

## Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)

Vienna, 11 - 12 October 2018

### Background Paper

#### **Session 2: How Europe Can Contribute to Improving the Political and Humanitarian Situation in Syria**

The fighting in Syria, ongoing now for over seven years, and its devastating effects have triggered one of the worst humanitarian crises since the Second World War. Efforts at inclusive peace negotiations with a view to a political transition led by Syria itself must be stepped up, and support is needed for the work of the UN Special Envoy and the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

#### **Humanitarian situation**

The humanitarian situation remains dramatic. Some 13.1 million people require humanitarian aid, almost 3 million of whom are living in areas that are under siege and difficult for relief organisations to access. The country has around 6.6 million internally displaced persons, half of whom are children and adolescents. Around 5.6 million refugees are living in neighbouring countries, 3.6 million of whom are in Turkey. One in three schools in Syria has been damaged or destroyed, and 35 per cent of Syrian households lack a safe water supply. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) expects up to 800,000 new refugees in the event of a possible attack on Idlib.

#### **Military situation**

At the end of July 2018, the Syrian government controlled around two-thirds of the country's territory and almost all major population centres. From January to July 2018, government-related militias occupied strategically important areas as a result of agreements or military campaigns, such as the eastern and southern suburbs of Damascus, the southern areas on the Jordanian and Israeli borders, and the area between Homs and Hama, whose location makes it of enormous economic importance.

## **The political role of the EU**

The EU enacted a series of restrictive measures against the Syrian regime after the Syrian government began violently suppressing the anti-government protests in March 2011. All bilateral cooperation programmes between the EU and Syria were suspended. In April 2017, the Council adopted the EU Strategy for Syria, which defines strategic objectives in six core areas: Ending the war by means of a genuine political transition; promoting a constructive, inclusive transition process in Syria; saving lives by meeting the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable; promoting democracy, human rights and freedom of expression; promoting accountability for war crimes; and strengthening the resilience of the Syrian population and society.

In light of the ongoing repression of the civilian population in Syria, the Council, in line with the EU Strategy for Syria, has extended its restrictive measures against the Syrian regime until 1 June 2019. In a broader sense, the sanctions currently in force include, inter alia, an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, the freezing of assets held in the EU by the Syrian Central Bank, export restrictions on equipment and technology which could be used for internal repression, as well as on equipment and technology for monitoring or tapping the Internet and telephone conversations.

## **EU humanitarian assistance**

The EU is the largest donor in the effort to address the crisis in Syria. Together the EU and its Member States have provided more than € 10.6 billion in humanitarian and development aid. The European Union's Regional Trust Fund manages most of the non-humanitarian aid provided to neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees. At present the fund has a total volume of € 1.5 billion.

In line with the EU Strategy for Syria, the EU organised the first Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region in April 2017 and the second Conference in Brussels in April 2018, which pledged € 3.5 billion for 2018 and a further € 2.7 billion for 2019-2020. A third Brussels conference is planned for the last week of March 2019, focusing on mobilising international and regional support for a political process.

- How should the current restrictive measures against the Syrian regime be assessed and what steps, if any, should be taken after they expire in June next year?
- What measures can be taken to support neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees in addition to the humanitarian assistance already under way?
- In what way could the EU support the efforts of the UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura in the peace negotiations?