

Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini at the Days of Dialogue at the Third Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"

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Check against delivery!

Thank you and *Salam*.

Shukran, thank you to all rapporteurs - mostly women - it makes me proud.

Thanks to all those that have participated to the panels for these Days of dialogue that for me and for us are the heart of our [Third] Brussels Conference on [Supporting] the future of Syria and the region.

Tomorrow we will channel these recommendations, that were well noted, to the Ministers from all around the world. We have 55 countries, in total 80 delegations that also include regional and international organisations.

Your voice is what the Brussels Conference this year - and the two previous editions - is about. 500 civil society organisations, most of you Syrians, from different backgrounds, and I think that a new Syria can be born with your contribution, where every Syrian can feel at home.

Let me use one of the main slogans of our Conference which is that "you are Syria" and this is why I am so proud to see so many of you participating in this process, because this is all about you and all about Syrians and Syria.

Some believe that peace in Syria is rather about a ceasefire among military actors and this is certainly needed. And let me say that we need a ceasefire to be guaranteed in Idlib to avoid it turns into a humanitarian catastrophe in the coming days.

But even if the military action and the absence of action is essential to bring peace to Syria, peace will require much more. It will require something you have all mentioned in one way or another. Reconciliation, inclusiveness, democracy can only happen if voices like yours can come to the table and shape not only the future of Syria but also the present of your country.

In a country destroyed by almost a decade of war, I think that you show, civil society shows – let me say women in particular - that there is hope for peace, that there is hope for justice, that there is hope for national reconciliation, and for diversity in unity, which is always the most difficult exercise to do - in the European Union we experience that

every day - but even more so after so many years of war. Syria is not only a beautiful country but also a country that can count on a unique diversity of its people. This is probably the richness of the country that needs to be still preserved or restored.

You are not only the witnesses of a war that has killed your brothers and sisters, your friends, your parents and your children, but you are mainly with your daily work the ones that are planting the seeds of a new Syria. You have already started to build Syria in these years that have seen destruction and despair and in which still you have managed to work on the ground and to work together in most cases.

Through all the war, I have met with many of you from all around Syria, from Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Idlib, Damascus but also Lebanese, Jordanian, European civil society activists or organisations were working together in the name of something very simple, that I believe is our common humanity, something we sometimes almost feel ashamed to show and that at the end of the day is the essence of our lives and of our work.

I think your struggle is the struggle for humanity and compassion. It is also a practical struggle for getting your country back, but it is also a struggle for political and social rights. It is a struggle for a Syrian society that is not based on repression, that is free from the terrorist threat, and that is truly inclusive and democratic.

This is why together, the United Nations and the European Union, I am so proud we are co-chairing this Conference together. I am just coming back from New York where I was briefing the UN Security Council and I was saying that the European Union and the United Nations, we have never cooperated so well and so much like these recent years. It is maybe because it is more needed, but anyway we are proud of the work we are doing together.

We want your voice to be heard at the table of the decision-makers. Let me add one additional element: we would like you to be part of the decision-making. This is why we will push and continue to push for you to be part of the peace talks, for you to be part of those that will shape the future and the present of Syria. Not only those who have invested in weapons and destruction, but also those that have invested in these difficult years in building peace, in delivering humanitarian aid, in protecting people, in building the bridges that will then be the basis for reconciliation.

For years, civil society and the Women Advisory Board have been part of the UN-led process in Geneva. The European Union has constantly supported this work both politically but also financially and from an organisational point of view. We invested in grassroots organisations, in women empowerment, in human rights, in local communities inside Syria that are working to provide basic services and education. I know that this is the right way to go and we have always been convinced that this was the right way to go.

Let me tell you this: we have been called and we are still being called idealistic or naive for that, because in the middle of the war you simply should be a military player. I believe there is a special added value in investing in those that are not fighting with arms in times

of war, but in those who are trying to build resilience, protection, safety, humanitarian aid and, in most of the cases, survival to the people.

I do not see anything idealistic or naive about that. I think this is the heart, the essence of our work. But I know for sure that this is not only right, but this is the only way forward. Peace in Syria can only be sustainable if it is just, inclusive and democratic. Peace in Syria will only be sustainable if it is built on the foundation of a strong and reconciled society with your voices, fully being citizens of this society.

We have the European experience. We have gone through thousands of years of war. We know that reconciliation and sustainable peace is only possible when you rebuild not only the bridges, the highways, the hospitals and the schools, but mainly the social fabric of the country. When people look at each other not as potential enemies, but as neighbours and friends - not necessarily friends because you can live well together with someone even if it is not your friend, but you can live alongside each other out of respect and on the basis of a common identity that I know is not only an identity, but is the pride of being Syrian, whatever your background is.

I know that too many of your friends, colleagues, relatives are in jail for the only reason of having sought justice. I know that too many are still missing. We all know that reconciliation needs justice and you can count on us to work on accountability. This is again a European experience, we know that reconciliation and peace needs justice.

You can also count on us to work so that every Syrian has the right to go back to their land. Every single Syrian I have met outside of Syria has always told me "We want to go back" - proud Syrians that want to reconstruct the country. But as Mark [Lowcock, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator] rightly said we have to first of all let them choose, it has to be a voluntary choice that is protected. They have to be sure that they can be safe from arbitrary detention, from conscription, that their property will be respected, that their children will be respected, that their freedom will be respected.

A sustainable peace will never be achieved through military means. There is a need for services, for recovery, for people to agree to live together, as I was saying, without fearing each other, a need to overcome sectarianism and a sense of vengeance.

Peace will also require safety services and access to documentation for housing and property to support the refugees' voluntary and dignified return to their homes. I am grateful for your reports to having underlined this and it will need to be built on a genuine political transition in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254. This is the only way we could build lasting peace and security in Syria and in the region.

Let me conclude by saying that I believe that our common challenge is for sure to do all we can to support and help Syrians inside Syria and in the region, but most of all that at the end of the day, they will all be able to live in a country that they can truly and safely call home.

We want to work with you and for you, so that Syria can be a safe space for Syria's impressive civil society. I think this is somehow the proof, when a country is safe for an active civil society, that you get to the right place. This can only be achieved if we all contribute to the UN led intra-Syrian dialogue in Geneva.

Let me say I believe this is the only format that can assure not only international legitimacy, not only the participation of the regime and the opposition representatives of a Syrian owned outcome of the crisis, but this can also guarantee that the faces and the voices of Syria's incredible diversity, civil society and women can be heard.

You are Syria. I am proud that you are in Brussels, that the Brussels Conference makes your voice heard.

I thank you for having shared with us your ideas, your recommendations and for coming together most importantly because I know how difficult it is. I think you are planting the seeds of respect, of reconciliation and of peace and we are proud to have you here, and most of all we are proud to work with you, and you can count on us to continue to work with you, hand in hand, every single day in the future.

Thank you very much.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I169031>

Matteo ARISCI (link sends e-mail).

EEAS Press Officer

+32 (0)2 29 80833

+32 (0)460 84 2115