

EU-Syria relations, factsheet

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The European Union has responded decisively to the violent repression of anti-government protests in Syria, which began in March 2011. The EU called for an end to the deteriorating situation in Syria and the unacceptable levels of violence, which continue to cause suffering to millions of Syrians and destruction of infrastructure and cultural heritage ([link is external](#)).

The legal basis for relations between the EU and Syria is the Cooperation Agreements signed in 1977. Prior to the conflict the EU had sought to develop a closer relationship with Syria, which would have provided for political dialogue, mutually beneficial trade and investment relations, and cooperation on economic, social and democratic reform. In late 2008, the European Commission and Syria updated a 2004 draft EU-Syria Association Agreement to take into account the reform of the Syrian customs tariff and EU enlargement. They initialled the revised version of the agreement in December 2008, but it was never signed. Priorities of EU co-operation with Syria were defined in the Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme ([link is external](#)).

In May 2011, the EU froze the draft Association Agreement and suspended bilateral cooperation programmes between the EU and the Syrian government under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The participation of Syrian authorities in EU's regional programmes and the loan operations and technical assistance by the European Investment Bank to Syria were also suspended. The EU has established and progressively expanded a policy of targeted restrictive measures (see annex for an overview on sanctions). In response, Syria suspended its membership of and participation in the Union for the Mediterranean. The EU Delegation to Syria remained open until December 2012 when scaling down for security reasons became inevitable.

In response to the conflict in Syria and its consequences both in Syria and in neighbouring countries, a communication mapping out a comprehensive EU approach to the Syrian crisis was adopted in June 2013.

The EU has repeatedly called for the urgent need for a political solution of the conflict and will continue to work with all interested parties, specifically with the United Nations, the League of Arab States, regional and international partners. The EU is committed to fully support the UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura's efforts to achieve a strategic de-escalation of violence as a basis for a broader sustainable political process. The EU recalls that the overall objective remains a Syrian-led process leading to a transition that meets the aspirations of all the Syrian people, based on the Geneva communique ([link is external](#)) of 30 June 2012 and in line with relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

The EU has also expressed its concerns with regards to the involvement of extremist and foreign non-state actors in the fighting in Syria, which is further fuelling the conflict and posing a threat to regional stability; the *Syria and Iraq : Counter Terrorism/Foreign Fighters Strategy* had been endorsed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting of 20 October 2014 which also tasked the EU High Representative/vice President to "develop an EU comprehensive regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh threat". The EU supports efforts by more than sixty States to tackle the threat from ISIL/Da'esh, including military action in accordance with international law.

The EU continues to condemn in the strongest terms the continuing violence and the widespread and systematic violations of human rights in Syria. The EU is a vocal promoter of accountability. Those responsible for the numerous grave violations of human rights and the murder of thousands of civilians need to be held to account. The EU has been supporting the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria ([link is external](#)), and other specific efforts aimed at documenting crimes committed during the conflict for the purpose of subsequent accountability (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights).

The EU has been at the forefront of supporting the proposals for putting the Syrian chemical weapons under international control, leading to their eventual destruction. Following a United Nations Security Council Resolution, the EU responded to the appeals for support from OPCW (provided close to €5 million for armoured cars and technical assistance and €12 million to the OPCW Special Trust Fund for the destruction phase). OPCW/UN Joint Mission was formally closed on 30 September 2014; the EU maintains pressure on Syria to ensure that the chemical weapons programme is completely and irreversibly dismantled.

The EU remains deeply concerned by the regional effects of the conflict on neighbouring countries and supports their efforts to contain it, as reiterated in the Berlin Communiqué ([link is external](#)) of the international Syrian refugee conference in October 2014. The EU calls for the respect of International Humanitarian Law and the protection of civilians and safety of humanitarian personnel. The EU with its Member States as the largest donor has so far mobilised more than €3 billion in development and humanitarian aid since the start of the conflict. Besides the European Neighbourhood Instrument, funds have been mobilised also through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

Further detailed information:

- Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Syria of 15 December 2014
- Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on the ISIL/Da'esh crisis in Syria and Iraq of 20 October 2014
- Overview of EU's relations with Syria

ANNEX - RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ON SYRIA

– in force as on 14 December 2014 –

The restrictive measures on Syria consist in:

- Prohibition on the import of arms and related material from Syria. Export restrictions on certain equipment, goods and technology that might be used for internal repression or for the manufacture or maintenance of such products. The measure includes a prohibition on related financial assistance as well as insurance and reinsurance.
- Obligation for member states to inspect vessels and aircraft if there are reasonable grounds to believe they carry arms, related material or equipment which might be used for internal repression. This applies in member states' seaports, airports and in their territorial sea, in accordance with international law. Items that may not be exported from the EU to Syria must be seized.
- Import ban on crude oil and petroleum products from Syria. The prohibition concerns import, purchase and transport of such products as well as related finance and insurance. The ban also includes a prohibition on related technical and financial assistance. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.
- Ban on investment in the Syrian oil industry. This covers loans and credits, acquisition or extension of participations and the creation of joint ventures. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.
- Ban on investment in companies engaged in the construction of new power plants for electricity production in Syria.
- Prohibition to participate in the construction of new power plants, including related technical or financial assistance.
- Ban on exports to Syria of key equipment and technology for the oil and gas industry. The ban also includes a prohibition on related technical and financial assistance. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.
- Ban on trade in goods belonging to Syria's cultural heritage which have been illegally removed from Syria with the objective of facilitating the safe return of those goods.
- The assets of the Syrian central bank within the EU are frozen and it is prohibited to make funds or economic resources available, but the provision allows for legitimate trade to continue under strict conditions.
- Ban on trade in gold, precious metals and diamonds with Syrian public bodies and the central bank.
- Ban on supplying banknotes and coinage to the Syrian central bank.
- Member states must not give new grants and concessional loans to the Syrian government.

- Asset freeze on 63 entities and 211 persons responsible for or associated with the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria or supporting or benefiting from the regime. The release of certain frozen funds or economic resources may be authorised exceptionally under certain conditions if they are intended, inter alia, for humanitarian purposes; for evacuations from Syria; or in order to make payments on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for activities related to the OPCW verification mission and the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons.
- Travel ban on 211 persons responsible for or associated with the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria or supporting or benefiting from the regime.
- Export ban on equipment, technology or software primarily intended for monitoring or interception of the internet or telephone communications.
- No disbursements and payments in connection with existing loan agreements between Syria and the European Investment Bank, as well as the suspension of technical assistance contracts relating to projects in Syria.
- Prohibition to trade Syrian public or public-guaranteed bonds to or from the government of Syria or its public bodies and Syrian financial institutions. No brokering or issuing services for such bonds are allowed.
- Prohibition for Syrian financial institutions to open new branches or subsidiaries in the EU or to establish new joint ventures or new correspondent banking relationships with EU banks.
- EU banks are prohibited from opening offices or accounts in Syria. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.
- Member states are to restrain short and medium term financial support for trade with Syria, including export credits, guarantees and insurance. No more long-term support.
- No insurance or re-insurance to the Syrian government, public bodies, corporations or agencies (except health and travel insurance or compulsory third party insurance for Syrian persons or entities in the EU).
- Cargo flights operated by Syrian carriers and all flights operated by Syrian Arab Airlines may not have access to EU airports.
- Prohibition to export luxury goods to Syria.
- Prohibition on the export of aviation fuel to Syria.

For more information, see [legislation](#) instituting these restrictive measures and [Frequently Asked Questions on EU restrictive measures](#).

