

Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini at the joint press point with Geir Pedersen, UN Special Envoy for Syria, at the Third Brussels Conference supporting the future of Syria and the region

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Brussels, 13 March 2019

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Good afternoon. It is an honour for me to be here today. I would like to thank the European Parliament for hosting us today for the beginning of an important moment. We are hosting the third Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region and it is my pleasure to be here today with the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, with whom I have been in regular contact since he started his important and difficult task.

It is the third year that the European Union convenes different actors to mobilise international support for Syria. It is clear that the conflict is not over yet and the European Union is determined to avoid that this becomes a forgotten war and a forgotten conflict. We are entering a different phase of the conflict, but as one of the women of the civil society, who we have met today together with the Special Envoy [for Syria, Geir Pedersen], said: we risk to enter into a zone of no war/no peace that does not constitute a sustainable basis for Syrians to feel at home in their country and for the country to move forward.

Building peace and stopping the war requires the UN led political process to move forward. And this is why we are gathering the international community, first and foremost, to support a UN facilitated and Syrian-owned political solution. We still believe that only a political solution achieved in the framework of the UN led negotiations can guarantee a truly peaceful future for a united and reconciled Syria that preserves the diversity of its people.

We are gathering here many delegations - I will come to the civil society segment - first of all, to support the UN, as I said, both the political and the humanitarian work, and to support Syrians inside and outside of the country. I believe that this conference will be an

important opportunity for us to reaffirm the international support and the European Union's support to Syria's neighbours, starting from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and supporting at the same time the Syrians and the communities that are hosting them. And they know that they can count on the European Union to remain a reliable partner, not only for the Syrians, but also for the region's economic development and stability.

Since 2011 the European Union has mobilised around €17 billion to help Syrians affected by the Syrian war and their host communities. We are the largest provider of humanitarian aid in response to this crisis, doing both humanitarian assistance, but also stabilisation and resilience support inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries. Actually, last year we mobilised €4 billion, which is actually 56 percent more than the original pledges we had. I am convinced that this support will come also tomorrow, at the ministerial segments of the conference.

Today, we did something equally important, if not more important, and I am grateful to the UN Special Envoy [Geir Pedersen] for having done this with us. We are having here in the European Parliament two Days of Dialogue this year, gathering more than 500 civil society and NGO representatives from over 300 different organisations of which more than 200 are from Syria and the region. They interacted with ministers and with high officials both of single countries and donors and UN agencies. And we have just met with both the Women Advisory Board and also with the Civil Society Support Room and we have listened to the Syrian voices.

These two Days of Dialogue, let me say, are just the tip of the iceberg; they are the result of a consultation process that our teams have led with civil society and NGOs in Amman, Beirut, Gaziantep, Ankara, Brussels and on the web and their voices are what our meetings in this week here in Brussels are all about. They are Syria and we are here to give them a voice and to try to support their work.

Let me say one special word on women. We have met a group of women. It was not the first time that we meet, but we work with them very closely. They are not only the first victims of the war, they are also essential peace builders; they are those that can with more possibilities and more hope, I would say, play a role in restoring the fabric of the Syrian society and work on post-conflict reconciliation. I promised them that I would mention this also publicly: I am convinced that if the UN Special Envoy [Geir Pedersen] could gather only women in his talks, probably we would get a solution to the war in a week or so. Coming from very different backgrounds and political and cultural ideas, they have shown a remarkable capacity to focus on common solutions that I think can inspire many others in this process.

Let me finish by saying that tomorrow we will host the ministerial segment of the conference, where we will try to bring the voices of the Syrian people to mobilise support, as I said, for humanitarian pledges and for the political process under UN leadership. I am particularly proud that we are co-hosting this conference - EU-UN -, coming straight from New York, where I was briefing the Security Council yesterday, so there is a special symbolism. We will have tomorrow 55 countries and around 80 delegations, including also international and regional organisations.

I stop here and leave the floor to the Special Envoy [Geir Pedersen]. Thank you.

Q&A

The Syrian regime is controlling a big part of the country and the political opposition is suffering from a lack of representativeness. How do you see the future of the political settlement in these circumstances, now that the conflict is entering maybe a new phase?

It is not for me to determine or elaborate on the future of the political process; it is first and foremost for the Syrian parties under the UN leadership. This is not a negotiating conference. We support - and this implies respect - the role of the UN Special Envoy [Geir Pedersen]. Our intention in these days is to mobilise not only the European Union's support that is always there, but also the broader international support to the UN led process to come to a political solution.

It is true that we are entering and maybe we have entered already a different phase of the conflict. But the voices we have heard today tell us that a process of inclusive political transition will need to happen in order to reconcile the country and move forward. You can win militarily some battles on the ground, you could even militarily win the war - even if I have to warn of the fact that we might have sad reminders in the coming days, hopefully not, that the hard conflict on the ground is not over yet. In particular, I would like to mention the need to avoid that Idlib turns into a humanitarian catastrophe.

I think it is clear for everybody that the fighting has diminished, but that the conflict and the war are not over yet. Even when and even if there was a military victory on the ground, it is a different thing to build peace; it is a different thing to unite the country; it is a different thing to make Syria the home of all Syrians, regardless of their background, of their political beliefs or of them living inside or outside of Syria or in different parts of the

country. Syria is an incredibly diverse country. And the only agenda that the European Union has always had - and this coincides fully with the work of the United Nations and in particular with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 - is to preserve the unity, the sovereignty, the territorial integrity and the diversity of Syria.

There is a sustainable peace to be built that goes through the channels of political negotiations amongst Syrians. So, it is not for the European Union or for anybody else to determine what the outcome would be, but for the Syrians to engage in the legitimate international framework of the UN led talks to define what would be the future of Syria. For us it is to accompany this process, to incentivise it if we can and to support this difficult, but in this moment particularly crucial work that needs to be done.

Q. There are a half a million Syrian refugees living in Iraqi Kurdistan region. Do you have any plan to do something for them?

The support we have mobilised all over this year and the support we will be mobilising tomorrow is covering not only Syrians inside Syria with humanitarian aid, it is also focusing on the countries in the region. This starts from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey that are hosting the biggest numbers of refugees, but also includes support to Iraq and Egypt that are also hosting a relevant number of Syrian refugees.

Let me add that this support will be sustained again. We will communicate more tomorrow together with [Mark] Lowcock [Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator] about our pledges and our ambitions on the humanitarian pledges. But I am confident that there will be a sustained effort for sure from the European Union, and from the rest of the international community, to not only support Syrians but also the host communities. Because we see the need to not only congratulate them for their generosity but to also concretely contribute to the sustainability of their efforts.

I visited myself many of the camps, many of the communities that are hosting Syrian refugees, and I know how important it is that this support equally goes to the hosting communities and this also includes Iraq.

Q. Is the European Union still united in saying that it will not finance reconstruction unless there is a political process because we have had reports saying that some of the countries led by the most populist

government are saying that they would want to go ahead with reconstruction?

The European Union is fully united on this point. We recently had a discussion with the European Union Member States Foreign Ministers exactly to see where we are on this point. I was pleased to see that all 28 Member States reconfirmed our consolidated position.

Let me turn the position around, because the efforts that the European Union has always been doing in support of citizens, is only ready to be upgraded in the moment when the political process will start. This can be a very strong incentive for the Syrian parties to engage seriously and constructively under the UN leadership in a way that is fully Syrian owned to turn the page to this conflict through a political process. The European Union will then be more than happy to support Syrians not only on the humanitarian side but also on reconstruction. But we obviously need to link this to some movements on the political process.

Q. How does the European Union intend to overcome its divisions on Syria especially with the Italian and the Central European governments sympathies for the regime?

I just replied to that: there is no division, so there is no division to overcome. This is the reality of fact. Look at the facts and the facts are that tomorrow we will have the European Union together with United Nations gathering not only our Member States, but 80 international and regional delegations different countries to mobilise support for humanitarian aid and the UN political process.

This speaks more than any declaration to the press that you can hear from one or the other. The European Union is united, otherwise we would not do this. We are not only reluctantly united, we are united in actively keeping this issue on the agenda, because the risk I see is that people tend to forget that Syria is still there, that Syrians still need help, still need support from the humanitarian point of view, and that maybe this is the right moment to give a push to the political solution exactly because the situation has changed on the ground. Not only are we united but we are actively pushing this issue on top of the international agenda because we do not want this to be forgotten. Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I169033>

