet vont aussi continuer à travailler sur ces sujets d'une façon très déterminée.

I will move to English to say that apart from having this very important conversation with the President of the African Union Commission, we also had two points on the agenda that we discussed with the ministers only on the EU-Africa relations and the situation on the Horn of Africa. We discussed in particular the humanitarian support we are giving to the region to face the droughts and the famine that is developing there [but also on security]. Starting from Somalia: the President of Somalia [Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed] was in London last week; I met him there and we had good exchanges on the support that the European Union is giving to the country and to his new administration both in humanitarian terms, as I said, but also in the security. The European Union is by far the larger supporter of AMISOM (African Union Mission to Somalia) and we continue to believe that our work there is essential also for our security.

We also had two other points on the agenda. We had a point on the Eastern Partnership, preparing with the ministers the summit with the Eastern Partnership countries that we will have here in Brussels in November, working on very concrete deliverables, showing the benefits that the partnership with the European Union is bringing to the population in these countries, each of them in a different manner. That was, I would say, a very constructive, a very positive session with the EU Member States Foreign Ministers. We will have in June at the Foreign Affairs Council a joint session with the Foreign Ministers of the Eastern Partnership countries.

We also had another point – actually, we started with that this morning – about the security and defence of the European Union, on the implementation of the Global Strategy on Security and Defence. We will come back to this

point also with the defence ministers later in the week, on Thursday, to adopt conclusions. But it was important for me to have a conversation about that with the Foreign Ministers, given the fact that all our work in security and defence is always in the bigger picture of our foreign policy, of our humanitarian and development policy as well, because the European way to security is never limited to military or defence approach. We also take an integrated approach to security.

There was a large, consensual support to the ongoing work we are doing on defence and security that I believe it will be reflected in the conclusions we will discuss with the defence ministers later this week and, in particular, on our civil missions and operations, the relevance of them and on the military side the need to work to find better arrangements for the financing of the Battlegroups with the Athena mechanism. We also discussed and advanced on the launching of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in the field of defence and security and also on the other decisions we had taken already, in particular the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) that I believe will take shape in the coming months, under the Estonian presidency.

And, obviously, the European Defence Fund that might be presented in early June and the crisis management structures, meaning the Military Planning and Conduct Capability on which we had taken unanimous decisions in March, at our Council, and now we are working on the legal text, finalising the last arrangements to have it place as soon as possible. So I would expect that both for the European Council in June and also obviously then for the second part of the year, this will be one of the files where the European integration will move more consistently and substantially as it has been in the last seven, eight months.

One last thing I mentioned already this morning. We also adopted conclusions on Venezuela. The situation in Venezuela worries us a lot, also because it involves many EU citizens who are also Venezuelan citizens. There was a full unity of the Member States on this. I have to tell you that in general terms it was a very consensual Council; sometimes it happens. This one was really long, but also very constructive, very substantial and very much united in the determinations we have taken and in the orientations we have expressed.

Q&A

Q. Going back to Venezuela, do you think that the tone of the declaration, the conclusions that have been approved are sufficiently strong to get a change in the attitude of [President of Venezuela, Nicolás] Maduro's government? I understand that the U.S. government, the new U.S. administration of President [of the United States, Donald] Trump is thinking of the possibility of sanctions because of the new announcement of Maduro to put in place a new constituency process. I would like to know if the EU is willing to second the U.S. in the sanctions way if in a period of time we see that there is no change on the ground, given that there have already been 39 people killed in the recent manifestations, demonstrations?

A: Well, in your question you indicated the fact that the U.S. administration

is 'thinking'. Obviously we are always ready to support anyone's 'thinking', but I do not see at the moment decisions or ideas for decisions being tabled on this file. What we are working on very consistently, and not from today but since years, is a very serious work to support the difficult, delicate mediation efforts that were put in place by the three former Presidents, by the Vatican, by the regional organisations with whom we are constantly coordinating.

We know very well that, yes, there is an EU interest at stake in trying to help the facilitation and to find a way out for Venezuela of this political crisis. But we trust the regional dynamics and, most of all, I hope the wisdom of the parties to find a way out from the situation as it is now. We also stand ready to provide support because our first concern is the people and people's lives. If required the European Union would obviously stand ready to support in terms of either humanitarian support or medical support, whatever can be needed by the population. This is the attitude we have now.

This does not mean that we are not clear on our assessment of the situation. I think what we state is clear enough. You don't always need hard language; you need clear language and you need clear vision on what can be useful to have a situation to move forward. This is – as I said – the common position of all of us. We hope that, I would say, we can... I do not have Italian here, no? I have Italian, wonderful! Then I will use it, also because on Venezuela I can. L'atteggiamento in cui siamo come l'Unione europea è quello di tendere una mano, innanzitutto alla popolazione. E questo è l'atteggiamento che speriamo possa avere intanto l'attenzione della popolazione venezuelana che sta soffrendo un momento di grande difficoltà e di grande tensione. Siamo popolazioni sorelle, ci conosciamo e alcuni dei nostri cittadini sono gli stessi, per noi l'atteggiamento è questo. Cercare di aiutare un dialogo politico nel rispetto delle regole costituzionali del paese stesso, con rispetto e appoggiandoci il più possibile alle mediazioni regionali che speriamo possano riprendere il loro corso.

Sorry for switching to Italian. I think it is the first time I speak Italian without a question from an Italian public.

Q. On the Horn of Africa: as you know, apart from Somalia and South Sudan, the situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea is not also reliable. You know the one-year-long protest in Ethiopia and the arrests of like Dr Merera Gudina, the long-time legal opposition leader. Did you discuss the political situation of these two countries and how will EU engage to improve the situation because this could lead to instability? And my second question: Just one month ago you have just issued a declaration regarding the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict calling for the two states to end the deadlock. How is now EU to engage in finishing this deadlock and did you discuss it?

Yes, we discussed this. Both issues, the internal situation in Ethiopia and our role as facilitator or accompanying entity somehow for trying to solve the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. I also had the opportunities to discuss this with the Ethiopian Prime Minister when I was in Addis a couple of months ago, but also last week when we were together at the [2017 London] Somalia Conference. We exchanged on this and we discussed this obviously also

with the ministers.

On the situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia, you made the reference to the position I expressed some time ago. This is the line on which we are working. Today, in the debate with the ministers, there was a clear intention to play a more prominent role as a European Union, to try and facilitate some kind of solution, not only between Eritrean and Ethiopia, but also in general terms on the need for the Horn of Africa to find its own security regional architecture which is something we believe would be crucial.

I had the honour to meet all the foreign ministers of the countries of the Horn of Africa the last time I was in Addis [Abeba]. We discussed with them the possibility of starting a reflection among them on the way of taking care together of their regional security. This is not only a regional necessity. It is also something that would benefit the wider region. The Horn of Africa is quite strategically positioned and security concerns around the Horn of Africa touch many different regions of the world. The European Union is fully committed to accompany such a process, if the countries of the region would be, at a certain moment, ready to engage in this dynamic.

On the internal situation in Ethiopia, I discussed with the Prime Minister, as I did in Addis two months ago, the need to have a national political dialogue that is open and inclusive. I also met in that occasion the representatives of the opposition parties and I am encouraging all [parties] to engage – through the political channels – into a serious dialogue. I am convinced that the country has to and can find a way to have normal exchanges on the political level without this derailing into other dynamics on one side or the other.

Q: Question on the MPCC (Military Planning and Conduct Capability): this morning we heard Boris Johnson [UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs] being pretty soft and saying that there is no political problem but only the language. But then in the end, as far as I know, the legal text has not been agreed yet. I was wondering two things: first of all whether the London position will change by Thursday, by the next Foreign Affairs Council (Defence format), and second whether you are upset by the Brits do want to call it 'veto', but anyway by this 'no' to this text?

Do I look upset? You said it in the beginning. Boris Johnson said very well this morning: the political decision was taken back in March. It was a decision on the establishment of this MPCC taken by unanimity, including by London. And I remember very well, I was in the press room saying 'I am proud, we are advancing on the political decision and we are advancing all together at 28'. By the way, there is no other way of advancing on security and defence issues so far because the UK is still a Member State. Then, I added it: 'Now, the challenge is to implement this decision and we will work on that in the upcoming weeks'.

We have been working on this on these last couple of months in terms of defining a legal text that can translate the political decision, the political decision that is unanimous and stays unanimous, into text that can make the decision operational. Boris Johnson said this very well this morning:

the political agreement is there, still a little bit of work to be done on the legal language. We will continue to work to find the most appropriate legal wording and we will see.

The important thing for me is that by the end of this week the defence ministers might be able to adopt the Council conclusions, covering the progress we have made from March to now, because that would constitute the basis for our work to continue. Sorry to bring you to the bubble and getting technical: sometimes you have to see conclusions that set the common vision for the next steps and sometimes you have Council conclusions that are meant to consolidate, somehow to take picture of where the consensus is so that this creates the basis for the further work to be continued.

The Council conclusions I would expect the defence ministers to take later this week are exactly that second kind of Council conclusions, while in the previous months we adopted more visionary conclusions. This time is more to share and consolidate the place where we are now on all the work – that seems very technical and you will find it a bit boring – to implement the decisions taken. Around the table today there was a consensus about this: strong indication of unanimity from all the 28 Member States this is the right direction, that we are doing things in the right manner on security and defence and that this is the direction which we need to continue in with the same pace which is a very sustained pace in order to be able to deliver on the decisions we have taken together.

So, I don't see a political problem. And if there is one, it has been hidden quite well but normally this is not the style we know. And the debate as I said was very constructive, very positive and very consensual, so I think this will be reflected in the work we will do in the coming days and weeks.

Q. It is actually on the same subject – a follow-up. Do you think that despite of the UK reservations, the newest structure will be able to be up and running in June, for the EU-leaders' Summit?

I hope so, I hope so. You know, for me, what is important and I pointed this out very clearly to the Foreign Ministers today but I also had a telephone conversation with the Defence Minister of the UK yesterday evening, with Michael Fallon. For me, the important thing is once we take all together, the 28 Ministers, a political decision, then, the same 28 put the same energy in making it operational. If you take a political decision, then it is your responsibility to allow this to become reality.

I would, as a European citizen, not understand the attitude of any Minister putting an obstacle between the political decision and the implementation of the same political decision he or she has taken. I would expect that things might move in the coming days and weeks as we have worked very well in these weeks after March, not only on this, because a lot of work has been done, a lot of consensus has been built. Sometimes this takes time, a lot of work, this is part of the bubble but this is the same at the national level, almost everywhere.

So, I am satisfied with the level of work that has been done both on the MPCC

but also on all the other strands of work that have been discussed this morning with the Foreign Ministers and will be discussed again with the Defence Ministers on Thursday. I'm satisfied because we have done a lots of steps forward, both on Permanent Structured Cooperation, on CARD [Coordinated Annual Review on Defence], on the MPCC, even if we still have a little bit of technical work to be done. We are talking about a couple of months work that is behind us; if you consider complexity and the sensitivity of this issue, it seems to me slow but it is in reality very fast, compared to how these things have been moving or rather not moving in the last decade. So, I think we can be patient and put a lot of energy in solving the last language, legal issues that be might there.

Link to the video (remarks):

<https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm?page=1&date=05/15/2017&institution=Council#s366103>

Link to the video (Q&A):

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I138222>