Speech of Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi on the sixth Brussels Conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region'

10 May 2022

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to the sixth Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region".

Let me first recall that the EU's overall objective in Syria remains unchanged: we support the emergence of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned lasting political solution, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254. This is the only sustainable response to the conflict and the only way to ensure stability for the region.

Undoubtedly, the Syrian conflict has profound consequences and far-reaching impact on the region – in human, political, socio-economic and security terms. The massive displacement of people from Syria continues to pose a challenge for the host countries, in particular Syria's direct neighbours. The region is still suffering to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now also coupled with the dire food insecurity as a consequence of Russian war against Ukraine.

The European Union stands by these countries. I would like to express our appreciation for the extraordinary efforts and generosity for hosting over 5.7 million refugees from Syria.

As you know, the EU and its Member States have contributed EUR 27.5 billion to the response to the Syria crisis since 2011, reaching nearly 7 million refugees and vulnerable people in host communities. Across the region, the EU has helped to build schools, provide education, health care, provide for the basic needs, help entrepreneurs and exporters, provide jobs, and ensure macro-economic stability.

Our support will continue: as you have heard this morning, the EU pledge for this and next year is EUR 3.12 billion.

11 years into the conflict, our support remains more important than ever – against the background of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine. The EU will continue to support Syria's neighbours and major refugee hosting countries, namely Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, keeping up its previous levels of engagement.

At the same time, it is clear that the solidarity of the international community is insufficient to address the numerous challenges ahead.

In this regard, two initiatives of the European Union will be key.

First, our New Agenda for the Mediterranean and the Economic and Investment Plan will keep supporting the socio-economic recovery of the region in major refugee-hosting countries, boosting the real economy and creating new jobs, offering a perspective for the young generation. We have a number of projects in the pipeline that will deliver real benefit for the people on the ground such as access to basic services, quality education, livelihoods, healthcare, water and sanitation. This will require considerable and systematic efforts to tackle the weaknesses that existed even before the crisis in Syria. The European Union remains ready to support these efforts, together with our partner governments, the private sector and civil society. I invite you all to contribute to the implementation of this major Economic and Investment Plan with a clear benefit for the Syrian refugees and host communities.

Second, the disruption of global supply chains due to the war of Russia against Ukraine has only put additional pressure in our neighbours in the Middle East and North Africa.

The EU is firmly committed to work with partner countries to help them mitigate the impact of rising prices in food and commodities in the region. To this end, I have recently announced an initiative for

a Food and Resilience Facility, worth EUR 225 million that will provide immediate support to ensure access to basic goods and services. It will respond to commodity shortage emergencies, contribute to balance of payment stabilisation, sustain local social protection and social safety net systems which are faced with an additional acute crisis. In the medium to longer term, it will also seek to improve the local agricultural systems and the development of less input-intensive and more climate relevant agricultural practices agricultural practices.

Thank you for your attention.

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