EUROPEAN COMMISSION

MEMO

Brussels, 20 March 2013

ENP Package – Syria

Syria continues to be embroiled in an armed internal conflict that causes far-reaching harm and damage. While all bilateral cooperation with the Syrian regime has been suspended, the Syrian population further benefits from EU assistance, especially the large-scale humanitarian aid. No Country Progress Report is prepared for Syria as there is no ENP Action Plan in force.

Political situation and latest developments in EU relationship with the country

Following the beginning of the Syrian uprising in spring 2011 and the escalation of violence and human rights violations by the Syrian government against its citizens, the EU took the decision to **suspend bilateral cooperation** with the Syrian government and froze the draft Association Agreement. Since then, the EU has suspended the participation of Syrian authorities in its regional programmes and the European Investment Bank (EIB) has suspended all its loan operations and technical assistance to Syria. The EU has established and progressively expanded a policy of **targeted restrictive measures**, including inter alia an arms embargo, an asset freeze and travel ban of members of the Syrian regime and an oil import embargo. In response, Syria suspended its membership of and participation in the Union for the Mediterranean. The **EU Delegation** remained open until December 2012 when scaling down for security reasons became inevitable.

The originally peaceful protests in Syria have developed into an intensive large-scale armed conflict leading to the death of more than 60,000 Syrians, according to UN estimates, and causing extensive damage to infrastructure and harm to the whole civilian population. The EU has repeatedly called for an end to the violence, for President Assad to step aside and for the launch of a **political transition**. The EU fully supports the Joint Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi, in his efforts to find a negotiated solution to the crisis.

The EU has urged the UN Security Council Members to agree on a resolute UN action towards Syria. In the UN Human Rights Council, the EU achieved the convening of three Special Sessions on Syria and the adoption of the respective resolutions. The EU strongly supported the mission of the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, and efforts aimed at ensuring **accountability** for crimes committed during the Syrian conflict. The EU also provided material equipment to the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) during its operations.

The Foreign Affairs Council of December 2012 accepted the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. The EU encouraged the Coalition to persist in its commitment to full inclusiveness and the principles of democracy and human rights.

The **humanitarian disaster** caused by the conflict in Syria has impacted millions of Syrians. According to the UN-OCHA, 4 million Syrians are in need of assistance inside the country, in addition to the more than 600.000 refugees in neighbouring countries. The EU has so far allocated more than EUR 400 million for humanitarian aid, approximately half of the sum coming from the European Commission and half from EU Member States. The Commission aid is helping people within Syria approximately in the same volume as refugees, mainly in Lebanon and Jordan, and in close cooperation with UN agencies. The EU is the leading donor internationally. The EU has repeatedly urged the Syrian regime to allow humanitarian workers, agencies and organisations unhindered access to those in need.

Economic and social issues

The Syrian economy has been severely affected by the crisis and is expected to continue to decline. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), **GDP contracted by 3.4% during 2011 and a further 15.2% in 2012**. Others estimate the decline to have been even higher. The fighting has deepened the differences from region to region and even within regions. Productive sectors have almost come to a standstill due to insecurity in agricultural as well as industrial areas. Disrupted transport links, electricity and fuel infrastructure make distribution dangerous, cumbersome and expensive, which is reflected in growing examples of shortages. The Syrian currency has devaluated approximately 60% since the beginning of the conflict, but has not yet collapsed. Public services have been substantially reduced and in many areas are no longer available. Investment expenditure is almost halted, but the government continues to pay salaries and pensions despite speculations since 2011 that public reserves were about to be depleted. **The situation for all Syrians is dire** due to the combination of extreme violence, inflation, unemployment, reduced public services, shortages, massive internal displacement and increasing numbers of refugees to neighbouring countries.

Trade-related issues

According to the EIU, the value of Syria's exports dropped 52% during 2012 while its imports decreased by 43%. The reduction in trade can be explained with the deteriorating security environment, reduced economic activity, declining demand and international sanctions; in particular the oil import bans and the broad restrictions on financial transactions and the use of the dollar that make any transactions through the regular financial system very difficult.

EU Cooperation

Regardless of the mentioned suspension of bilateral cooperation with Syrian authorities, **several projects are on-going** in support to Non State Actors, the Syrian civil society, and the refugee populations. Tempus and Erasmus programmes with Syrian students and universities are also continuing.

In June 2012, a Special Measure benefiting **Syria and Syrian refugees** was adopted in the scope of EUR 27.6 million. It aims at supporting both civil society within Syria and the Syrian refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries, and specifically: In Syria, EUR 12.6 million are available to assist the Syrian people to address the medium-term needs such as **health, education, livelihoods and media**, and support the role of the civil society in the transition context. In Lebanon and Jordan, EUR 15 million EUR allocated to UNHCR and UNICEF to provide Syrian refugee children with access to free formal education and other relevant services.

In December 2012, to take into consideration the important increase in the flow of refugees fleeing the country, another Special Measure for Syrian refugees was adopted. Amounting to EUR 20.8 million**,** this measure will be used to support neighbouring countries (Jordan and Lebanon) in dealing with the influx of Syrian refugees in the field of **education, vocational training, and support to livelihoods** of both refugees and host communities through UN agencies and NGOs.

Over the past months, the EU foreign ministers have repeatedly declared that as soon as a genuine democratic transition begins, the EU is ready to develop a new and ambitious partnership with Syria across all areas of mutual interest, including by mobilising assistance, strengthening trade and economic relations and supporting transitional justice and political transition.

Civil Society: role and EU support

Several activities are being implemented or planned in the field of support to civil society and Human Rights defenders, beyond the cooperation mentioned above. In particular, the **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights** (EIDHR), at a scale of EUR 4 million, allows emergency support to Human Rights defenders, as well as support to documentation of Human Rights violations, digital security, media, networking of activists and support to Syrian bloggers and independent media.

EU–Syria – Timeline

March 2011: The uprising began

May 2011: EU suspended official bilateral cooperation programmes with Syria as well as new EIB loans, froze draft Association Agreement, and introduced targeted restrictive measures

August 2011: EU called on Bashar al-Assad to step aside

Throughout 2012: EU amended and extended targeted restrictive measures

December 2012: Scaling down of the operations of the EU Delegation for security reasons

December 2012: EU accepted the Syrian National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people

More info at:

http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

http://eeas.europa.eu/syria/index_en.htm

http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm