European External Action Service (EEAS)

Opening address by High Representative Kaja Kallas for the 9th Brussels Conference – “Standing with Syria: Meeting the Needs for a Successful Transition"

2025-03-17

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Esteemed colleagues and friends,

Today, we open a new chapter for Syria.

Syria faces a colossal transition.

And there are inevitable challenges with this. The transition is highly complex.

Socio-economic distress, insecurity and political challenges are interconnected.

We are, Minister Al-Shaibani, fully aware of this. You have a huge responsibility on your shoulders.

But there is also immense hope after decades of brutal dictatorship and war:

Hope for a Syria where all citizens can express their views freely, without fear, and enjoy safety and equal rights;

For a Syria where people and businesses can thrive;

For a Syria where conflicts are resolved by rule of law and justice, and not through fear or the barrel of a gun.

In this vein, I am happy that today the EU is pledging over 720 million euro (€720.5) for 2025.

This will support the population inside Syria, as well as Syrian refugees and their vulnerable host communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. This is an increase of over 160 million euro from last year’s pledge.

We also pledge 750 million euro for 2025 for Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Türkiye.

This conference is of course more than pledges.

Today we send a message of collective support for a peaceful, inclusive Syrian led and Syrian owned transition in Syria.

Minister, we welcome the number of positive steps the transitional government took over the past three months.

These include the agreement reached last week between the Syrian authorities and the Syrian Democratic Forces.

This agreement is a major breakthrough. It could pave the way for increased stability and a better future for Syrians.

We strongly encourage parties to work on implementation. And we are ready to support this.

You also have an historic opportunity in this transition to tackle long-standing security threats, including chemical weapons and terrorism, including Da'esh.

We intend to support the deployment by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons of a verification mission to Syria with 4 million euro. I urge others to do the same.

Cooperation on the security and daily management of camps and prisons holding Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Northeast Syria also remains essential.

The recent wave of violence has highlighted the fragility of this transition.

We strongly condemn the attacks, particularly those targeting civilians. They must be addressed swiftly and decisively.

We welcome the establishment of an independent investigative commission by the authorities – which must credibly investigate these acts. The existing UN Commission of Inquiry should be associated to these efforts.

The EU is also a very strong advocate for civil society to be fully included in the transition process, which is essential for its success.

I am happy that we are joined today by several members of Syria's civil society.

Justice and reconciliation are fundamental parts of this transition.

The people of Syria have lived through decades of horror. It's high time that all Syrians can live safely in peace.

The EU will continue supporting UN accountability mechanisms and other transitional justice initiatives.

Those responsible for war crimes and human rights violations over the past thirteen years must finally held responsible.

There will be no peace without justice.

Let us be clear. Not all parties want the transition in Syria to succeed. These parties include Da'esh and Assad loyalists, but also Russia and Iran who supported Assad's regime.

We see malign attempts to derail the transition, be it by fuelling violence or information manipulation online. We are hosting a conference on this topic on Wednesday.

The recent violence in Syria is a perfect example of the dangerous consequences of this. External actors seek to manipulate the information environment to amplify tension between citizens and communities.

And who really gains from this? Because the people of Syria pay for this with their lives. All actors – from the north to the south, from the east to the west – must respect the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The path to peace, stability, and prosperity for Syria requires the support and collaboration of all stakeholders, both within Syria and beyond its borders.

At this critical moment in Syria's history, the EU is ready to play its part.

Thank you.

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