European Commission - Speech

Donors Conference for people in Türkiye and Syria by Commissioner Lenarčič

Brussels, 20 March 2023

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is a disaster of immense proportions. I was in Gaziantep a few days after the earthquakes struck and I witnessed first-hand the **overwhelming devastation and the magnitude** of the emergency. I saw how it has affected not just the Turkish population but also the Syrian refugees within the local community. Türkiye, as we were reminded by President Erdogan just now, hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees in the world. Now, after having fled a brutal war and finally beginning to rebuild their lives, their lives are again turned upside down – along with the lives of those who welcomed and supported them.

I could also see, on the ground, how **Europe has reacted as one efficiently and fast** in the face of this disaster. In the immediate days after the event the EU Civil Protection Mechanism sprang into action. Over 30 search and rescue teams and 7 medical teams from 21 Member States and three Participating States rushed to help those in need.

For the people of Syria, this is disaster upon disaster after 12 long years of war. Over 15 million people were already in need of humanitarian aid before the earthquakes. That's over three times the population of Ireland, for instance. It's hard to imagine the impossible hardships these people are now going through following this latest tragedy. We must support them in every way possible.

Like in Türkiye, in the days and weeks following the earthquakes, **Member States have stepped up** to provide people in Syria with those everyday items so key to survival to those who have lost everything: tents, heaters, food, medicines, winter clothing, medical equipment and more. In addition, the EU has further stepped up our humanitarian assistance to people in Syria – and will be announcing additional funding today.

Thanks to this funding, for instance, Fatima and her 3-year-old son, now living in a collective shelter after losing their home in the earthquakes, are now able to have medical consultations. Thanks to this funding vulnerable women who are at great risk of cholera outbreaks in these shelters like 67-year-old Hasnaa can now get hygiene kits.

We have ensured this support has reached people in both government controlled and non-government-controlled areas - because **we must help those in need wherever they are**.

However, we know that simply providing aid in the immediate aftermath of this disaster is not enough. The people of Syria need support with basic services. These services have been devastated from years of crippling conflict, leaving people even more vulnerable than ever. That means we have to work on the rehabilitation of basic water infrastructure. Making sure children can go to school. Ensuring that people have livelihoods, rather than being dependent on handouts. In short, we need to build people's resilience through early recovery as already mentioned by President Von der Leyen.

That is why **we will maintain our support to the Syrian people** with the annual donors' conference in Brussels raising funds for the Syrian people on the June 14th.

We must continue to help those suffering the effects of these devastating earthquakes across Syria and Türkiye. We must not forget them in their struggle. We must not leave anyone behind. That is why your support today is so crucial. I encourage you to pledge generously to help those in desperate need.

Together, we must continue to help the people of Türkiye and Syria in this moment of hardship. Together, we can demonstrate Europe at its best – through European solidarity in action.

Thank you

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