

PRESS CONFERENCE MICHEL / VON DER LEYEN / MERKEL
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EXCERPTS

QUESTION FROM GUTSCHKER: Good morning! I have several questions on Turkey.

The first is for President Michel: There is a sentence in the conclusions that says the EU intends to cooperate on the responsible management of migrant flows towards all Member States. - That almost sounds like Hungary and Poland are going to agree to take in migrants which they have to date always refused. Can you clarify again what this sentence really means?

Federal Chancellor, what additional measures are you considering if Turkey does not change its approach? To be more specific, Greece has for some time been calling for Germany not to deliver six submarines to Turkey. Is there a possibility that the Federal Government will withdraw this authorisation which has already been issued?

[...]

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR MERKEL: I can only confirm what has been said. We did not have Hungary and Poland in mind at all in this context. What we were thinking about was the view shared by Turkey and the European Union that we do not want to have illegal people smuggling. We want regular migration. That is what the agreement between the EU and Turkey is all about.

We have mandated the High Representative to draw up a report for the next Council focussing on aspects of our cooperation with Turkey which go beyond what we discussed today, also with a view to the region as a whole. What I'm talking about here is the issue of Libya, the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Based on this report, we will then continue to talk about our relations with Turkey which are on the one hand characterised by strategic dependencies - many of us are members of NATO - but on the other hand also by tensions. That is why it is worth continuing to discuss this topic intensively.

In this context, we also addressed the fact that questions of arms supplies or exports will have to be discussed within NATO. We also pointed out that we want to coordinate with the new American Administration on Turkey. So, bearing this in mind, I cannot say anything about the question of arms exports from Germany nor about other further-reaching considerations. We are waiting for the High Representative's report.

QUESTION FROM BRESOLIN: Good morning! I have a question on COVID coordination for the Chancellor. We have seen the images and footage of the first vaccinations in the United Kingdom. Also at the symbolic level, that is hugely important. Have the Heads of State and Government agreed to start vaccinating on the same day all across Europe and if not, why not? Are there still big differences in the level of preparedness between the member states?

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR MERKEL: No, we spoke at great length about the approval procedure at the EMA. When it comes to how long it takes, the cooperation of the member states does of course also play a role. After all, the EMA forwards questions to the authorities or institutions of each member state. Here, we all decided to hurry as much as we could with our opinions. But of course they need to be drawn up properly and they need to be right.

Then we spoke about the major importance of delivering the vaccines in coordinated fashion, that is, that they arrive in each country at the same time. I don't know if we can time that to the hour in 27 member states, whether the first injection will be performed everywhere at exactly the same second. But we have resolved to do this in very coordinated fashion and to show that we all have the same access to the vaccine.

QUESTION FROM ARONI: A question on Turkey: Are you happy with the consensus that has been reached? The Chancellor said there were difficulties with Turkey's actions. Do you believe that the message for Ankara is clear enough to convince Ankara to change these illegal and provocative steps in the Mediterranean? The President of Turkey has also ignored resolutions drawn up by the United Nations.

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR MERKEL: We addressed the critical points. I am happy with the consensus we reached and believe it is very balanced. On the one hand, we are saying where we feel provoked. Particularly the activities in Varosha are for our Cypriot colleague of course a point where he rightly complained what is more with support from all of us. We have the situation that the Oruç Reis is now no longer off the coast of Greece but that by itself is not enough. So, the consensus is balanced and at the same time contains the offer. I hope that these messages are understood.

QUESTION FROM PREISS: I have two questions.

Federal Chancellor, you just summed up in brief what the Presidency has accomplished in terms of substance. I would like to ask you about the atmosphere. Extreme words were spoken, especially in the arguments about the budget. People spoke of gestapo methods, and the EU was compared with the Soviet Union. Do you think that has left a mark? At the last Summit, you said with regard to President Erdoğan that you would take some things he said with a pinch of salt. So was this just a normal argument, or was it something out of the ordinary?

My second question is for the President of the European Commission, Ms von der Leyen. [...]

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR MERKEL: No such words were spoken in any of my talks with members of the European Council. I think the fact that we treated each other with respect, at least as concerns me and my talks with my colleagues, contributed to us finding a solution in the end for what was in fact a very difficult subject. I at least felt it was very important to try everything we could. The fact that we have succeeded, and that the Parliament, too, has taken note of this and accepted it, as its President David Sassoli said yesterday, is, I feel, an important point.

It is apparent that ways can be found. But I know that there are member states that feel deeply hurt. I think it would do us good to talk to each other extensively at times, so that we are really aware of what matters to each other. You know, when you've had such a long, hard night, and then still have the whole climate issue and other matters to deal with, it's good to be able to trust each other and rely on each other, even when you have major differences of opinion. Those can't be resolved by sleight of hand, especially when the rule of law is involved.

[...]

QUESTION FROM BECKER: Good morning! Federal Chancellor, a question for you. It's about the rule of law mechanism. It seems that Hungary and Poland backed down when the rest of the EU started considering Plan B. Would you say, given the obvious success of this measure, that it should have been deployed earlier in the process, which after all goes back to the start of the year?

Secondly, what lessons have you personally learned from this success? What lessons do you think the EU should learn from it for the future?

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR DR MERKEL: Even back during our European Council in July, the idea was floated that, if we didn't come to any agreement - - -. For back then, too, it was difficult to come to any joint conclusions. We took many, many hours to agree on the conclusions on conditionality and the rule of law mechanism. From then on, it was basically clear that we would face serious problems transposing it into law and that the whole issue would not be easy.

To this extent, this option was raised in July and was always in the air. I have no wish at all to speculate on what has caused x, y and z to happen. I only want to say that it is, on the one hand, important – as we have made clear – that it must be possible to use the instruments available to a state governed by the rule of law, especially in connection with budgetary resources, to ensure that the money is spent in a reasonable way. There is of course more at issue here than just corruption and other financial irregularities. This has been fleshed out in the conditionality mechanism.

On the other hand, when I think about the first draft of this Regulation, I must say that you have to be very clear that Article 7 is Article 7 and that subsidiary rules, i.e. secondary legislation, is secondary legislation. We observed this principle in particular very carefully when working on later drafts of this act. That was, I think, both right and important.