

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the ministerial meeting of the Third Brussels Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"

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Good morning.

We are convening here today together with the United Nations the Third Brussels Conference [on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"], gathering 80 international delegations, more than 50 countries for three main reasons.

The first one is to keep Syria and the Syrian people on top of the international agenda. The European Union has been supporting Syrian people inside and outside of Syria since the beginning of the crisis, with both political and humanitarian support - €17 billion mobilised only from the European Union.

We want this conflict not to be forgotten, we want the people of Syria not to be forgotten, in a moment when the international community seems to care a little bit less about this. We gather here so many from all around the world to say that we have to keep focused on a political solution for the conflict in Syria. It is not over yet, people need our support.

The two main purposes of the Conference are, first of all, to support the UN-led political process. The military situation on the ground might be developing in one sense or another, but what is clear to everybody is that winning the peace will require a political Syrian-owned process led by the United Nations in Geneva.

We are here to support this process, to support the UN Special Envoy [to Syria, Geir Pedersen], to gather and rally all the possible international support for the Syrian parties to reconvene in Geneva, and finally turn the page of this conflict.

The second reason is to mobilise international financial support for the Syrians, for humanitarian aid both inside the country and in the neighboring countries. I would expect later today the announcement of significant pledges - I will be announcing the European Union pledge at the opening of the Conference that is consistent as usual – and most importantly, to track the pledges that have been done in the previous years, to check if they have been delivered on the ground. And they have, but we want to keep the pressure high on the delivery of the humanitarian aid, so that the Syrian people can still be at the center of our attention.

I want to spend one word on something we have done yesterday that is remarkable to me. The ministerial Conference is today but the most important part of the Conference was maybe yesterday with the civil society and the women of Syria, expressing their views coming together and showing that reconciliation is possible if there is a step towards finding a solution at the political level.

I will expect to have a good Conference with quite an impressive participation, the convening power of the European Union and the UN together is still remarkable and I hope with a strong push for the political process to resume.

Q. You have a specific promise to the neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees.

Yes, thank you for the question because this is actually the third pillar of the Conference. The support to the neighboring countries, to the countries that have been hosting so many Syrians all along this year and have been challenged by the conflict next door.

We are going to mobilise support, not only for the Syrians but also for the hosting communities, and the countries of the region, first and foremost Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey that are hosting the biggest number of Syrians, and also Iraq and Egypt. I am glad to see a very good participation from the region.

To us Europeans, the most important thing in this process is to work, as I said, hand in hand with the UN and with our partners in the region, because they are the ones who are more involved and more concerned by the situation in the country.

Q. Will the money collected today only go to humanitarian aid and not into reconstruction?

The money that will be collected today will go into humanitarian aid, this is very much needed. Without the humanitarian aid that we have been mobilising in these years, so many people would probably not be alive anymore, so many children would not go to school, so many families would not be supported. So, yes, it is going to be dedicated to humanitarian aid, both inside and outside of Syria.

I stress the inside of Syria because the international community is doing a lot to support humanitarian needs but also rehabilitation, I think for instance of the areas liberated from Daesh. We are investing there to make sure that services start to be active again, and that the areas are stabilised.

It is humanitarian aid and it is also an effort to stabilise the areas of the country that need it the most. The money for the reconstruction from the European Union and from the European Union Member States is going to be mobilised in the moment when a political process will be fully under way under UN auspices in Geneva.

You can see it two ways. One way is that - no, there is no European money for reconstruction today - but you can see it the other way: the European money for reconstruction is ready to be mobilised, we have started to work on that, also together

with the World Bank. It will be ready to come in the moment when the political process will start again in Geneva.

Q. Will the Syrian civil society voices be heard today?

We have invited them to come as always. It is up to them to decide in which format, if, when and how they want to deliver their messages to the Ministers.

When I say that the meeting with the civil society is probably the most important part of this Conference, I do not hide the difficulties, because they come from very different backgrounds, from inside and outside of Syria, very different political opinions.

It is a matter of respect from our side, first of all to offer them a protected space here to have exchanges among them, and to leave them the responsibility of deciding how to channel their messages. Their messages were already channeled yesterday to myself, to the UN Special Envoy [to Syria, Geir Pedersen], to the rest of the Conference, to key stakeholders. They have been meeting different delegations all along these days, they spend the entire week in Brussels.

We have completely left them the decision of how, if, when and in which format they will give their input to the Conference. We believe civil society is not a flag to be shown but an actor to be empowered. It will be their choice.

In any case, we have discussed with them at length already in these days, and yesterday in particular with myself and the UN Special Envoy [to Syria, Geir Pedersen], and the messages have been heard.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I169468>

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