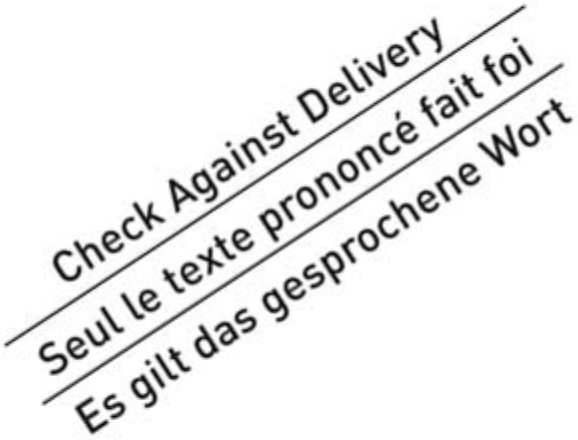
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Štefan Füle
European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

Statement on situation in Syria



European Parliament, Plenary Session

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Spokespersons' Service
Service des Porte-parole

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President, Honourable Members,

The situation in and around Syria remains extremely difficult. Since last year most humanitarian statistics, such as the number of those affected in numerous ways by the fighting, have doubled. With 9.3 milion Syrians in need of outside assistance, half of them children, we have reached the limits of what the international community can do. The neighbouring countries are sheltering close to 3 million refugees. The European Union continues to support them, but the dangers for Lebanon and Jordan, as well as threats to the territorial integrity of Iraq are real.

At the UN humanitarian conference hosted by Kuwait, the European Union pledged an additional €550M for the relief effort in Syria raising its overall effort to €2.6B. Yet, the UN's unprecedented fundraising appeal of €6.5B clearly shows the urgency of settling the conflict as the capacity of international donors is reaching limits. The international community worked hard in Kuwait but only slightly more than a third of that sum was raised.

That is why the recent launch of the Geneva Conference on Syria on 22 January in Montreux is so important. As stressed by HR/VP in Montreux, the Geneva Conference on Syria is unique as it has a clear political legitimacy (found in the UNSC resolution 2118) to work together to fully implement the Geneva Communique [of 30 June 2012].

In the first round of negotiations, progress has been slow, but the parties are now talking to each other and we need to remind ourselves that reaching the goals stated in the Geneva Communique will be an arduous process.

The European Union considers that it is important to maintain a double track approach by discussing the difficult issue of a political transition and at the same time promoting confidence building measures that could alleviate some of the suffering being experienced by the Syrian people.

Even small progress that would, for example, enable more humanitarian access to those trapped in the conflict zones would be a success that would help sustain the negotiations. The tactics of "starve and surrender" practiced by the regime must end.

Yet our responsibility goes beyond our humanitarian obligations and supporting the Geneva process. That is why it should be our ambition to reach out to groups that have not taken up arms and that can play a role in settling the conflict. Here the role of women is crucial. HR Ashton in her meetings with the Syrian women in Switzerland promised a dedicated European Union effort to support their role in the envisioned transition.

The European Union also has the ambition to look beyond the conflict and assist in educating and training of young Syrians who will be key to Syria's future. To this effect, the EU is planning to develop an ambitious training programme in cooperation with our Member States.

Honourable Members,

Syria's crisis has profoundly affected its neighbours. They must be applauded for their efforts to host an increasing number of Syrian refugees. It is important to reiterate that the European Union's support to Syria now focuses mainly on Syrians that fled to neighbouring countries. To that, our support is also addressed to the host countries and communities.

We will also maintain all other forms of assistance, including those targeting areas under the control of the opposition to maintain and develop most vital services. With these and many other efforts, the EU will help Syrians to reach their goal of living in dignity, freedom and democracy.

I would like to re-emphasise that the European Union will continue in its humanitarian efforts and spare no effort to deliver life-saving and medical aid to besieged areas.

The European Union also has the ambition to look beyond the conflict and assist in educating and training young Syrians who will be key to Syria's future. To this effect, the European Union is planning to develop an ambitious training programme in cooperation with our Member States.

There is little doubt that the Geneva process will be a long and complex one but we must work relentlessly with all partners in the international community to reach the desired goal of a peaceful and reunited Syria.

Thank you for your attention.