European Commission - Speech

Address by Commissioner Lenarčič at the Brussels VIII Conference on supporting the future of Syria: Day of Dialogue

Brussels, 30 April 2024

Ladies and gentlemen,

I must be honest: standing here today, I feel immense frustration and sadness.

This is the fifth Day of Dialogue I have spoken at. The eighth hosted by the EU since this crisis began 13 long years ago.

Syria has grown into one of the biggest humanitarian crises and one of the largest refugee crises in the world.

And **every year the situation worsens**. With little progress made towards finding a solution.

However, this event also gives me hope. Looking around, I see undiminished determination and commitment to build a better Syria.

You should know that Europe stands with you. With this event, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting Syrians both in the country and across this region.

I know that to continue pushing for peace in Syria when so little changes for so long is exhausting and demoralising. But we urgently need to continue and even ramp up our efforts.

As we watch, the fabric of Syrian society is falling apart. With over 70% of Syrians requiring humanitarian aid.

A consistent lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law means that public infrastructure remains widely unavailable.

Whilst for years Syrians have lived with the constant threat of violence. From arbitrary arrest and torture to forced disappearance and killings.

We must recognise that the responsibility for this terrible situation lies primarily with the Assad regime. Which wields oppression and corruption whilst remaining unwilling to engage in the political process that would unlock reconstruction.

And yet, in the 12 months since we last met this situation has managed to worsen. Most recently with spillover from the conflict in Gaza. And the consequences of the tragic earthquakes that hit Türkiye and northern Syria last year.

But it is not just Syria that is affected by this crisis.

Since the outbreak of conflict, 5 million Syrians have been welcomed by neighbouring countries. In particular Jordan, Türkiye and of course Lebanon, where the conflict in Gaza has put even more pressure on host communities.

I thank the people of these and all other countries who are sheltering Syrian refugees.

We know that the current situation in Syria is beyond desperate.

But we must not lose hope. Together, we can make a difference to the lives of the Syrian people.

I would like to outline three actions we must take to achieve this.

First: we must demand respect for international humanitarian law and Human Rights Law.

This includes safe, unimpeded, and uninterrupted access for humanitarian operations. Because aid is a human right, not a political chess piece.

Second: we need more long-term perspective.

This includes advocating for early recovery, resilience and for the conditions of return to be fulfilled.

Europe continues to call for the sustainable, safe and voluntary return of refugees to Syria – but only when conditions are met. Meanwhile, Syrians continue to need our support and protection.

Third: we must call for more funding.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the EU together with our Member States has mobilised over 33 billion euros in humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance for this crisis.

This makes Europe one of the world's largest donors to Syria.

But this alone is not enough. **We urgently need more funding from more donors**. And I hope this is realised at the upcoming Ministerial event.

In conclusion:

More respect for international humanitarian law. More long-term perspective. And more funding.

These are the actions we must take to help the Syrian people. Implemented via the Whole of Syria approach.

But we can only do this together. We need your perspectives, your knowledge and your ambition.

What we discuss today will help to shape the outcomes of the upcoming conference in May.

Let's work together to make sure those outcomes are a lifeline for the Syrian people.

Thank you.

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