SYRIA – EU renews sanctions for three months, more help for civilians

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The European Union has decided to extend the sanctions against the Syrian regime for a further three months and to relax the arms embargo. The conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council state that the restrictive measures have been amended “so as to provide greater non-lethal support and technical assistance for the protection of civilians.” Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi underscored that “the agreement by the 27 member countries is a positive development that goes in the direction we wanted: stronger European support for the Syrian opposition at both the material and political levels”.

Immediate end to the violence

The Council Conclusions reiterate that “the EU is appalled by the increasingly deteriorating situation in Syria and the unacceptable levels of violence, which continue to cause suffering to millions of Syrians and destruction of infrastructure and cultural heritage. The EU strongly urges the regime to stop targeting civilians […] and calls for an immediate end to all violence.”

Solution to conflict lies in political dialogue

The EU believes that “the key to the solution of the conflict lies in facilitating the Syrian-led political process. In this context, the EU reiterates its full support to the Joint Special Representative of the UN and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi to promote a credible and effective political solution with those genuinely committed to the transition”. The EU commended the initiative made by the President of the Syrian National Coalition, Moaz al-Khatib, of a political dialogue that would lead to a peaceful transition towards a future without Assad. It called on the representatives of the Syrian regime “not to miss this opportunity”.

Dramatic humanitarian situation, donors must deliver on their pledges

The EU is “extremely concerned at the dramatic deterioration in the humanitarian situation […] and calls on all donors to promptly deliver on their pledges”. These pledges, as announced at the Kuwait Donors’ Conference on 30 January, amount to over 1.5 billion

dollars. The EU “will continue to support all neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Jordan with financial and in-kind assistance”.

The EU called on the UN to reach all the population in need through all possible channels. And it called on the Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria with respect to “the widespread and systematic violation of human rights”, including through “a possible referral to the International Criminal Court”.

Mali: formal approval for military training missions

The Council formally approved the European Union Training Mission for the Malian armed forces. The political decision to launch the mission was taken in December 2012. An advance party of 70 experts arrived in Bamako on 8 February, with a further 400 military personnel due to arrive in coming weeks. The mission will have a budget of 12.3 million euros, and an initial mandate of 15 months. The headquarters will be in Bamako while training is to take place in Koulikoro.

Freedom of religion: guidelines approved, at Italy’s insistence

Freedom of religion or belief – for which Italy has campaigned strongly – will be a priority for the European Union in its policies on the defence of human rights. The guidelines were approved today at the Foreign Affairs Council, in the lead-up to the United Nations Human Rights Council. “The inclusion of a section concerning the protection of freedom of religion or belief is extremely important”, underscored Minister Terzi. “It is something Italy feels strongly about and for which we have pressed most firmly”.

Nuclear test: sanctions against North Korea strengthened

The European Union decided to further strengthen sanctions against North Korea as a sign of protest against the nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 12 February. “These new measures relate to trade in conventional weapons involving the DPRK and to the export to the DPRK of certain key materials for the ballistic missile sector, as well as financial restrictions.” Measures to prevent the DPRK from pursuing its uranium enrichment activities are also envisaged. The Foreign Affairs Council has added new names to the list of persons subject to an asset freeze and to a travel ban to the territory of the European Union.

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2013/02/20130218_siria_ue/