EUROPEAN COMMISSION

MEMO

Brussels, 27 March 2014

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 EU endeavours to provide direct support, as much as possible in very difficult circumstance, to the Syrian population, especially through its large-scale humanitarian aid as well as development aid inside Syria and to Syrians in neighbouring countries. 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 100,000 Syrians internally displacing 6,5 million 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** based on the principles outlined in the Geneva Communique of 30 June 2012. The EU supported holding a peace conference on Syria (so called Geneva II) announced by the UNSG Ban Ki-moon, which took place on 22 January 2014 together with his call for confidence building measures. The subsequent talks between the two sides ended without agreement on putting the political transition in Syria on the agenda. The EU continues to fully support 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. The EU supports the UNSC resolution 2118 calling on the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons and supporting the political solution based on the Geneva Communique. The EU also supports the UNSC presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15) on the humanitarian situation. The EU welcomes that the unanimous agreement in the UNSC to go beyond the presidential statement and agree on the UNSC resolution 2139, which calls for a series of measures that would allow better humanitarian access including through cross border operations. 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, 9,34 million Syrians are in need of assistance inside the country, in addition to the more than 2,2 million refugees in neighbouring countries. The EU has so far allocated more than EUR 1.588 billion in the form of humanitarian aid, with EUR 515 million coming from the European Commission and over EUR 1 billion from EU Member States as well as over EUR 3 million in in-kind assistance. The Commission aid is helping people within Syria as well 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. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), projects **GDP to contract by 18% during 2013.** Others estimate the decline will be 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. On the back of increasing inflation, The Syrian pound has lost nearly two thirds of its value to the US dollar 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. Syria ranks 165th (out of 189 economies worldwide) in the World Bank's 'Doing Business 2014' report's ease of doing business ranking.

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. **Bilateral trade** volumes have contracted substantially in 2012[1] to only EUR 1.45 billion whereby EU imports from Syria dropped by 91 % and exports by 61 % as compared to 2011.

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 Syrian refugee populations and host communities in neighbouring countries. Tempus and Erasmus programmes with Syrian students and universities are also continuing.

Since the start of the conflict, in March 2011, funds have been increasingly mobilised through European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument - ENPI (more than €300m to date) to address the consequences of the crisis in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Around half of this amount has been focused on providing access to Education and child-care services for the children most affected by the crisis.

In Syria, ENPI support (€45m in 2013) has been provided in 2013 in complement to humanitarian assistance to provide longer term assistance and increase the resilience of the affected population (Education, support to livelihoods, basic services, multi-sectoral support to Palestine refugees, capacity building of Syrian CSOs, protection of cultural heritage and support to Syrian students through the Erasmus Mundus programme).

In neighbouring countries whose social and economic capacity to deal with the growing influx of Syrian refugees is under stress, ENPI support has also been provided to help those countries cope with the refugee influx, and avoid the destabilisation of the whole region (EUR 60m in Jordan and EUR 161m in Lebanon provided in 2013). This support, provided in complementarity to emergency humanitarian assistance, has focused on Education, vocational training, support to livelihoods and job creation, as well as basic infrastructures and services (waste management, municipal facilities, …). It was provided through UN agencies, NGOs, Member States agencies, and host countries institutions and has targeted both refugees and host communities.

Under the Instrument for Stability, the EU has provided assistance to opposition entities in Northern Syria to coordinate assistance to the civilian population and to assist local councils to restore and maintain essential basic services.

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.

1 Data for 2013 was not available at the time of writing.

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 7,34 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.

The EU has expressed full support to the participation of women in the peace process and the rebuilding of Syria.

EU–Syria – BACKGROUND

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

May 2013: EU amended restrictive measures (arms embargo)

October 2013: UNSC resolution 2118 on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and UNSC Presidential Statement calling on improvement humanitarian access also by allowing cross-boder operations

November 2013: Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) appointed an interim government

25 November 2013: UNSG announced the date for the Geneva II conference (22.01.2014)

For further information

Press release: Neighbourhood at the crossroads – tacking stock of a year of challenges (IP/14/315), 27 March 2014

For the Joint Communication check the EEAS website at http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm

Website of Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/index_en.htm

Website of High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/ashton/index_en.htm

European Commission: European Neighbourhood Policy

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

http://www.enpi-info.eu

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

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