



Turkey: Common interest to end conflict in Syria and cooperate on the refugee crisis

Brussels, 4 March 2020

High Representative/Vice-President Josep **Borrell** and Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez **Lenarčič** concluded their two-day visit to Ankara on Wednesday, where they discussed with Turkish partners the situation in North-West Syria and refugee flows to and from Turkey.

They held talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vice-President Fuat Oktay. High Representative/Vice-President **Borrell** also met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Defence Hulusi Akar and Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu. Commissioner **Lenarčič** met with Minister of Labour Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk, with President of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) Mehmet Güllüoğlu, and with President of Turkish Red Crescent and Vice President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Kerem Kinik.

In their meetings, the High Representative/Vice-President and the Commissioner exchanged views with their Turkish counterparts on the humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib. They stressed that the situation in and around Idlib was critical and there was an urgent need to act to stop the military confrontations which are causing extensive humanitarian suffering. Almost one million people have fled their homes due to heavy fighting in north-west Syria. They are facing freezing temperatures with insufficient or no shelter. Civilians and civilian infrastructure such as schools, and hospitals are directly targeted by armed forces. Humanitarian access is urgently needed.

The High Representative declared readiness of the EU to consider working with Turkey on an approach that would offer a joint political way forward: *"We have a common interest and that is to end the conflict in Syria. Only in this way will we be able to bring to an end the suffering of the civilian population and contribute to address the most significant challenges Turkey is currently facing. Increased pressure at EU-Turkey border and unilateral actions will not provide answers."* Josep **Borrell** said.

During their meetings, they further discussed EU-Turkey cooperation, including EU assistance to Turkey for addressing the challenges stemming from the situation in Syria.

HR/VP **Borrell** stressed the need to work together and expressed understanding for the difficult situation Turkey is currently facing. However, current developments are not leading to any solution and can only exacerbate problems.

He reminded his Turkish interlocutors of the EU's expectation from Turkey to deliver on its obligations under the EU-Turkey Statement and called on them not to encourage further movement of refugees and migrants towards the EU borders.

Commissioner Janez **Lenarčič** reiterated the EU's position as the biggest donor in the context of the Syrian refugees crisis and recalled the EU's solidarity with Syrians affected by the 9-year war as well as with the countries hosting the Syrian refugees. The EU therefore announced today €170 million in humanitarian aid to continue assisting the most vulnerable people in Syria, including €60 million to address the humanitarian crisis in north-west Syria.

Janez **Lenarčič** said: *"Blatant international humanitarian law violations have become common in north-west Syria for way too long. This must stop. The attacks on civilians, children and aid workers must end. Civilians in Idlib lack essential services, such as shelter and heating, food and health care. The EU continues to support the most vulnerable Syrians. However, the conflicting parties must ensure unhindered and safe access for humanitarian assistance. The cross border humanitarian operations are crucial for thousands of people who rely on daily lifesaving support."*

The EU funding announced today will help Syrian population across the country with critical lifesaving assistance. The European Union urges all parties to the conflict to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to people most in need of assistance and to respect the rules and obligations of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians.

Commissioner **Lenarčič** will continue his visit to Turkey by going to Gaziantep in the southeast of the

country where he will visit facilities for Syrian refugees and meet with key humanitarian partners providing cross-border assistance in Idlib. High Representative Borrell will on his side travel to Zagreb, where the Foreign Ministers of the European Union will convene for an informal meeting (Gymnich) to discuss Turkey and Russia, followed by an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council, which will discuss Syria/Turkey.

Background

As the Syria crisis is entering its tenth year since the start of the conflict, the scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs remain extensive. More than 11 million people are still in need of humanitarian assistance. The situation in Idlib has dramatically deteriorated, creating large-scale internal displacement, while more than 3 million civilians, among them 1 million children, are in life-threatening danger due to the escalating hostilities.

Through its humanitarian aid partners on the ground, the European Union has been providing emergency assistance to millions of people in need in Syria since the start of the conflict. More than €17 billion have been mobilised by the European Union and its Member States to support the most vulnerable people inside Syria and in neighbouring countries.

For more information

[EU Delegation to Turkey](#)

[Factsheet on EU Humanitarian aid operations inside Syria](#)

[Website - EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)

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