

Brussels V 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region': Remarks by HR/VP Josep Borrell at the press conference

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Check against delivery!

Good afternoon,

This is the fifth time that the European Union is organising a conference on 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region'. This is nothing to be celebrated: it just shows how tragic and prolonged the situation is for the Syrian people.

From the European Union, it conveys a simple message. The European Union has stood by the Syrians, and by those welcoming them as refugees, throughout the crisis. And we will continue to do so, for as long as it takes.

We all know how devastated Syria is today. How much suffering and pain its people are enduring since ten years already. The destruction, torture, enforced disappearances, chemical weapons, the forced displacement of people.

In 10 years, more than 400,000 people have died. Perhaps 100,000 have disappeared. Over 12 million refugees and internally displaced. And today, over 13 million people need humanitarian assistance. Over half of them are children. A generation of Syrians has only known war.

Yet, to get the remedy right, we must not forget the causes of the problem.

Exactly ten years ago, Syrians peacefully took the streets asking for freedom, justice and economic perspectives. The regime responded with extreme violence, unable and unwilling to meet those demands. The situation escalated into the deadly conflict that we know.

The changes that Syrians peacefully called for have not taken place. If anything, their demands have piled up.

Today, we reaffirm the support of the international community for United Nations Security Resolution 2254. Over 85 delegates from more than 55 countries and over 25 international organisations gathered virtually, reconfirming the resolution's core message: Syrians must decide the future of Syria. The future of Syria belongs to none of the factions and to none of the outside powers. It is for Syrians to shape, in Syrian-owned and Syrian-led negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Syrian regime must take steps in that direction. If they do, we will respond.

In the meantime, we will keep mobilising all our efforts to meet the increasing needs of the Syrian people and of the neighbouring countries hosting 5.6 million refugees. One has to pay tribute to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey for their extraordinary generosity – and let me also mention Egypt and Iraq in this respect.

Throughout the past ten years, the European Union and its Member States have been the largest provider of support to Syrians with close to €25 billion delivered since the beginning of the crisis. This conference is the main yearly pledging event for Syria and the region. A central aim is to ensure that the United Nations appeal is met as fully as possible – especially considering the extra challenge of COVID-19.

I am happy today to announce a new European Union pledge of €560 million, the same amount that was pledged last year.

These Brussels Conferences have become key over the years to underline political and financial support, but also to address the most critical humanitarian and resilience issues. All of them affecting Syrians and neighbouring countries and communities hosting Syrian refugees. That includes being able to access and protect Syrians in need, irrespective of where they find themselves.

Finally, these Brussels Conferences are also a space for civil society to meet and discuss among themselves and with international organisations and decision-makers from the European Union and the United Nations. Over the past two weeks, a broad range of topics ranging from disability to independent media have been addressed in over 40 side events. Yesterday, the “Day of Dialogue” gave a space to inputs of Civil Society Consultations gathered from over 1,500 respondents.

The voice of civil society is crucial to understand fully what is happening, what is needed, and how tomorrow’s Syria can be shaped. Shaped and built. They carry hope for the future, for a peaceful and different Syria. Syria’s women and youth, in particular, hold the key to that future. They are not giving up, and neither are we.

We continue standing for the Syrian people.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-203998>

Q&A

Q. In terms of pledging, we know that it is one thing to pledge but it is another thing to actually deliver on the pledges. Can we have data for example on the last conference on the amount that was pledged how much was actually delivered. We do know that Western nations did play a major role in this conflict, we know that four out of five refugees are being hosted in neighbouring countries not in the European, not in the United States. Even Tony Blair admitted that the invasion of Iraq contributed to the formation of Daesh, or the Islamic State. We know that Daesh has wreaked havoc in Syria and we also know that anti-government fighters or rebels fighting against Bachar Al Assad were armed by the United States and many of them went on

to join Daesh, so they are actually using western weapons to kill innocent civilians. When we talk about funding, €24 billion from the EU to Syria over the last ten years, it is a lot but the EU has also given €16 billion to Ukraine over the past six or seven years, and Ukraine is not in ruins, it just happens to share a border with Russia. There seems to be a mismatch here compared to the amount of money going to Syria. Are Western nations not to blame to a large extent or at least to some extent for this catastrophe.

About the data of what has been promised and what has been delivered, let me try to summarise. At the fourth Brussels Conference in 2020, donors pledged €4.9 billion in grants and macro financial funding for all the purposes: support humanitarian, resilience, stabilisation, development activities in Syria and the region, and a further €2 billion for 2021 and beyond.

Maybe you know that last week we published the [financial tracking report](#), which is an interesting document to answer more in details your question. This report, as of January 2021, shows that donors have contributed with €6.8 billion in grants to Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It means that this is 54% more than the original conference pledge. That is a good news, not only the sum that was pledged was delivered but it is 54% more than what was promised.

About the comparison between Ukraine and Syria, well they are different situations. You cannot compare the situation of a country destroyed by war and another country, which is part of our neighbourhood, where there is a strong support for performing reforms, structural changes. The reasons are different, the sizes are different, the length is different. I do not think this kind of comparison makes a lot of sense.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-204000>

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