Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock prior to her departure for Damascus

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Foreign Minister

Annalena Baerbock

issued the following statement today (3 January 2025) prior to her departure for Damascus:

Decades of repression, the atrocities of the Assad regime and its terrible civil war have left deep wounds for millions of people in Syria. An entire country is marked by them – but is now rightfully hoping that the future will be a better one. The painful chapter of the Assads' rule has ended. A new chapter has opened, but has not yet been written. Because in this moment the people of Syria have the opportunity to take the fate of their country into their own hands once again. And to close those deep, open wounds.

We want to help them with this, with an inclusive, peaceful transition of power, with reconciliation within Syrian society, with reconstruction, in addition to the humanitarian assistance that we have been providing uninterrupted for the people of Syria over all these years. It's clear to us all that this will be no easy path.

My visit today – together with my French counterpart and on behalf of the

EU

– sends a clear message to the people of Syria. A political reset between Europe and Syria, between Germany and Syria, is possible. It is with this outstretched hand, but also with clear expectations of the new rulers, that we are travelling to Damascus today.

This reset can only happen if the new Syrian society gives everyone in Syria, women and men, regardless of the ethnic or religious group they belong to, a place in the political process, if it guarantees them rights and offers them protection. If precisely these rights are safeguarded in the transition process that now lies ahead, rather than potentially undermined by excessively long waits for elections or by steps to Islamise the justice or education system. If the past is reckoned with, justice is done and reprisals against entire groups are refrained from. If extremism and radical groups have no place. That must be our common goal. And it

is also very much in our own interest – security in Europe and in Germany is closely intertwined with this goal.

We know where HTS comes from ideologically, what they have done in the past. But we also see and hear the desire for moderation and for mutual understanding with other important players. The opening of initial talks with the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces is an important step in this direction.

We will continue to judge HTS by their actions. Scepticism notwithstanding, we cannot now pass up the opportunity to support the people of Syria at this important crossroads.

Germany is also working with its international partners to prevent the process within Syria from being disrupted by external actors. We have drawn up important principles to this end in Aqaba with the

UN

. They include the need for all neighbouring states to respect Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. In addition, it is time for Russia to leave its military bases in Syria. The Syrian people will not forget the large-scale bombardments and human rights violations. It was Putin who stood by Assad for so long, who supported and covered for the crimes of the regime.

We now have a goal before us that millions of Syrians long for, too: for Syria to once again become a respected member of the international community. A safe home for all its people. A functioning state with full control of its territory, which offers people the protection and assistance that they need in order to live.

Background information:

Foreign Minister Baerbock is travelling to Damascus this morning for a one day visit. Together with her French counterpart J

ean Noël Barrot

and on behalf of the European Union, she will speak to Ahmed al Sharaa and meet representatives of Syrian civil society. The Foreign Minister will be accompanied by Minister of State

Tobias Lindner,

Germany’s Special Coordinator for Syria.

Overview "Newsroom"

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