

Hezbollah: EU decision aggressive and unjust

BEIRUT: Hezbollah said the European Union's decision Monday to blacklist its so-called armed wing was "aggressive and unjust" and argued that it was "not based of any justifications or evidence."

The EU agreed Monday to put the military wing of Hezbollah on its terrorism blacklist, a move driven by concerns over the Lebanese group's roles in a bus bombing in Bulgaria and the Syrian war.

In a statement issued by its media office, Hezbollah firmly rejected the decision and accused the EU of bowing to pressure from the United States and Israel.

"It looks as if the decision was written by American hands and with Israeli ink," said the Hezbollah statement. "The EU only had to add its signature in approval."

Hezbollah added that the EU succumbing to "blackmail from the U.S." would not get it anywhere

The party added that the EU's unjust decision "does not in any way echo the interests of the people of the EU and goes against the principles of the European people which are supportive of freedom and independence."

Hezbollah reminded the EU that the U.S. had issued a similar decision against the party "that only generated further failures and disappointments."

In the United States, Secretary of State John Kerry said Syria was an important factor behind the EU vote.

"A growing number of governments are recognizing Hezbollah as the dangerous and destabilizing

terrorist organization that it is," he said.

The White House backed the EU decision, saying it sent a strong message that the group could not operate with impunity.

White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters the decision should have an impact on Hezbollah's fundraising, logistical activities and "terrorist plotting on foreign soil."

"In reaching this agreement, the EU has sent a clear message that it stands united against terrorism," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said at the end of the one-day ministers' talks.

"We will have to distinguish as best we can" between the group's various parts, Hague said, suggesting that military and administrative sections could be identified.

Hezbollah has attracted concern in Europe and around the world in recent months for its role sending thousands of fighters to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, an intervention that turned the tide of a more than 2-year-old civil war.

Before the EU meeting, the union's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton told Al-Arabiya TV that she presented the proposal to blacklist Hezbollah to the EU because of the party's involvement in Syria.

Britain and the Netherlands have long pressed their EU peers to impose sanctions on the group, citing evidence it was behind an attack in the coastal Bulgarian city of Burgas a year ago. Hezbollah denies any involvement in last July's attack in Bulgaria.

The attack killed five Israelis and their Bulgarian driver in the Black Sea resort of Burgas and came around the same time as a Cyprus court's decision in March that found a Hezbollah member guilty of helping to plan attacks on Israelis in the island.

Until now, many EU governments had resisted lobbying from Washington and Israel to blacklist the group, warning such a move could fuel instability in Lebanon and add to tensions in the Middle East.

President Michel Sleiman said Monday he hoped the European Union would reconsider its decision to list Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization for the sake of stability in Lebanon.

Sleiman met with EU Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst at Baabda Palace where he asked Eichhorst for clarification on the reasoning behind such a move.

In a statement, Eichhorst said that the EU is “sending an important political message: Acts of terrorism are unacceptable irrespective of the perpetrators.”

She said the decision did not prevent the continuation of dialogue with all political parties in Lebanon and would not affect the EU's financial support to Lebanon including humanitarian assistance.

The decision will be reviewed every six months, she said.

The blacklisting of the military wing of the party occurred despite diplomatic efforts by Lebanese officials to prevent the decision. Government officials argued that Hezbollah was a major component of political life and could not be ignored.

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati said he regretted the EU's move but noted that Lebanon would remain committed to its international legitimacy.

“We will follow up the issue via diplomatic channels and we wish the EU countries had conducted a careful review of the facts and the additional data,” Mikati said.

Caretaker Foreign Affairs Minister Adnan Mansour described the organization's step as hasty.

The EU's 28 foreign ministers reached the decision unanimously at their monthly meeting. The listing raises many questions about how EU countries will deal with Lebanon and its government particularly if Hezbollah members are leading it.

British Ambassador Tom Fletcher said on his Twitter feed that the organization's blacklisting of Hezbollah would not affect dealings with the party's political wing.

“EU listed Hezbollah due to their activity inside Europe. Does not alter cooperation with Lebanon [government], nor EU contact with political [representatives],” Fletcher said.

The blacklisting opens the way for EU governments to freeze any assets Hezbollah's military wing may have in Europe.

By limiting the listing to the armed wing, the EU was trying to avoid damaging its relations with

Lebanon's government.

Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Zeev Elkin welcomed the decision, but expressed disappointment only the armed faction was included.

"We [Israel] worked hard, along with a number of countries in Europe, in order to bring the necessary materials and prove that there was a basis for a legal decision," Elkin told Israel Radio.

In debating the blacklisting, many EU governments expressed concerns over maintaining Europe's relations with Lebanon. To soothe such worries, the ministers were expected to issue a statement pledging to continue dialogue with all Lebanese political groups and to maintain financial aid to Beirut.

Sanctions against Hezbollah will go into effect later this week.

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