**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**

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**Number e-note**: 187/2022 **Transmission**: SECEM

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To: EEAS MD Angelina EICHHORST, Acting COM NEAR DG Maciej POPOWSKI

**Subject: Turkey: EU-Turkey MENA Dialogue (Ankara, 28/06/2022)**

**Summary:**

* ***Syria political: Unless Western engagement with the YPG is ending; more than one military incursion can be expected in the future, according to TR MFA. The discussions with Russia are not leading to anything concrete.***
* ***Syria renewal of cross-border resolution:*** ***RU representatives are none-committal. Ankara is looking into a phone call between Erdogan and Putin in the coming days. In case of a Russian veto, TR MFA plans an alternative mechanism. The role of the World Food Programme and transition period (of at least six months) are however crucial for the success of such a plan.***
* ***Libya: TR maintains good contacts with both competing PM’s and is not supporting any particular figure. The water with Egypt remains deep and no regular high-level contact takes place between the two countries on Libya.***
* ***Gulf: The EU’s agenda for GCC is overlapping with TR’s, which has a strategic partnership with the GCC.***
* ***Iraq: Uncertainty on the government formation. TR MFA deems that Iranian influence in Iraq is somehow in decline.*** ***In the fight against PKK, which constitutes a national threat, TR will continue its operations even without the support of IRQ. TR however informs the IRQ authorities of any such operations.***
* ***The Levant and Maghreb were also briefly touched upon.***

**Detail:**

1. EEAS DMD Carl Hallergard held on 28/06 with TR counterparts an EU-TR MENA Dialogue. ECHO Director Papaconstantinou took part in the discussion on Syria. The consultations were held in a good and constructive atmosphere during which sensitive issues were openly discussed. After the EU-TR MENA Dialogue in Ankara, ECHO Director Papaconstantinou, accompanied by EEAS desk officer Syria Meyfroodt, visited Hatay focussing on the cross border resolution/assistance and met with the governor, UN and NGO partners. A separate report of his visit will follow.

**Syria Political**

**2. Possible TR incursion:** TR MFA DDG for Syria Ozan acknowledges that President Erdogan has been “*unusually transparent*” on the possibility of a new TR incursion into Northern Syria. The **motivation** for such an incursion is not new and has been reiterated repeatedly; the YPG attacks from its springboard areas (Tel Rifat, Manbij, Ein Issa and Tel Tamer) against TR troops and interests as well as TR territory. These attacks have amounted to 1750 incidents over the past 2 years. Ankara claims the YPG is using heavier weapons and that it has set up a drone production (TR claims 50 YPG drone attacks in the last 2 years). Equally, Ankara cannot accept the separatist agenda of the PYD/YPG. TR perceives the social contract that the Self-Administration is preparing as a text with all the elements of a would-be constitution. Furthermore, the Self-Administration has started speaking about the organisation of elections in northeast Syria. Unless Western engagement with the YPG is ending, more than one military operation can be expected in the future, according to TR MFA. It deplores that the US had not taken serious the intelligence it provided, before the spectacular Daesh prison break in the NE took place. The discussions with Russia are not leading to anything concrete, as RU calls for the Syrian regime to be put in charge of some of the YPG areas or refers to the Adana agreement as point of reference. Asked about the imminence of a potential TR military operation, TR MFA DDG considers that, if it were to take place, it might not take place imminently, at least not before the UNSC resolution vote in NY next week.

3. **Normalisation efforts of Arab states**: Ankara is in touch with Arab states on the normalisation drive and assesses that the Arab states realise that Assad is not reciprocating their efforts (UAE FM showed himself very frustrated on this issue in his recent visit to Ankara).

4. **TR plea to regain momentum among like-minded**: TR MFA deplores that common efforts have decreased and lack coordination. Syria is no priority for the US and Ankara assesses the US’ focus on the northeast as narrow-minded. Arab states and Israel look only into the Iran angle. According to TR MFA, like-minded countries should work more together to increase the pressure on Damascus, Tehran and Moscow.

5. **Sixth Brussels Conference on support to Syria and the region**: TR MFA qualified B6C as a good event, contributing to combatting international fatigue on Syria and emphasized the convergences between the EU and TR on the matter. EU highlighted concerns on the lack of engagement of Arab donors. EU confirmed its Syria policy, including its commitment concerning early recovery/livelihood activities.

**Syria Humanitarian – renewal of cross-border resolution**

6. TR MFA DDG for International Organisations Begec underlines that RU has nothing to win with a veto, but the current state of mind in the Kremlin could hamper a logical decision. For this reason, engagement on the leader’s level is required and Ankara is looking into a phone call between Erdogan and Putin in the coming days.

7. The resolution’s zero draft was presented in NY on 28/06, to be discussed on 30/06. TR notes dryly that the Russian Permanent Representative is taking holidays at that very moment. TR MFA notes that RU representatives, including Lavrov during his visit to Turkey on 08/06, are non-committal and mention that Putin will make the decision. TR MFA refers to RU allegations that the US needs to live up to so-called commitments the US pledged for last year’s renewal of the cross-border resolution: a) natural gas, b) electricity, c) rehabilitation of infrastructure (including the Tishrin Dam), d) unfreezing of certain Syrian Regime assets and e) a World Bank loan of USD 1 billion.

8. TR MFA assesses that in this context, urgent contacts between RU and US are needed. At this stage there are only contacts between the US and RU Permanent Representatives in NY. According to Ankara, the US Permanent Representative plans to send a letter to the RU counterpart to record the progress that has been made on early recovery. If it helps, Ankara is not opposed to language on early recovery or on more future cross-line operations, although it should not be too prescriptive.

9. EU confirmed its commitment to the renewal of the resolution

10. **Contingency plan**:

* + For Ankara, there is no doubt that cross-border assistance needs to continue even if RU poses a veto against the UN operation. In that case, the UN border assistance system needs to be replicated with an alternative mechanism.
  + In case of a RU veto, the UN will no longer be in a position to 1) perform the monitor mechanism, 2) manage funds (cross-border fund cease to exist), 3) dispatch the aid in NW Syria. Access (and humanitarian diplomacy) will be main concerns.
  + However, the UN would still be able to keep its Gaziantep and Amman offices open, which could be used to make need assessments, crucial for the trust of all parties (INGO’s, donors, TR).
  + The support of the donors needs to be channelled in new formats: An alternative needs to be found for the Cross Border Fund, managed by the UN. A solution is also needed for the UN Pool fund CERF, which the alternative mechanism will not be able to access.
  + Ankara foresees a possible alternative mechanism to look as follows, which focuses on foodstuff (80% of cross-border assistance is food):
    - The World Food Program remains in charge of procuring foodstuff (advantage of worldwide contracts and tax exemptions) and based on the UN needs assessment
    - hands it over INGO’s, who deliver it in their turn to
    - The Turkish Red Crescent (Kizilay). Kizilay in its turn is in charge of the trucking operation, by using the same logistical companies the UN is using today. TR informs RU that convoys belong to Kizilay to avoid any hits by RU or the Syrian regime on the convoys.
    - Monitoring on the ground could be done by national Red Cross organisations, as was the case in the period before the cross-border resolution (2011-2014).
  + Ankara request from the UN before the expiration of the current cross-border resolution whether the UN can support the alternative system, with a crucial role for the WFP. Donors should not cut their funding to WFP. However, the UN is rather hesitant to commit at this stage, due to legal reasons as well as not to rebuff RU. In any case, a transition period is needed until January 2023. The UN Agencies are stocking up to have 2 to 3 months of reserves in the country, but TR MFA doubts this would be sufficient.

11. TR MFA emphasizes the need to create **better living conditions for the IDP’s in NW Syria**. TR does this with Briquette houses, but indicates other models that are better suited to the limitations of international donors (no reconstruction), such as the models of UNHCR (finance by DE) of “reinforced shelters” and of OCHA of “dignified shelters”. ECHO indicates that it has started financing dignified shelters.

**Libya**

12. TR MFA (DDG Barbaros Dicle) stresses that the number 1 issue for TR is to avoid violence and it calls upon the parties to refrain from armed conflict. The current state of play remains fragile and is not sustainable. TR MFA concurred that the only solution for the Libyan crisis is the holding of nationwide, free and fair elections. The outcome of the elections should lead to fair representation of the all regions, which is not the same as equal representation (Western Libya harbouring the greatest population and should gain a greater share of representation).

13. On the crisis on the executive level, both competing PM’s stick to their contrasting position of forming the legitimate government. The UN’s assessment that the June election deadline is not a legal obligation, but rather a political indication, makes for TR clear that the GNU remains legitimate. According to TR MFA, the international community accepts this, with the exception of Egypt that continues to question the legitimacy of PM Dbeibah. In that respects, Ankara was concerned with the talks between the parties that were held in Cairo, although it acknowledges that some (small) progress was made.

14. TR maintains good contacts with both competing PM’s and is not supporting any particular figure. Bashaga visited Ankara recently, where TR FM Cavusoglu received him for an informal meeting. TR worked before with Bashaga as he signed the TR-Libya MoU for military cooperation. In reference to the joint FR/IT/DE/US/UK statement, TR MFA pleas for a careful calibration of statements of the international community. PM Dbeibah now feels emboldened, which makes him to act more hard-line.

15. Ankara would like to see the UN to take the lead and is looking forward to the appointment of a new UN Special Representative, regretting the blocking of the Algerian ex-FM’s candidature by UAE.

16. For Ankara, the Berlin format has been very useful in the past. The new format of P3+2+2 is welcome (meeting taking place in Rome this week), but the exclusion of Russia make it doubtful to achieve results. At the current stage, TR sees no benefit bringing the meeting in P3+2+2 format to the level of FM’s.

17. Ankara is rather sceptical that the Libyan oil production capacity can contribute to alleviate the current energy crisis. A great amount of investment is needed to achieve this.

**Other North African files**

18. **Egypt**: TR MFA acknowledges that compared to the other “*normalisation*” processes with countries in the region, the progress with Egypt is rather slow. DDG Dicle hopes that in the future a 3rd round of TR-Egyptian talks can take place and that the respective FM’s can meet at a certain point. TR MFA appointed a new charge d’affaires to Cairo, who in the TR diplomatic system has the rank of Ambassador. On Libya, TR MFA has no separate round of talks with the Egyptians ongoing, besides the contact on the ground between the diplomatic missions in Tripoli. TR MFA showed a particular interest in the development of the EU-Egypt relations and the EU’s analysis on the developments in Egypt related to human rights.

19. **Tunisia:** TR MFA shares the same concerns as the EU on the economic situation in the country and of the potential negative consequences of the draft constitutional text.

20. **Algeria:** TR MFA briefed about the recent visit ofthe Algerian President and the outcome of the first high-level diplomatic mechanism; 15 agreements, including on energy, were signed. TR also opened a new consulate-general in Oran, the centre of TR investment in the country and recently visited by vice-President Oktay.

21. **Morocco**: TR FM Cavusoglu was recently in Marrakesh and met his counterpart. Bilateral trade is progressing well, but there is no high-level dialogue mechanism in the plans.

**Gulf**

22. DDG Cobanoglu acknowledges that the EU’s new strategy with the Gulf country is a very timely initiative, which could not have happened a couple of years ago because of the division between GCC countries. Although the crisis is now resolved, getting back to normal would require some time in order to build confidence. The EU’s agenda for GCC is overlapping with TR’s approach who has a strategic partnership with the GCC. A Free Trade Agreement with the GCC has not yet been concluded, as the heavy GCC bureaucracy led countries to go their own way (also TR with UAE).

**Levant**

**23. Lebanon**: TR MFA DDG Cobanoglu concurs with the EU’s position that it is in the international community’s interest to keep Lebanon stable and this in a sustainable way. In this respect, TR is contributing with economic and financial support, as well as with security assistance. In particular, the army (as well as the internal security forces) are seen as the guardian of the Lebanese state and need to be reinforced. TR MFA supports continuing reforms, although it is critical about the *“FR approach, which risks backfiring*”.

**24. MEPP**: In the context the visit of IL acting PM Lapid to TR, TR MFA underlines its continuing support to the Palestinian cause. Ankara has made many efforts that this year around there has been no derailing of the end of Ramadan period. In TR’s reading, the Abraham accords have been detrimental for the Palestinian negotiation position and is emboldening Israel. TR MFA claims that the topic is raised in every meeting with the Israeli side. At the same time, it calls for the Palestinians to present a united Palestinian Administration, including Hamas. TR MFA concurs that support for UNRWA remains essential.

**Iraq**

25. MFA considers that for the first time in years there is “*light at the end the tunnel*” for Iraq.

26. According to Ankara, PM Kadhimi tried to reach out to different part of the society without being sectarian, has endorsed a balanced foreign policy and invested on institutional building. He was courageous enough to ask the resignation of ministers over the fire incident in Baghdadi hospital. DDG considers that it would be beneficial for Iraq a comprehensive government that would endorse similar policies. DDG expects that electricity cuts should be expected again this summer which would likely lead to another round of protests in September.

27. The “*coordination framework*” has the upper hand to form a government; however, they still need 80 parliamentarians to convene the parliament for the presidential election. The Sunni – KDP alliance had agreed and their numbers have reached exactly 100 MPs. 89 seats are thus undecided at this stage. Looking to the elections results the pro-Iranian Shia parties have received plenty of votes however have not managed to “*iron*” their differences and come forward with one winning seat for one constitutional electoral district. There is a similar problem with KDP, but not for Sunnis who have managed to work together and get the maximum they could.

28. Iran has a strong influence in IRQ, which is however in decline. There are signs that pro Iraq Shi’ism is getting stronger and Iraqi people oppose foreign meddling in their country. The burning of the Iranian consulates and the attempt against the Embassy are important indications. Regarding Muqtada Al-Sadr, DDG said that he is “an interesting figure” and the time and conditions helped him rise. The link with Iran remains however, as indicated by Al Sadr flight to Iran during the 2019 October protests.

29. Regarding the bilateral TR-IRQ relations, DDG said that they are good and the two countries collaborate in many fields and in particular in security, military, defence, trade, intelligence as well as in technical fields and infrastructure projects. In the fight against PKK, which constitutes a national threat, TR will continue its operations even without the support of IRQ. TR however informs the IRQ authorities of any such operations and maintain close cooperation. DDG emphasised that the information published in media is often not accurate and TR forces are careful not to target civilians. The two countries have made progress regarding the water issue however, DDG flagged that TR is also facing issues with the accumulation of water and underlines that IRQ needs to change its attitude on water usage.

30. The current state of economy in KRG is dire. KRG has not been receiving FDI’s in the last 7-8 years and is questionable how is managing its economy. Although KRG wants to attract private investment in the energy field, many companies complain about KRG authorities’ treatment and policies. Medium and small size entrepreneurs are suffering to survive with a high number of closure cases. This economic situation leads to an important migration risk. TR MFA considers that the migration at the BY-PL borders with amongst others Iraqi migrants could materialise again.

**SIGN-OFF: N. Meyer-Landrut, Head of Delegation**