

Second Brussels Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", remarks by HR/VP Mogherini upon arrival

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Good morning,

We have gathered today more than 80 international organisations, countries, friends and partners, from the region and from the international community, first and foremost to support Syrians. I said yesterday after having met the Syrian civil society organisations that Syria is not a chessboard for big players; Syria belongs to the Syrian people.

Here today, we will mobilise on one side political support for a political process under UN auspices - the only context in which a political solution can be found for Syria. We will be together with Staffan de Mistura [UN Special Envoy for Syria] discussing this with all the Ministers of the region. The convening power of the European Union manages to reach out to countries that normally do not sit necessarily at the same table.

We will try to use this opportunity, but also to mobilise humanitarian aid. The European Union has devoted so far almost €11 billion to the Syrian people, both inside Syria and in the region. And we will continue to support the Syrians, to keep them alive, to make sure that children have access to education, that people have access to food and water, and that living conditions inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries allow them to think and build the future of their country.

The humanitarian help, the humanitarian work is not a minor issue in this moment; it is a necessity. We will discuss especially with the United Nations how to guarantee that ceasefires allow aid to go in, and civilians are protected.

This is going to be the main work we try to do today. And I will meet you after the morning sessions that will be dedicated after the opening to our political discussions. So I [will] meet you after the first sessions.

Q. On the role of the EU in bridging gaps among different parties.

We always try to help, you know that the European Union always tries to bridge the gaps. We have very clear positions. People around the world know very well where we stand, in particular against the use of chemical weapons in any circumstances and for accountability - but we also try to find common ground and some unanimity to have all the relevant actors pushing towards an effective and meaningful political dialogue.

We need in particular Russia and Iran to exercise pressure on Damascus so that it accepts to sit at the table under UN auspices. The opposition with whom we have been working in these years is today more united and ready to sit for negotiations.

We believe that the only sustainable peace for Syria will be linked to a political process under UN auspices. As I have said several times, the three guarantors of Astana have a special responsibility in this context to guarantee that the ceasefires and that the de-escalations zones happen - while we have seen an escalation in military activities, which is exactly the contrary of what they were working on and committed to. So we call on them to go back to their efforts to de-escalate from a military point of view and, most of all, to exercise political pressure on Damascus for the beginning of meaningful negotiations and I say *meaningful negotiations*.

Obviously, we will also continue our work on preparing for the future of Syria, but we also make it very clear that the European Union and the international community will not finance the reconstruction of Syria until we will see a political process firmly in place under UN auspices. But we are ready to do that and we would be very much willing to work on the reconstruction and the future of the country. Obviously an inclusive, democratic, united country.

Q. On international work in the current political situation.

It is almost a disaster, you said it well. These times are not encouraging, for sure not on Syria, but also on other files. We are not living easy times, but it is exactly when the situation gets worse that more work is needed on the diplomatic and political level.

We have seen in recent days and weeks that military activities are not opening the way neither for an improvement of the humanitarian situation nor for an improvement of the political talks.

The only efforts that can bring some changes, some positive changes are the diplomatic and political ones. I am not saying that today we are bringing peace in Syria with the conference, but I am saying that gathering the different actors and players, with the European Union and the United Nations together, can only contribute to opening *some* spaces for improvement on the political side. And this is what the European Union will continue to work for, for humanitarian aid and political processes.

Q&A

Can you be sure that the money pledged here actually reach the people on the ground and not the Assad Regime?

Absolutely yes, that is very clear to us. First of all, from the European Union side, that all the money pledged is also delivered. Today we will also look at the state of play of the pledges of last year because it is very important to have accountability ourselves. So, who pledged what and who delivered what. We will look also at how the money has been spent and the perspectives for further pledges and delivery of aid.

And we have a very strict way of delivering our aid, and to ensure that it reaches the people. We visited so many projects, in particular Commissioner Stylianides who is responsible for our humanitarian aid, and I am sure that you will get during the day more details.

By the way let me single out to you that this time we will start the conference with a short video that I would really invite you to watch carefully. We have produced different videos where what we call “the Syrian heroes” – the normal people, the normal Syrians who are living in different conditions - tell their stories. Each of them is benefiting from one of the projects we are financing.

This is the real work we are doing on the ground. Not a military one but one for saving lives and trying to push for a political solution. This is the only objective the European Union has, we have no other hidden agendas. That is very clear for us, we are on the side of the Syrian people - and the country belongs to them, we should always remember that.

Q. On the declaration in Washington [yesterday] about a possible other nuclear deal [with Iran], supplementary to the one that is existing?

You said it. There is one deal that is existing currently.

It is extremely clear from the words of President [of the French Republic, Emmanuel] Macron and from the words and the positions of all the Europeans, that the deal we have in place now, today - the only existing deal for the moment - is working.

It has been preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and commits Iran not to develop a nuclear weapon, without limit. Because if you read the deal, the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action], very carefully, in the very beginning it says that Iran will not acquire nuclear weapons.

The deal is working, President Macron has stressed it yesterday in the White House very clearly: that we believe that the full implementation of the JCPOA is essential for European security and for the security of the region, and the Europeans will stick to that.

On what can happen in the future, we will see in the future. But there is one deal existing, it is working and it needs to be preserved.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I154333>

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