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Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the EEAS on the situation in Syria

European Parliament recommendation of 28 February 2024 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the situation in Syria (2023/2052(INI))

(C/2024/6749)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the accession of Syria as a Member State to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on 14 October 2013,

— having regard to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction ratified by Syria on 14 December 2013,

— having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2170 as adopted on 15 August 2014 and Resolution 2254 as adopted on 18 December 2015,

— having regard to UN Security Council Resolutions 2533 as adopted on 11 July 2020 and 2504 as adopted on 10 January 2020, both concerning the border crossings of Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa and the provision of humanitarian aid,

— having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2664 as adopted on 9 December 2022,

— having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2672 as adopted on 9 January 2023,

— having regard to UN General Assembly Resolution 77/301 of 29 June 2023, establishing an Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic,

— having regard to the report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of 21 January 2021 to the 46th regular session of the Human Rights Council,

— having regard to the report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of 14 August 2023 to the 54th regular session of the Human Rights Council,

— having regard to the order of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 16 November 2023 on the request for the indication of provisional measures for the application of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (*Canada and the Netherlands* v. *Syrian Arab Republic*),

— having regard to the order of the Paris Judicial Court (TJP) of 14 November 2023 issuing an international arrest warrant against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, Maher Al-Assad, Ghassan Abbas and Bassam Al-Hassan,

— having regard to Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1035 of 25 May 2023 [1], which extends the EU sanctions until 1 June 2024,

— having regard to Rule 118 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0041/2024),

A. whereas the Geneva and Astana processes have failed to bring an end to the conflict and establish an inclusive transitional governing body, given the continued refusal of the Syrian regime to seriously negotiate a credible political solution with the opposition; whereas the Syrian regime has used selective engagement in international talks as a delaying tactic to nullify the results of international talks, thereby prolonging the suffering of the Syrian people;

[1] Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1035 of 25 May 2023 amending Decision 2013/255/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria (OJ L 139, 26.5.2023, p. 49).

B. whereas since 2011 half a million Syrians have died and 14 million have been forcibly displaced owing to violent attacks by armed and terrorist groups, but mainly as a result of the fierce repression and demographic engineering by the Syrian regime, with the help of its allies, of its own people; whereas this repression has included the repeated use of chemical weapons, cluster munitions, incendiary bombs, barrel bombs, missiles and conventional aerial bombardments on civilians; whereas thousands of civilians have been killed as a result of hundreds of chemical attacks carried out by the Syrian regime, including the sarin attack in East Ghouta in August 2013; whereas at least 150 000 Syrians are missing in the regime's mass arbitrary detention system, of whom no fewer than 112 713 have been forcibly disappeared, with frequent deaths in custody and extrajudicial executions; whereas families have still not been informed of the fate of their loved ones; whereas this is currently the largest displacement crisis in the world; whereas the crisis has left some 15,3 million people in Syria in need of humanitarian aid and protection; whereas an estimated 8,8 million people were further affected by the earthquakes in February 2023, exacerbating the pre-existing humanitarian challenges in Syria and its neighbouring countries; whereas, according to UN reports, 90 % of the Syrian population lives in poverty and lacks basic goods; whereas the ICJ's order directed Syria to take all measures within its power to prevent acts of torture and other abuses, after having considered various reports by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which concluded that there were 'reasonable grounds to believe that the [Syrian] Government continued to commit acts of torture and ill treatment'; whereas Syria is ranked 175 out of 180 on the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index; whereas at least 300 professional and non-professional journalists have been killed since 2011; whereas despite the Syrian regime's brutal repression of its people, Syrians continue to organise peaceful anti-government protests, notably those in the Druze-majority Syrian governorate of Souweïda that started in August 2023 and attracted thousands of protesters, particularly women, from across the province over several weeks; whereas the demonstrations have been calling for political, civil and human rights for all Syrians;

C. whereas authoritarian foreign actors, including Russia and Iran and their proxies – the Wagner militia and the Lebanese Hezbollah –, Iraqi militias and Afghan mercenaries, as well as local Syrian proxies, have played a destructive role in the country since 2011; whereas Syria serves as a testing ground for Russia, in which to practice and demonstrate its military capabilities, tactics, logistical reach as well as its capacity for foreign military intervention to save a beleaguered allied regime; whereas the Syrian regime does not control the whole of the national territory and can remain in power only with brutality and the support of these foreign actors; whereas both Russia and Iran remain major suppliers of military equipment to the regime;

D. whereas several investigations and prosecutions of serious crimes committed in Syria are under way based on the principle of universal jurisdiction, giving some hope in the struggle for justice and accountability for acts of torture, crimes against humanity or war crimes in Syria; whereas France has issued an international arrest warrant for Syrian dictator Bashar Al-Assad, his brother Maher Al-Assad, who is the de facto chief of a Syrian elite military unit, and two armed forces generals accused of complicity in crimes against humanity in relation to attacks with chemical weapons in 2013; whereas to prevent possible sanctions and military intervention, Russia and China have vetoed resolutions on Syria sponsored by Western and Arab countries at the UN Security Council, thereby shielding the Syrian regime from accountability for its war crimes;

E. whereas the regime in Syria has supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine and recognised the occupied Luhansk and Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine; whereas, on 7 February 2024, Ukraine's military intelligence agency reported that Russia was training 1 000 Syrian mercenaries to support Russia's war in Ukraine; whereas Russia claims that it has sent over 63 000 Russian personnel since 2015, including special forces, military advisers, air force personnel and private military contractors such as the Wagner Group, to support and protect the Assad regime from collapse; whereas Russia has consistently committed war crimes in Syria, including the bombing of medical facilities and civilian areas and the use of indiscriminate weapons; whereas Russia's military footprint in the country consists of two main bases: the Hmeimim Air Base and a naval base in Tartus, and more than 100 smaller military sites across the country; whereas Russia is the largest supplier of weapons to the Assad regime amounting to billions of Euro in sales;

F. whereas Hezbollah has repeatedly and successfully sought to receive Iranian weapons through Syrian territory; whereas Israel has carried out repeated air strikes to prevent such arms transfers, including on Damascus and Aleppo airports in October 2023 in the aftermath of the 7 October terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians by Hamas; whereas the Israel-Hamas conflict, triggered by the terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023, caused a renewed cycle of violence in the region; whereas Syria must abstain from any military involvement in the war in the Gaza Strip; whereas the alleged Israeli strikes in Aleppo and Damascus have led to a temporary halt of the UN's Humanitarian Air Service; whereas, since Hamas's brutal attack against Israel on 7 October 2023, Iran-backed militias in Syria have stepped up the firing of drones and rockets at Israel and US and international forces in north-eastern Syria; whereas Syrian airports have been used by Iran to transport weapons from Iran and Iraq to Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as to help Iran to supply weapons to Hamas; whereas the regime has murdered thousands of Syrian Palestinians and refugees;

G. whereas Türkiye, which occupies territories in northern Syria, regularly engages in large-scale military operations on Syrian territory both directly and through proxies, particularly targeting Kurdish-held areas in north-east Syria, as well as in and around Afrin in the north-west; whereas the unilateral Turkish military interventions in northern Syria constitute a violation of international law; whereas, in October 2023, the Turkish Parliament voted to extend the mandate that allows for military operations in Syria for another two years; whereas Türkiye should end its illegal occupation of northern Syria and withdraw its military and paramilitary proxy forces;

H. whereas The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) committed gross, systematic abuses of human rights and violations of international law, including crimes against humanity and genocide, in the territories temporarily under its control prior to the intervention by the international coalition; whereas in 2014 the formation of a broad international coalition to defeat ISIS was set up, consisting of 86 coalition members, who committed themselves to the goals of providing military support to partners, impeding the flow of foreign fighters, stopping financing and funding of ISIS, addressing humanitarian crises in the region and exposing the true nature of jihadist movements;

I. whereas the assets of 3 58 individuals and 95 entities directly involved in the repression of the Syrian people are subject to EU sanctions; whereas as a result of Russia's continued obstruction in the UN Security Council, only one crossing point is ensured for the delivery of international humanitarian aid between Türkiye and the areas not controlled by the regime in Syria; whereas since 2014 the Bab-al Hawa crossing has been used for deliveries of cross-border relief from Türkiye to Syria with the authorisation of the UN Security Council; whereas Russia has frequently obstructed the renewal of this authorisation in the UN Security Council and ultimately vetoed the authorisation for the aid corridor in July 2023, for which reason Bab-al Hawa remained closed; whereas in September 2023, as a result of negotiations between UN agencies, the Syrian regime, and Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham, the dominant armed group in Idlib, aid deliveries through Bab al-Hawa resumed and the aid corridors Bab al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings, that the Syrian regime agreed to open following the devastating earthquake in February 2023, were extended for another three months; whereas the conditions under which the Syrian regime and Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham authorised the UN to resume aid deliveries through the three border crossings are unknown; whereas renowned international humanitarian law experts question whether cross-border UN aid requires UN Security Council authorisation;

J. whereas several countries in the region have started to normalise their relations with the Syrian regime, which has led to Syria's reintegration into the Arab League as decided by the League's foreign ministers on 7 May 2023, in Cairo, despite Syria's record of serious international crimes and without any indication that its abusive practices have ceased; whereas the working groups of the Arab League have been suspended since September 2023 due to the fact the Syrian regime did not respect its commitments, including to limit drug trafficking, facilitate the safe return of refugees, release political prisoners and allow humanitarian aid to all areas; whereas meetings between the Arab League and representatives of the Syrian regime have been suspended in the meantime; whereas no action has been undertaken since the adoption of Parliament's resolution of 11 March 2021 on the Syrian conflict – 10 years after the uprising ([2]) to ensure that war criminal suspects cannot be given asylum in an EU Member State, especially when other EU Member States have already rejected their asylum claim;

K. whereas the EU and its Member States have been the largest donors to the people affected by the conflict since 2011, contributing EUR 30 billion; whereas the European aid pledged at the Brussels Conference in June 2023 amounts to EUR 3,8 billion out of a total of EUR 5,6 billion; whereas the EU and the Member States provided emergency assistance during the earthquake in Syria, and on 23 February 2023 the EU decided on a temporary exemption from sanctions on humanitarian grounds to facilitate the delivery of aid to the victims; whereas the UN warns that 90 % of the Syrian population is living below the poverty line, with many Syrians now eking out an existence in conditions that are even worse than those that existed during the years of conflict; whereas the World Food Programme estimates that 12,4 million Syrians are suffering from food insecurity, representing nearly 60 % of the population; whereas the responsibility for the current dire situation lies mainly with the Assad regime;

L. whereas the regime is not sufficiently addressing the basic needs of the Syrian people, the country's economic situation is extremely precarious and Syria has turned into a narco-state, further destabilising the region; whereas humanitarian advocates and practitioners continue to raise concerns about the security and protection of returnees and displaced people in the light of the conditions in many areas of the country and, raise questions about the Syrian Regime's approach to political reconciliation; whereas this hinders Syria's social and economic progress, as well as blocking its way out of the crisis;

([2]) OJ C 474, 24.11.2021, p. 130.

M. whereas according to a report by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) from September 2023, Europe is a key trans-shipment point for Captagon (fenethylline) arriving from the Middle East, mainly Syria and Lebanon, and bound for the Arabian Peninsula; whereas countries in the region have banned the import of fruit and vegetables from Lebanon in an effort to crack down on Captagon drug smuggling; whereas Europe has become both a destination but also a popular transit hub for Captagon, and according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction over a million tablets and almost two thousand kilograms of Captagon have been seized in Europe since 2018; whereas in April 2023, the EU sanctioned 25 individuals and eight entities in Syria for their involvement in the trafficking of narcotics;

N. whereas the Syrian regime's destruction and neglect of water sources and the healthcare system led to the outbreak of a country-wide cholera epidemic in August 2022 which is still ongoing; whereas public education is under pressure in Syria and in the countries hosting Syrian refugees, with around half of Syria's school-aged population (nearly 2,4 million pupils) not receiving any form of education, resulting in many children suffering from the psycho-social impacts of prolonged conflict and displacement; whereas according to UNESCO only around half of young people aged 15-24 in Syria meet the minimum expected competency levels in literacy, numeracy and life skills;

O. whereas the Syrian regime, through ethnic cleansing, conducted a brutal campaign to change the country's demographic makeup; whereas Christians in Syria made up about 10 % of the pre-war Syrian population, totalling 2,2 million people; whereas the brutality of the war caused a mass exodus of Christians, so that now only about 640 000 remain; whereas, in addition to the Syrian regime, Christians in the country have been persecuted by ISIS and other Islamist militias; whereas the Assad regime has attempted to project an image as a secular protector of Christians in Syria, but the regime has reportedly intentionally destroyed churches and detained at least hundreds of Christian citizens; whereas the regime, with the active support of the Russian Federation, besieged and completely decimated Aleppo, the city with the largest Christian population in the country; whereas the country was ranked as the 12th most difficult place in the world to be Christian;

P. whereas according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), most Syrian refugees would like to return to Syria but have legitimate security concerns; whereas this means that for the current situation resettlement and complementary pathways remain the most viable durable solution for Syrian refugees; whereas the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, in its most recent report dated September 2023, found that insecurity remained rife far beyond the frontlines, rendering the safe return of Syrian refugees implausible and further concluded that it had documented specific cases where Syrian refugees returning from neighbouring countries were ill-treated by Syrian security forces;

1. Recommends, with regard to their policies vis-à-vis Syria, that the Council, Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

Political process

(a) reaffirm the EU's strong support for Syria's continued democratic aspirations, despite the regime's total repression since the peaceful protests in 2011, which has been bolstered by decisive military and financial assistance from Iran and Russia to enable Assad and his cronies to retain power; denounce the regime's granting of contracts that allow Russia and Iran to access the country's resources at the expense of the Syrian people;

(b) stress the regime's personal responsibility, without downplaying the role played by ISIS and other armed and terrorist groups, for the death of half a million civilians, the destruction of the country, the displacement of the majority of the population, the torture and forced disappearance of no fewer than 112 713 people ([3]) at the hands of the mass arbitrary detention system, the use of chemical weapons against civilians and the systematic crushing of any democratic and peaceful opposition;

([3]) Syrian Network for Human Rights, *12th Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared: Enforced Disappearance is an Ongoing Crime in Syria*, 30 August 2023.

(c) oppose any normalisation of relations with the Assad regime unless there are profound and verifiable developments in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), including the release of political prisoners, informing the families of the victims about the fate of missing persons and victims of enforced disappearance, and the cessation of any attacks on or obstacles to humanitarian aid; call on EU Member States to refrain from measures weakening or undermining the common EU position on Syria; welcome the adoption of the Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act by the US House of Representatives and encourage the US Senate to pursue the legislative process towards its enactment; stress that despite the sovereign decision of some Arab states to readmit Syria to the Arab League, the Syrian regime has not given any indication that it wants to combat drug trafficking, a problem originating in Syria but which affects the whole region; condemn the stranglehold of the Assad family and its allies, including Hezbollah, on the market for the drug Captagon, which is estimated to be worth USD 57 billion; note that the brother of Bashar Al-Assad, Maher Al-Assad, commands the army unit responsible for facilitating the drug's production; support an EU coordinated security response to prevent the EU being used as a trans-shipment zone for Captagon produced in Syria and Lebanon;

(d) stress that the repression, negligence and corruption on the part of the regime are responsible for the dire economic situation; recall that EU sanctions are only targeting individuals and entities involved in the repression; address the issue of financial over-compliance that can prevent aid groups from transferring funds into the country and to run programmes or pay local staff and suppliers, even when the transactions are to support activities exempt from sanctions; underline, however, that EU restrictive measures need to remain targeted, continue to ensure exemptions for humanitarian aid, and prioritise deliveries of aid at the local level;

(e) swiftly grant robust, extensive and clear exemptions to trusted international humanitarian organisations; harmonise as far as possible the interpretation by Member States of the Regulation on restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria and apply UN Security Council Resolution 2664 (2022) on humanitarian aid to it;

(f) salute the courage of the demonstrators in the towns of Souweïda and Deraa who have once again been rising up peacefully against the Assad regime since August 2023; consult with and provide long-term, flexible and core support to the Syrian civil society networks in Europe and in Syria that share democratic values and strive to protect human rights defenders and activists in the region; strongly condemn all forms of religious discrimination and insist on respect by all for the rights of ethnic and religious groups and minorities in Syria, including Christians, Druze, Kurds, Alawites and all other minorities; strongly condemn antisemitic propaganda and the denial of the right of Israel to exist, a key feature of Bashar Al-Assad's family's overall messaging; make sure that education and educational materials are in line with these principles; call for anyone who has been displaced, to continue to live in or return to their historical and traditional homelands in dignity, equality and safety, and to be able to freely practise their religion and beliefs without being subjected to any kind of coercion, violence or discrimination; support interreligious dialogue;

Security

(g) deplore the continued presence on Syrian territory of hundreds of Iranian, Turkish and Russian bases and Iranian and Russian militias; express concern about the economic exploitation of the country by predatory foreign powers; condemn the attacks by Turkish forces and their occupation of Syrian territories in the north as well as the renewed brutal military campaign by the Syrian government and Russia in north-western Syria, including on civilian targets; express their deep concern about the persistence of radical Islamist opposition in Idlib province; support the continuation of the international coalition against ISIS, which remains active in Syria despite significant defeats; call for a determined international effort to continue its fight against ISIS in Syria until its complete elimination; recall that Turkish unilateral military actions constitute a grave violation of international law and have undermined the stability and security of the region as a whole; dismantle the jihadist networks campaigning in Syria and Iraq and track and prosecute their members, who commanded over five thousand foreign fighters who they had radicalised, recruited and brought from Europe; continue to support the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS in terms of political, financial, operational and logistical means;

(h) stress the role of the Syrian Democratic Forces in the fight against ISIS in north-east Syria;

(i) urge Member States to continue repatriating their nationals from the Al-Hol and Roj jihadist prison camps and to try them, in fair trials, for any crimes they have committed; express serious concern about the deteriorating humanitarian, sanitary and security situation in the camps in north-east Syria, especially the Al-Hol and Roj camps, which continue to be breeding grounds for radicalisation; call on the Member States to repatriate all European children, offering them adequate support and reintegration; call on the Member States to promote in all bilateral relations and international bodies the repatriation of all children of nationals of third countries, in full respect of international law;

(j) step up efforts to counter Russian and Iranian disinformation about Syria, including disinformation in Arabic; take the necessary steps to ensure that online platforms substantially increase their fight against disinformation in the region, in particular through the recruitment of Arabic-speakers to moderate online content;

(k) condemn the launch of rockets by Syrian forces from Syrian territory towards Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan heights, and the sending of an unarmed drone to the north of Israel; condemn the repeated and successful attempts by Hezbollah to receive Iranian weapons through Syrian territory; condemn the Assad regime's permissive attitude towards Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, especially with regard to facilitation efforts in the Iraq conflict, as it has fed the growth of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and affiliated terrorist networks inside Syria;

(l) note that the Israeli military continues to launch air strikes and other forms of attacks on Syrian territory in acts of self-defence with the objective of ensuring that the Assad regime remains unable to regain sufficient strength to pose a threat to neighbouring countries;

(m) ensure that Syria-related EU resolutions, reports and decisions are translated into Arabic;

Fight against impunity

(n) stress that the fight against impunity in Syria is a prerequisite for any future resolution of the ongoing crisis, as well as a moral and political imperative for Europe and the international community; welcome the judicial progress made by the Franco-German Joint Investigation Team regarding the 11 000 bodies of torture victims identified in the César report, the suspension of Syria from the International Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; welcome the issuance of international arrest warrants against Bashar Al-Assad, his brother Maher Al-Assad and two generals, by French courts in November 2023, for crimes against humanity in relation to attacks with chemical weapons against civilians; welcome the ICJ order directing Syria to take all measures within its power to prevent acts of torture and other abuses after the Netherlands and Canada filed a case regarding Syria's violation of the international Convention against Torture; welcome also the progress made in Germany, France and Sweden in bringing Syrian criminals to justice, such as through the criminal trials in Koblenz and Frankfurt; welcome the arrest and imprisonment, in December 2023, January 2024 and February 2024, of Syrian paramilitary leaders with links to the Assad regime in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium for crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture; encourage all EU Member States to implement universal jurisdiction, where applicable to the respective constitutional order; support attempts to bring the leadership of the Syrian regime to justice; call for the pooling of expertise and interpreters among the judicial and police authorities, and for a public prosecutor for crimes against humanity to be appointed in each Member State; call on EU Member States to establish specialised war crime units within law enforcement and prosecution services, in those cases where they do not already exist, and ensure they are adequately resourced; encourage the Member States to pay particular attention to, and prevent, the activities of Syrian intelligence services and their influence on the Syrian diaspora, including the protection of witnesses; call for European scholarships to be specifically allocated to Syrians seeking legal training in the fight against impunity;

(o) urge that information be exchanged automatically between all Member States on war criminals whose asylum applications are rejected under Article 1(F) of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; call on Member States to establish a European fund for victims of serious violations of international law in Syria, including victims of torture, by identifying existing funds linked to violations of international law in Syria within their jurisdictions, such as monetary judgements, sanctions, fines and penalties, forfeiture orders, funds frozen as they are linked to property unlawfully acquired by the Syrian regime, and other revenue; call to develop a legal framework allowing the transfer of such funds to the families of the victims, including victims of torture; recall that such funds must be carefully designed in full cooperation with the families of the victims; recognise the ongoing threat of illicit trafficking in looted art and cultural goods from Syria by both the Assad regime and ISIS; urge the EU's action plan against trafficking in cultural goods to be strengthened along with third country cooperation to ensure that cultural goods are protected, removed from the black market, and are repatriated to the countries of origin when conditions permit; welcome the adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution of 29 June 2023 establishing an Institution for Missing Persons in Syria, and the continued funding of the International, Independent and Impartial Mechanism to support investigations into the most serious crimes committed in Syria since 2011; urge the EU and its Member States to expand the list of those subject to targeted sanctions under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (the so-called EU Magnitsky Act), including the Syrian and Russian civilian and military commanders who may have command responsibility for or have been credibly implicated in war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations committed in north-west Syria;

(p) welcome the decision of the Council of 22 January 2024 to add six business people close to the Assad family and five companies to the EU sanctions list for their involvement in the transfer of Syrian regime mercenaries, arms trading, drug trafficking or money laundering to support the Syrian regime;

Humanitarian aid and refugees

(q) urge the international community, at the 2024 Brussels Conference, to urgently increase its humanitarian assistance to the 15,3 million Syrians who depend on it on a daily basis; express their gravest concern about the decision taken by the UN World Food Programme to suspend its food assistance from January 2024 due to a funding shortfall, which until then had been benefiting 3,2 million people in Syria daily; insist on access to clean water, including drinking water, sanitary water and water for agricultural purposes, formal education, also for girls and women, energy supply, affordable motor fuels, education and long-term budget support tailored to women's needs; focus on directing humanitarian aid especially towards clean water, affordable energy, heating, healthcare and health products; call on the Commission and the Member States to step up efforts to support the work of local civil society and refugee-led organisations; stress the importance for aid agencies of reinforcing accountability to the beneficiaries of assistance and act on their feedback and needs, in line with the principle of 'accountability to affected populations'; point out that the EU is the biggest contributor in this regard; welcome the continued efforts of Lebanon, Jordan, Türkiye and Iraq to host six million refugees while facing difficult economic conditions; remind these countries of their obligation to adhere to international law in this regard; reiterate the need to guarantee the status of refugees, notably in the main host countries of Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, and to refrain from any discrimination towards minorities; recognise the huge cultural heritage of Syria as a major part of the world's cultural heritage and as a source of solutions to some of the country's problems; recognise Aramaic as an endangered minority language, since it is only spoken by about 100 000 people in Syria, while in Europe this number is as high as 500 000 people;

(r) strongly condemn Russia's countless vetoes against delivering aid to the people in the north of Syria, specifically its veto on the renewal of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2672 (2023), thereby not allowing an extension of humanitarian access through Bab al-Hawa; denounce once again Russia's attempts to tarnish the image of the 'White Helmets' (Syrian civil defence); stress that the White Helmets play a significant role in the rescue of Syrian civilians; commend the work of journalists, bloggers and individuals as well as organisations, such as the White Helmets, who, despite the brutality of the regime, continue to carry out their work in the country, informing the international community, supporting victims on the ground and maintaining their focus on the future of the country; note the government's decision to grant further access to UN humanitarian agencies and partners through the Bab al-Hawa corridor until 13 July 2024; deplore the absence of a decision extending access through Bab al-Salam and al-Rai, which had previously been renewed until 13 February 2024; remind all parties responsible of the absolute need to keep these accesses open; urge the Commission and the Member States to, in parallel with robust diplomatic action at the level of the UN Security Council, obtain the continued operation of the border crossings of Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salaam and al-Rai, for at least 12 months; explore the possibility of also channelling resources through the recently established 'Aid Fund for Northern Syria'; condemn the systematic attempts by the Syrian regime to divert international humanitarian aid and transfer it to militias, and the regime's manipulation of exchange rates in order to appropriate the majority of the aid destined for the territories under its control;

(s) recall that Syria cannot be regarded, in whole or in part, as a safe country for the return of Syrian nationals living as refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and around the world, people who have fled the crimes of the regime and risk torture and enforced disappearance if they return to Syria; reiterate to host countries, such as Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, that Syria is not a safe country, neither in whole nor in part, and that Syrian nationals can therefore not return safely; stress that each and every return must be voluntary and be under dignified conditions; stress that some Syrians have fled terror organisations operating in Syria such as ISIS; stress that there are areas in Syria where violent jihadist groups and militias are still active; highlight the impact of the Syrian conflict on the 438 000 Palestinian refugees estimated to be in the country and who depend primarily on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their basic needs; express concern regarding the Agency's financial situation and call for Palestinian refugees to be better included in the EU's humanitarian plans in Syria;

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2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and to have it translated and published in Arabic.