

Brussels, 15 May 2012

ENP Package – Syria

Syria is not a full participant to the ENP. It participates only in the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership. No Country Progress Report is prepared for Syria because there is no ENP Action Plan in force.

Political situation and latest developments in EU relationship with the Country

Following the uprising in Syria, which began in spring 2011, and the escalation of violence and human rights violations by the Syrian Government against its citizens, the Foreign Affairs Council of May 2011 took the decision to suspend bilateral cooperation programmes between the EU and the Syrian government. The EU also froze the draft Association Agreement. Since then, the Commission has suspended the participation of Syrian authorities to its regional programmes and the European Investment Bank (EIB) has suspended all its loan operations and technical assistance to Syria. On 30 November 2011, in reaction to the EU restrictive measures, Syria suspended its membership and its participation to the Union for the Mediterranean.

The EU called for President Assad to step aside, and has worked closely with the international community to put pressure on the Syrian Government to stop all violence. The EU supported the League of Arab States (LAS) in its efforts to solve the crisis and urged the UN Security Council Members to agree on strong UN action towards Syria. EU's restrictive measures are in place in Syria since May 2011 and new measures have been introduced regularly.

Throughout the uprising, the EU has repeatedly condemned in the strongest terms the ongoing brutal repression led by the Syrian regime against its population as well as the widespread human rights violations, including killing, mass arrest and torture of civilians, peaceful protestors and their relatives that may amount to crimes against humanity. The EU has urged the Syrian regime to allow unhindered access to humanitarian workers and agencies and to allow access to media and independent observers.

The EU has worked closely with international partners to ensure a strong UN response to the crisis in Syria. This has resulted in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council having adopted important resolutions on Syria. By adopting UNGA resolution 66/253 on 16 February 2012, the international community sent a clear and unequivocal message to the Syrian government: The time has come to put an end to the bloodshed and the suffering of the Syrian population, to seek a peaceful outcome to the current crisis and to begin a new era of democratic change.

The UN Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement on 21 March, expressing its full support for the efforts of Joint UN-LAS Special Envoy Kofi Annan and his six point plan. The Syrian government has written to K. Annan accepting his six point plan, endorsed by the UNSC. On 2 April Annan briefed the UNSC and announced that Syria has agreed on the date of 10 April to withdraw troops. Discussions on the

deployment of a monitoring mechanism are currently ongoing as well as to how endorse the “political outcome” at UNSC.

Second meeting of the Friends of Syrian people (FoS) took place in Istanbul on 1 April. The meeting expressed support for K. Annan’s plan while calling on the Special Envoy to determine a timeline for next steps. FoS recognised the Syria National Council (SNC) as a legitimate representative of all Syrians and the umbrella organisation under which Syrian opposition are gathering and qualified SNC as the leading interlocutor of the opposition.

According to UNHCR, on 30 March, there are 8,400 Syrian refugees in Jordan. The EU is financing humanitarian assistance inside Syria and in support to refugees in neighbouring countries with an amount of EUR 10 million.

Economic and social issues

The Syrian economy continues to decline. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), GDP contracted by 3.4% during 2011 (according to other sources the number may be significantly higher). The level of economic activity in Syria remains low and is expected to decrease further in 2012 as the security situation continues to deteriorate. Thus economic contraction is likely to be significantly higher in 2012 as reserves and savings run out. The Syrian government remains absent in terms of economic policy, offering no clear direction. The economic pressure caused by the crisis and by international sanctions is expected to lead to reduced public services, e.g. healthcare, education and infrastructure maintenance. Subsidies on mazout (used as heating oil and diesel) are expected to be reduced. The political and economic stalemates are expected to last in the short to medium term.

Trade-related issues

The EU has imposed restrictive measures and sanctions on Syria since May 2011. They have been updated and extended 14 times. Syrian exports have been negatively affected by the EU import ban on Syrian crude oil, which represented 27.4% of total exports in 2010. The financial sector in Syria is mainly affected by US restrictions on the use of the dollar. It has made it extremely difficult to perform any transactions through the regular financial system. International transactions have also been significantly reduced, also affecting international trade which is hampered by the difficulty of obtaining foreign currency to pay for goods.

EU Cooperation

While the bilateral cooperation with the Syrian government was suspended in response to the regime’s repression, several projects are still ongoing in support to Non State Actors, the Syrian civil society, and the refugee populations. Tempus and Erasmus programmes with Syrian students and universities are also continuing.

The Commission approved in late 2011 a Special Measure to support two United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) projects targeting both Palestinian refugees and the Syrian population. The Palestinian refugees remain a priority: from a population of over 500.000 refugees, it is estimated that more than 10% are directly affected by the conflict. UNRWA is currently one of the last executive agencies with a real operational capacity on the ground, and its mandate allows to some extent the inclusion of Syrians as beneficiaries.

Given the security situation and the major operational constraints, options are currently very limited to implementing projects in Syria.

Over the past months, the EU foreign ministers have repeatedly declared that as soon as a genuine democratic transition begins, the EU is ready to develop a new and ambitious partnership with Syria across all areas of mutual interest, including by mobilising assistance, strengthening trade and economic relations and supporting transitional justice and political transition.

Civil Society: role and EU support

Under thematic instruments, several activities are now being implemented or planned in the field of support to civil society and Human Rights defenders. In particular, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) allows emergency support to Human Rights defenders, as well as support to documentation of Human Rights violations, digital security, media, networking of activists and support to Syrian bloggers and independent media.

EU–Syria – Background

FACTS AND FIGURES

December 2008: EU and Syria initial Association Agreement.

October 2009: EU invites Syria to sign the Association Agreement, Syria declines.

March 2011: Uprising begins.

May 2011: EU suspends bilateral cooperation programmes between the EU and Syria; EU freezes draft Association Agreement, the EIB suspends new operations in Syria.

May 2011: EU imposes restrictive measures and sanctions on Syria, which have to date been extended 14 times.

November 2011: Syria suspended its membership and its participation to the Union for the Mediterranean.

More info at:

http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm

http://eeas.europa.eu/syria/index_en.htm

http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm