European Commission - Speech
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Opening speech by Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi at the afternoon Plenary Session of the Ministerial Meeting - Brussels VII Conference

Brussels, 15 June 2023

Good afternoon,

Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome back to the seventh Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region. I want to thank you for joining us to discuss the situation of the Syrian refugees this afternoon.

For the second time this year, we gather to address this critical matter. As we stood by the people in the region after the devastating earthquake in February, the conference today is a clear and loud demonstration of the international community's continued solidarity and support for the Syrian refugees and the host communities.

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 to the neighbours of Syria, and Russia's war against Ukraine puts the region under enormous pressure in terms of food insecurity and risks of instability.

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

Since 2011 the EU and its Member States have mobilised over EUR 30 billion to respond to the Syria crisis. This funding has supported refugees and host communities alike. Across the region, the EU has helped to build schools, provide education, health care, provide for basic needs, help entrepreneurs and exporters, provide jobs, and ensure macro-economic stability.

Let me underline that the Syrian refugees and host communities can keep on counting on the European Union's support.

In the same vein, we hope that the international community can live up to its commitment and make meaningful pledges today.

As you have heard this morning [from HRVP Borrell], the European Commission is pledging EUR 2.12 billion for 2023 and 2024 for the Syrian refugees and host communities across the region.

Our assistance package will seek to provide basic services, quality education, livelihoods, healthcare, water and sanitation. In general, we aim to contribute to the prosperity and stability across the region. Our Economic and Investment Plan will keep boosting the real economy and creating new jobs, offering a perspective for the young generation, including for refugees and other vulnerable groups. It requires sustained efforts to address the weaknesses that existed even before the crisis in Syria. The European Union remains committed to support these efforts, together with our partner countries, the private sector and the 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 the host communities.

In addition, we are stepping up our engagement in early recovery. In this regard, I am pleased to announce a new contribution by the European Union to the "Too Big To Fail" project by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria. Together with Commissioner for Crises Management Janez Lenarcic, we are mobilising this year EUR 10.5 million for this exemplary project of the ICRC that support the maintenance of water supply facilities. In essence, we are pleased to team up with the ICRC to prevent the collapse of water infrastructure and provide safe water to the Syrian people, not only on an emergency basis.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by stressing our unwavering commitment to find a lasting solution to the Syrian conflict. The EU will continue to stand by the Syrian people and Syria's neighbours.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Closing remarks

Thank you very much.

We have reached now the end of this first afternoon plenary session. I want to express our appreciation for your firm commitment and all the pledges that we have heard already. This is helping directly the Syrian refugees and the host communities, and once again, this demonstrates the solidarity and the support of the international community.

The session is now adjourned, and we will continue with a coffee break to be followed by presiding Mr Janez Lenarcic, my fellow Commissioner.

Thank you.

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