

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the EU-hosted High Level Meeting on Syria in the margins of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly

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Let me, first of all, welcome and thank all of you for being here. And I would like to thank in particular the many delegations that are present at ministerial level - I take it as an encouraging sign -; those from the region, those from the Astana Group, those from the neighbouring countries.

I would like to, in particular, recognise that the Foreign ministers of Turkey and Jordan, but also the Foreign Minister of Lebanon are here, as well as the presence of Members of the Security Council and of many EU Member States. I think this gives us a good platform to try and advance on our support to the political process needed in Syria.

I would also like to welcome the representatives of Syrian civil society, who have joined us today and who will address us later to bring an important perspective that for us is the most important one: the one of the Syrian people. Because if we are here today it is to serve them and to try and achieve peace in the country so that they can live normal lives again.

The war in Syria is not over yet. With these words I opened our meeting exactly one year ago. And sadly these words are still true today. We all took a sigh of relief when another massacre was avoided in Idlib after the deal between Turkey and Russia. I would like to thank their engagement in this respect. Yet, the risk of an offensive remains and I believe the first objective we share today is to call on the Astana guarantors, who are present here, to safeguard the last remaining de-escalation zone.

And beyond Idlib, Syria is still not at peace. The conflict is evolving, is changing; its regional dimension is even stronger than in the past and this worries us. Syria is divided; millions of Syrians are still displaced inside the country and outside the country.

There is no winner in this war. There might be military victories, but there is no winner in this war - certainly not the people of Syria, who are paying the highest price. And let me mention in particular the women of Syria, who have shown an incredible courage, determination and wisdom.

And nobody will win, neither the war nor the peace, without a negotiated political solution. And this is why, just after my opening remarks, I will be pleased to pass the floor

to Staffan de Mistura [UN Special Envoy for Syria]. A negotiated political solution that opens the way towards a united, independent, democratic and inclusive Syria.

A negotiated political solution can only emerge in the United Nations' framework, and this is why we are having this meeting here today in the framework of the UN General Assembly. I am glad to see that a new international consensus is emerging on this very basic idea that has always been at the centre of the European Union's work on Syria and for Syria. Only together we can help put Staffan's work back on track and make sure that the Constitutional Committee can start, concentrating on substance in Geneva.

Staffan [De Mistura] has all our full support, he knows that; it has always been the case and it will continue to be the case. You can be sure that our only goal, our only agenda, our only objective as European Union is to support the United Nations' mediation and to help start meaningful negotiations towards a political solution.

And with this goal in mind, I am glad to announce our intention to host a third Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region. I would like to invite you all to the third Brussels Conference in the last week of March next year, hoping that by then we will be in the condition to gather and to mobilise international and regional support for a political process that, by then, hopefully, will be underway.

The Brussels II Conference last spring was crucial to raise humanitarian support for the Syrian people - and this is something that we will address in the second part of our meeting today - but also for the host communities. And I am proud to tell you that we have already delivered on 95% of the pledges that were made in Brussels last spring. We have kept our word to the Syrian people and to Syria's neighbours, and I think that this consistency is relevant for the credibility of the work that lies ahead of us. We have proven this credibility to be there on the humanitarian side, I hope and I believe, we have the space for doing the same on the political side of our work.

Next year, expect our Conference to be – hopefully, depending on the work that will happen or not under the UN auspices – more focused on the political support and on the support we can mobilise to accompany negotiations. But also, expect the Conference to be a Syrian week, providing the stage for the best parts of the Syrian society. Because too often we discuss of Syria but not with the Syrians. It will be a stage for Syrian women, for Syrian youth, and for Syria's civil society – that has survived through these seven years of war, saving lives and the very possibility of life in Syria. They are Syria and the future of Syria must be in their hands, not ours.

Syria today is still very far from being the peaceful, democratic and inclusive country where all Syrians can feel at home. Every Syrian dreams to go back home. Every time we talk with the men, women, children that we meet outside or inside of Syria, they tell this, and we can only support this dream. Let me thank once again their host communities, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, but also in Egypt, in Iraq and in Europe.

Our common goal is to create the conditions for a safe and dignified return of all Syrians to their land. Still today, most Syrians simply do not have a home to go back to. Their properties are being confiscated, and many would risk forced conscription or unlawful arrest. And I am glad we will hear more from Filippo Grandi [UN High Commissioner for Refugees], from the UNHCR [UN Refugee Agency], because we will trust their assessment, their work, and we will support their assessment and their work on the creation of the conditions for the Syrian refugees to return home.

Last but not least, we, Europeans, are willing to contribute to the reconstruction, but a political solution must be under way. Most Syrians do not want to go back to a country where there is no accountability, and where political detainees are still in jail. The people of Syria ask for the end of the war and for a negotiated political solution. This will be – we believe – the only realistic basis for a sustainable peace, because military victory does not necessarily imply winning the peace.

The people of Syria want and need a negotiated political solution and let me conclude on a positive note. Against all odds, I believe a political solution is still possible and we could be very close to achieving it but only if we all work to make it happen. This is the moment to pull all our weight in support of the UN process, of your work, Staffan [de Mistura], so that we can finally see the beginning of the end of the Syrian war.

I thank you very much for your presence, for your attention and I will pass immediately the floor to Staffan de Mistura.

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