Questions and Answers: Joint Communication: Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria

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Why this Joint Communication coming now?

Firstly, the situation in Syria has evolved since the last review of the EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh threat. The Syria-related part of the Regional Strategy needed to be reviewed in order to reflect the new realities and different stage of the conflict that are also shaping the EU's political and humanitarian engagement in Syria.

Secondly, the Joint Communication outlines the enhanced role for the EU on Syria, in contributing to a lasting political solution under the existing UN-agreed framework and in helping to build resilience and stability in the country, as well as supporting post-agreement reconstruction once a credible political transition is underway. This is also in line with the call by President Juncker for a stronger role of the European Union on Syria in his State of the Union speech in September 2016.

The EU is already doing a lot, politically and in terms of humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance, and will continue to do so in order to save lives, to help those most in need and to bring back peace for the Syrian people.

What are the prospects for the end of the conflict?

One of the main objectives of the EU is to end the Syrian conflict. A lasting and sustainable solution to the conflict can only be a political solution, based on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and forged through the Geneva process on intra-Syrian talks led by the UN Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura.

While we cannot predict when an agreement will be reached, we can support the UN-process that aims to facilitate it. This is what the Joint Communication proposes, to reinforce the EU's ongoing diplomatic and political work, notably the ongoing political dialogue with regional actors under the EU regional initiative on the future of Syria, which aims at directly supporting and feeding in to the UN-led political talks.

We need to prepare for the post-agreement phase, in order to be ready and to deliver effectively when the appropriate moment comes.

What will the future Syria look like?

We cannot prejudge and pre-define a future for Syria. This has to be defined by the Syrians themselves and this is currently part of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, led by UN Special Envoy de Mistura.

We can only support those talks under the UN-led political process in view of a lasting solution, which the international community will support and which needs to be in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué. UN Security Council Resolution 2254 defines parameters that should frame discussions in Geneva. The fourth round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva in February 2017 has identified three baskets for future negotiations, in line with UNSCR 2254 – governance, constitution, and elections – plus an additional ad-hoc basket in which counter-terrorism could be discussed.

The political dialogue with key actors from the region under the EU regional initiative on the future of Syria also intends to identify common ground for the end-state in Syria and the conditions for the reconciliation and reconstruction process. This work aims to further contribute towards an agreement in the intra-Syrian peace process.

A political solution is the only way to fight Da'esh efficiently in the long run. Without this solution, Da'esh will always pursue war gains and try to benefit from the war economy.

What has the EU done until now to help the Syrian people?

The EU is the first and leading donor in the international response to the Syria crisis, with over €9.4 billion from the EU and Member States mobilised collectively in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance since 2011.

Through our **humanitarian aid inside Syria**, we are reaching millions of people across the country, starting from the first line emergency response. We are helping humanitarian partners to respond to the situation caused by early displacement.

Thanks to lifesaving humanitarian aid provided by the European Commission since the beginning of the crisis:

- Some 2 million people have gained access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene items,
- more than 4 million people received health assistance,
- 850 000 people have received food,
- 1 million people have received essential items and shelter,
- 350 000 children have been covered by child protection programmes,
- more than 2 million children under five received polio vaccines, and more than 500,000 children under one got routine immunization programme,
- thousands of out of school children have been benefiting from education in emergency programmes.

Our priority in our humanitarian aid programmes is to help the most vulnerable Syrians both inside the country but also in neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

In **Jordan**, the EU's humanitarian aid has helped 350,000 Syrian refugees in 2016.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the European Commission has contributed more than €251 million in humanitarian aid alone, providing services such as health, food and basic needs assistance, winterisation, shelter, education, water and sanitations, psychological support and protections programmes to refugees in camps and urban settings. The provision of basic services in villages and towns across the country also includes vulnerable Jordanian families.

Example: Since 2012, UNICEF has received a total of €24 million from the European Commission for child protection, water and sanitation, and the current child cash programme. Since February 2015, UNICEF is assisting about 56 000 girls and boys from 15 750 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugee families in host communities with 20 Jordanian Dinar per child per month.

In **Lebanon**, thanks to its partners, in 2016 the EU's humanitarian aid to Lebanon reached around 665,000 Syrian refugees.

Since 2012, the European Commission has provided €356.1 million in humanitarian funding in Lebanon, focusing on the most vulnerable refugees. This includes €87 million for 2016.

EU humanitarian funding has contributed to informal education, cash assistance programmes, lifesaving secondary healthcare, shelter, water and sanitation to improve the living conditions of families. Protection remains a critical sector in terms of counselling and legal assistance and service to survivors of violence.

Overall the EU has mobilised over €2.4 billion in **non-humanitarian aid** to respond to the Syrian crisis in Syria and in the region since 2011.

Inside Syria, the EU is providing €327 million in non-humanitarian assistance through various instruments to strengthen the resilience of the Syrian people. The European Neighbourhood Instrument[1] has funded actions within Syria in various sectors, such as education, support to livelihoods, local governance, health and civil society.

This funding aims to maintain Syrian human capital, facilitate people's access to basic services and enhance the capacities of local civilian institutions. Under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace[2] and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights,[3] the EU is supporting Syrian civil society and human rights defenders. The Development Cooperation Instrument[4] also supports projects inside Syria to increase the food security of the Syrian population.

The EU has created a **Facility for Refugees in Turkey**, with a total budget of €3 billion for the period 2016-2017, to support longer-term livelihoods, socio-economic and educational perspectives of refugees in Turkey.

The EU has also created a **Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis**[5] that includes €932 million in contributions from 22 Member States and Turkey. This is in addition to direct financing from the EU budget, that has been used to date in the region, in order to help Syrians and hosting communities in neighbouring countries.

EU funding has contributed to improve the lives of the refugees in particular in the education sector. For instance, 663 000 Syrian refugees and host community children and youth in **Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan** are provided with access to quality primary education, protective services and psycho-social care. In the higher education sector, the 'HOPES' project is offering scholarships, educational counseling and language training to some 250 000 Syrian refugees and host community youth in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey. In Turkey, interventions in the area of education include the construction and equipment of 70 new schools.

What is the "whole of Syria" approach?

The “whole of Syria” approach aims to cover the population's needs across the entire country, irrespective of political, ethnic or religious affiliations. It is a concept developed by the UN, to be followed by all providers of humanitarian assistance in Syria, which aims at responding first and foremost to the actual and most urgent needs of the population. EU non-humanitarian assistance to the civilian population is also delivered with a "whole of Syria" approach, in line with the political guidance established in the Council Conclusions of May 2016[6].

How can the EU imagine contributing to reconstruction when the conflict is ongoing?

The EU has been clear that it will not be able to assist with the reconstruction of the country until a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is under way. The EU's engagement in reconstruction is therefore linked to a political solution to the conflict based on UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué. However, the Joint Communication outlines the main areas in which the EU could get involved together with other international institutions such as the Monetary Fund and the World Bank in support for a post-agreement reconstruction, in an incremental way, and only in response to concrete and measurable progress. These include:

- Lifting restrictive measures: the EU could review the current restrictive measures against Syria to support early recovery and reconstruction;
- Resuming co-operation: the EU could resume bilateral co-operation relations with the Syrian Government and mobilise appropriate tools under the EU Neighbourhood Policy and other programmes to boost the economy and tackle governance and accountability challenges;
- Mobilisation of funding: when a genuine and comprehensive political transition starts, the EU will be ready to contribute to the reconstruction of Syria, as well as to mobilise and leverage funding from other international donors. The EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syria Crisis should play an important role in pooling and channelling the EU's, Member States', as well as other contributors' funding.

In order to be ready to act quickly and effectively when the appropriate moment comes, preparations have to start in advance.

What role can the EU play once a political agreement is reached?

When a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is under way, the EU will be at the forefront of the collective efforts for reconstruction together with other partners such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The EU will continue to engage in and contribute to the post-agreement planning exercise conducted by the UN Inter-agency Task Force that will detail the multi-sectoral interventions that will be needed in the first 6 months following a peace agreement to support the political process and the transitional government structures. Work is also ongoing to expand existing joint EU-UN assessments of damage and needs in a number of Syrian cities and to ensure that the needs of the population are tackled in reconstruction efforts. The EU will seek to integrate similar, parallel efforts of the World Bank. This work will prepare the ground and reduce the time needed post-agreement for the conduct of a joint Recovery and Peace Building Assessment between the EU, the World Bank and the United Nations, in support of the longer-term recovery and reconstruction plans of the transitional government structures.

The EU can be involved in a large number of areas: from governance and the drafting of a new

constitution, to security sector reform, job creation, the voluntary, safe and dignified returns of refugees and internally displaced persons, boost of Syrian human capital through services and education, to various other areas such as demining, cooperation with the new authorities in various fields, and the protection of cultural heritage. The Joint Communication gives a brief outline of the most important fields of possible involvement of the European Union.

What can be done to ensure transitional justice and accountability for war crimes?

During and after the conflict, the EU will continue to support transitional justice initiatives to help ensure accountability for war crimes, human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. This includes the confirmed use of chemical weapons, as well as support for the investigation of war crimes at both a national and international level. These efforts will be done in conjunction with the support for the strengthening of psycho-social relief and national reconciliation across the country.

What about sanctions?

The EU will maintain its restrictive measures against Syrian individuals and entities supporting the regime as long as the repression of civilians continues. The measures targeting certain sectors of the Syrian economy will also be maintained for as long as is needed. The current sanctions will be extended further as necessary. The EU will keep the impact of sanctions under constant review and will regularly consider options to mitigate any unintended consequences.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/european-neighbourhood-and-partnership-instrument-enpi_en

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/documents/140311_icsp_reg_230_2014_en.pdf

[3] http://www.eidhr.eu/

[4] http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci_en.htm_en

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20161220-eutf-syria_0.pdf

[6] That notably states (§6) that the EU will strengthen its collective work to […] seek to increase assistance, combining cross-border assistance with support from inside Syria and will aim at delivering aid as part of a larger effort to address the needs of the population all across Syria and build local resilience.