

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the discussion on Syria at the Foreign Affairs Council

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I will give you just a quick update and then I will meet you in an hour or so. This is to say that we have a common, united position asking first of all Russia to stop the bombing and create the conditions for a cessation of hostilities, most of all for humanitarian aid to reach Aleppo.

We have had a very good discussion with the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. We have decided that the European Union and the UN will work more together to push the humanitarian aid into Aleppo, but also that the European Union will start talks with key actors in the region on the post-conflict phase in Syria. I know this seems far away now but we believe - and we have shared with the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura - it could be helpful in this moment to start reflecting on the post-conflict institutional settings for Syria: reconstruction, reconciliation, governance, including local governance. The European Union will start these talks in the coming days - not as an alternative but as a complementary track that could help and facilitate the other efforts that are ongoing in Lausanne, under the UN auspices, to try and create a political space for some common ground on the future of the country.

But priority number one now is to save Aleppo, to save the people of Aleppo and this is why our strong call is on Russia and on the Syrian regime to stop the bombing on Aleppo and to continue talks with the US and other key players on the ground to avoid the catastrophe - first of all the humanitarian catastrophe in the city.

And as I said, the European Union will start as of tomorrow talks, in particular with Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia. We will continue our work with different groups of Syrian opposition players – including the civil society, women, Christian minorities and others to start thinking of the day after the conflict because we have, and we believe we have, some positive leverage, some positive agenda that could be built. I know this sounds unreal in this moment, as we see the pick of violence in the country – but maybe thinking of what can be there in the future can also help the actors to find some common ground on which to engage also in the current talks.

So you will see the Council conclusions. They are very clear and the unity around them is full. So the news is the European Union is clear, united, with strong positions but also with some concrete steps we have decided to take in the coming days.

Q. Any idea when these discussions can begin? Is there a realistic timetable for this political track to start?

You know we started testing the ground already last week with the calls and dialogues we have had with all the different key regional players, so we will continue in that respect. I don't want here to raise expectations. It is simply something that we feel we have the responsibility to do. As I said not substituting any tracks; on the contrary, to reinforce the existing paths that we support very much and to see if the added-value of the European Union that has always been institution-building, governance, reconciliation, and also economic reconstruction linked to a political transition can be of any help to create the space in the region and possibly in Syria to find some common ground. Again, in parallel to that we have decided to work on the urgent issue of Aleppo and the humanitarian track. Because this is the priority number one now: save lives. The European Union has put forward a proposal to bring medical aid in, to bring the wounded out. For that we need the bombing to stop for some hours but again it is not only a matter of hours, it is a matter of responsibility. We all call on Russia to exercise its responsibilities also as an ISSG (International Syria Support Group) co-chair and show that there is the possibility of having a cessation of hostilities in place and stopping the bombing in Aleppo. This is urgency. The humanitarian plan is urgency. In parallel, what cannot wait for this to happen, is the start of the talks on the political future of Syria.

Thanks. I'll meet you a while.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I127861>