Europe urges U.S. to reverse sanctions against staff of International Criminal Court

September 3, 2020

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Politico

<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/03/europe-urges-us-to-reverse-sanctions-against-staff-of-international-criminal-court-408473>

The EU on Thursday urged the United States to reverse sanctions against staff at the International Criminal Court, calling the move “unacceptable and unprecedented.”

“The sanctions announced by the United States administration ... are unacceptable and unprecedented measures that attempt to obstruct the Court’s investigations and judicial proceedings,” the EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement.

“The ICC must be able to work independently and impartially, free from outside interference. The United States should reconsider its position and reverse the measures it has taken. Impunity must never be an option.”

Washington on Wednesday announced penalties against ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda and Phakiso Mochochoko, head of the ICC’s Jurisdiction, Complementarity and Cooperation Division. The sanctions followed an executive order signed by President Donald Trump in June, authorizing the possible imposition of economic sanctions and visa restrictions on ICC employees involved in an investigation into whether American forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

The United States, which is not a party to the international court and does not recognize its authority, has called the ICC “corrupt,” “grossly ineffective,” and “highly politicized.” U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also accused the court, which is based in The Hague, of being on “ideological crusade against American service members.”

France echoed Borrell’s statement Thursday, calling the sanctions a “serious attack" against the court and countries that support it, as well as "a challenge to multilateralism and the independence of the judiciary."

France "calls on the United States to withdraw these measures," French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a statement.