



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 24 May 2013

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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Delegations

Subject:	Summary record of the plenary session of the European Parliament, held in Strasbourg on 22 May 2013 Situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries <i>Statement by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy</i>
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Commissioner Füle, speaking on behalf of the High Representative, delivered the speech in the Annex.

The following Members intervened on behalf of political groups:

- Mr Salafranca (EPP, ES) regretted that the debate only focused on the issue of Syrian refugees rather than on recent developments concerning the situation in Syria. He wondered in particular what was the position of some of the neighbouring countries (among others, Israel, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, etc.) with respect to the ongoing conflict. He regretted that the EU had been "eclipsed" as far as the search for a political solution to the crisis was concerned.

- Ms De Keyser (S&D, BE) described the appalling situation of Syrian refugees and the dramatic consequences for the region. She deplored the fact that EU Member States had been reluctant to accept Syrian refugees - even those who had left the Syrian army and could therefore be entitled to asylum. Like Mr Salafranca, she also regretted that Europe was playing no role at political level.
- Ms Schaake (ALDE, NL) noted that the conflict was radicalising and that the humanitarian crisis was of unprecedented magnitude. She was particularly critical of the EU and of the High Representative, wondering where she was at the moment and if she had attended the meeting of the Friends of Syria. She considered that the EU needed a long-term plan and had to put pressure on the Russians, in particular to stop the transfer of arms to the Syrian regime.
- Ms Sargentini (Greens/ALE, NL) focused on the issue of refugees, including the Palestinian ones, and insisted on the EU's responsibility in sharing the burden with Syria's neighbouring countries. She deplored the fact that some refugees had been sent back to Syria.
- Mr Szymanski (ECR, PL) called on the EU not to exclude any option for its engagement. He condemned the operation of "cleansing" of Christians in Syria, carried out also by some elements of the opposition.
- Mr Belder (EFD, NL) raised the issue of the abduction of four members of the Christian clergy and denounced discrimination against the Palestinian refugees.
- Ms Matias (GUE/NGL, PT) called for a political solution to the Syrian crisis and for an end to the transfer of arms to the regime.
- Mr Van Der Stoep (NI, NL) raised concerns over external support to the parties in conflict.

Members speaking in their personal capacity contributed to enlarging the debate beyond the specific issue of refugees.

Members were unanimous in denouncing the living conditions in refugee camps, notably those in Jordan, where rape, sexual violations, fake marriages and other violations of human rights appeared to be taking place, with children and women particularly vulnerable categories of refugees. Ms Neyts (ALDE, BE), Mr Van Orden (ECR, UK), Mr Obermayr (NI, AT) and Mr Lopez Aguilar (S&D, ES) all called on rich Arab States to bear their share of responsibility in accepting Syrian

refugees. Ms Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR) and Mr Schmidt (ALDE, SE) also called into question the attitude of EU Member States which were too reluctant, in their view, in receiving refugees. They called for the application of the "temporary protection" directive and the activation of mechanisms specifically set up to face crises of this type. Ms Neyts and Mr Paşcu (S&D, RO) deplored the fact that the principle of responsibility to protect was not implemented.

The attitude of the EU in the Syrian crisis was an issue raised by many Members. While there was a general appreciation of the amount of humanitarian aid devoted to Syria and the neighbouring countries, criticisms were widespread on the lack of initiative on the political front (Ms Flautre, Ms Oomen-Ruijten (EPP, NL), Mr Panzeri (S&D, IT), Mr Paşcu). In particular Ms Flautre noted that the EU was excluded from the Geneva process, leaving scope for Bashar al-Assad to take advantage of this initiative. In her view the political and humanitarian aspects should not be viewed as being contradictory. Mr Panzeri said that while Russia, Iran and the Hezbollah were taking part in the conflict, the EU was a mere spectator. These Members called on the EU to take action and to do so with a sense of urgency, taking into account the risk of destabilisation of the whole region.

On the arms embargo, Members expressed different positions. While Ms Flautre and Mr Van Orden called for its lifting as the only means to strengthen the opposition and accelerate the fall of the regime, Mr Arlacchi (S&D, IT), Mr Pirker (EPP, AT) and Mr Brons (NI, UK) rejected this idea, arguing that it would only lead to an escalation of violence.

Commissioner Füle gave a lengthy reply concerning many of the issues raised in the debate. Firstly he underlined the unprecedented commitment of the EU in terms of humanitarian aid, the good record of its delivery and its positive impact on the ground. Then he analysed the humanitarian and the political dimensions of the crisis. For the humanitarian side, he argued that the EU had to look in a different manner at the way its assistance had been provided. Innovative solutions had to be found and a comprehensive approach followed. According to this approach, the perspectives of High Representative Ashton, Commissioner Georgieva and Commissioner Füle had to be merged together. Concerning the political dimension, Commissioner Füle paid tribute to the tireless work of the High Representative who had been in constant contact with all the major actors with a view to

facilitating the search for a political solution. The Commissioner warned against underestimating the strong linkage between the two dimensions: he said that the less the EU was committed to a political solution, the more it had to be committed on the humanitarian side. Time had come, he concluded, to reverse this trend. On the appalling conditions of refugee camps, he gave assurances of the Commission's commitment to assist Syria's neighbours in managing safe and secure camps. Concerning the Palestinian refugees, whom he qualified as double refugees, the Commissioner recalled that the EU was the biggest donor to UNRWA and that specific programmes for Palestinians had been set up.

On 23 May 2013 the EP adopted a resolution on the situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Catherine Ashton

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission

Remarks by EU Commissioner Štefan Füle on behalf of HRVP Catherine Ashton on the situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Parliament/Strasbourg
22 May 2013

President, Honourable Members,

This is a crisis that has brought unspeakable suffering to the people of Syria and that has already gone beyond Syria's borders, dramatically destabilising the whole region.

The European Union has consistently supported the vision of a political settlement outlined in the Geneva Communiqué. High Representative/Vice President Ashton has officially expressed her full support for the joint call made by United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov to convene an international peace conference on Syria as soon as possible as a follow up to the Geneva Conference of June 2012. Keeping the political track alive is paramount for the European Union. Next week's Foreign Affairs Council discussion will take stock of where we stand, while also tackling the politically sensitive issue of adaptation of the European Union sanctions regime.

The European Union should continue its engagement with the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC) whilst remaining open to cooperation with other moderate groups.

The European Union urges all parties to the conflict to fully respect international humanitarian and human rights law and condemns terrorist attacks of any nature, including any assaults that may endanger the civilian population.

The number of people in need of assistance in Syria (4.25 million internally displaced people) and the number of refugees (1.5 million) arriving in the neighbouring countries continues to grow at an exponential pace. The UNHCR estimates that by the end of 2013 the number of Syrian refugees will have reached 3.5 million, with 1 million refugees each in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey and a further 500,000 in Iraq. Were this to be the case, this would mean that by the end of this year Syrian refugees would account for 25% of the Lebanese and 16% of the Jordanian population.

The sharp increase in refugees has increased the humanitarian needs at an alarming rate, outpacing current relief efforts and assistance. The economic costs of hosting Syrian refugees were estimated in 2013 at \$ 700 million for Lebanon and \$ 851 million for Jordan, respectively 1.6% and 2.9% of GDP of countries already heavily indebted.

The cost to Turkey so far has been about €600 million and is foreseen to reach €1 billion by the end of the year.

To respond to this challenge, the United Nations are expected to issue a revised appeal of at least \$ 3 billion in June 2013, their largest appeal ever for a single crisis.

To address these exploding needs, the European Union has repeatedly increased its funding to become the first donor with €860 million of assistance pledged of which most has been already disbursed.

Standing tall, the European Union has repeatedly called on all donors to deliver on existing pledges and to increase their contributions.

We are improving coordination among donors and welcome the Assistance Coordination Unit's efforts on using all channels to provide assistance everywhere in Syria. We will work to strengthen this Syrian-led effort and will work tirelessly to improve access for our aid.

We are also working intensively to mobilise significant additional funds this year with a view to addressing the plight of the refugees and stabilising Syria's neighbouring countries.

This will require a long term commitment and a regional approach. To better coordinate our efforts, the Commission, the European External Action Service together with Member States are working on a comprehensive response to the crisis, which will also include dealing with threats stemming from the potential use of chemical weapons, the presence of European fighters in the country and the provision of international protection to Syrians in the European Union.

President, Honourable Members,

While any action seems inadequate given the scale of the Syrian tragedy, we have mobilised an unprecedented amount of effort to assist Syrians in need and their neighbours. We have a record in delivering on our promises, we have a record in delivering on the ground but we need to do more and the letter from some of you last week was very clear in this respect. International NGOs / UN partners are doing very good work but are completely overwhelmed given that the pace of arrival of refugees is constantly growing. As Commissioner Georgieva rightly said on her recent visit to Lebanon and Jordan, this is the most serious and complex humanitarian crisis of the past decades.

In this context, we will have to tackle more decisively issues of prioritisation, coordination and effectiveness. We have to move to a longer term approach, not only providing shelter, but investing in infrastructures and services for refugees such as health and education. I am talking about us looking differently at the EU assistance - we used to address the countries, for the first time we are addressing the region.

Yet we have to be aware that the better must not become the enemy of the good, and we have to progressively enhance our efforts. An increasing volume of assistance, quick mobilisation of funds, effective access, and coordination, coupled with appropriate political response are our signposts. We will continue as long as needed and work hand in hand with our partners in the international community to make good on our promise of assistance and a lasting political settlement of this terrible conflict.
