**European Commission -
Speech**

Speech by President von der Leyen at the 9th Brussels Conference on Syria

Brussels, 17 March 2025

"Check against delivery"

Secretary-General Guterres, dear António,

Dear Kaja,

Minister al-Shaibani,

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past ten years, we have met in Brussels to stand with the people of Syria. Even in the darkest moments of the war, when the Assad regime was dropping chemical weapons on its people, and there seemed to be no possible solution to the conflict, we gathered at the Brussels Conference to keep the hope alive.

One of the first Conferences was opened by the words of Farah – a six-year-old Syrian girl living in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. Thanks to our collective support, she could go to school and keep working for a better future. Today, Farah is a grown-up girl. She wants to become a journalist in her native Syria. But for the first time ever since we have these conferences, her wish is not just a dream. It is a real possibility. Because Syria is a new country. Today the dreams and aspirations of the Syrian people are no longer on hold. For the first time in decades, Syria's hope can become reality.

Of course, the path to reconciliation and recovery is still long. On the one hand, we see very encouraging steps. The agreement between the central authorities and the Kurdish SDF, for instance, is nothing short of historic. As is the signing of a constitutional declaration by interim President al-Sharaa. On the other hand, the attacks on security forces and the violence against civilians in Syria's coastal region show that the situation remains fragile. Once again, we have seen Syrian mothers weep for their lost children, and old wounds reopen. The Syrian authorities' commitment to bring the perpetrators to justice, to protect minorities, and form an inclusive government – all of this is vital for reconciliation.

From our side, we must do everything in our power to support these goals and a successful transition. This is why we gather here today. We want the Syrian people to know that we will be with them every step of the way. And this is why it is so important that, for the first time, we are joined by Minister al-Shaibani. In the past, we have always worked for Syria and for Syrians. But today, we can finally work with Syria. And this gives new meaning to our Brussels Conference. We would like to hear from you about the needs of your people, and your plans for rebuilding State institutions. For every new step you take towards an inclusive political transition, we are ready to move forward with you. Europe is ready to do its part. And this is what I would like to focus on.

First, we will continue to address the most immediate and humanitarian needs. Second, we want to support socio-economic recovery. And third, we want to support an inclusive political transition.

On the first point. Since the start of the conflict, we have provided over EUR 37 billion in support of Syrians. Now that Assad has fallen, this support is even more important. According to the UNHCR, 1.5 million Syrians might return to their country already this year. And two more million people, who are currently displaced within Syria, could potentially return to their homes. Today we are working with the host countries and UN agencies to support them along the way. Basic services must be restored.

Electricity is only available for a few hours per day. There is not enough drinking water. Syrian children must be able to go back to school. All this is vital to re-build a normal and dignified life. Syrians need greater support – whether they are still abroad, or they decide to go home. This is why today the European Union is increasing its pledge for Syrians – in the country and in the region – to almost EUR 2.5 billion for 2025 and 2026. And we call on all who are here today to do the same. Because at this critical time, the people of Syria need us more than ever.

But as we tackle the immediate needs of Syrians, we must also start looking to the future of the country. This is my second point. There are entire cities to rebuild, and a whole economy to restart. This is why we have suspended our sanctions on key economic sectors, including energy, transport, and the financial transactions that are linked to them. And we are ready to do more to attract the necessary investments for reconstruction, as the political transition advances towards a credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian government. As long as progress continues, we are also willing to scale up our support for recovery and reconstruction – together with our partners in the region and across the world. Syria used to be one of the economic powers of the Middle East. And we want to be partners for recovery and growth of a new Syria.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the old Syria, a dictator controlled all political and economic power. But in the new Syria, power can go back to where it belongs – that is, to the people of Syria. And this is the third issue where we can be of help. Here at the Brussels Conferences, we have always hosted Syria's civil society representatives – both from inside the country and in exile. Some of them were banned by the Assad regime because of their ideas. But now they can finally be heard. I am proud to announce that this year we are planning to hold the civil society dialogue of the Brussels Conference in Damascus. Because all Syrians deserve to take their future into their hands.

Syria can become a country where everyone can speak their mind. With equal rights and representation for all – men and women alike, beyond faith, ethnicity and ideology. A country with no place for sectarian violence. The future of Syria is for all Syrians to build. Those who always fought for freedom, and those who just discovered hope. Those who fled and those who stayed. This must be the promise of the new Syria. And we will do everything we can so that it can be fulfilled.

Thank you. And long live Europe.

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