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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 9 October 2013
Council and Commission statements - EU and Member State measures to tackle the flow of refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria
[2013/2837(RSP)]

Mr Leškevičius, Lithuania's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, speaking on behalf of the Council, delivered the speech set out in [Annex I](#).

Commissioner Barnier, speaking on behalf of Commissioner Malmström and Commissioner Georgieva, focussed on the unprecedented magnitude of the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Syria. He paid tribute to the neighbouring countries, both their authorities and their people, for their openness towards Syrians fleeing the conflict. He mentioned the Regional Protection Programme developed by the Commission in cooperation with Member States, which would be beneficial to all refugees in the region. Commissioner Barnier commended those EU Member States that had agreed to resettle Syrian refugees and called on the others to follow their example. He stressed that the refugees came via different routes and that very often their travel was

organised by criminal networks that had to be dismantled. On borders, the Commissioner said that the right response was not their closure, but rather the opposite and he added that, should the crisis deteriorate further as expected, Frontex would need to reinforce its work and get additional funding.

The following MEPs spoke on behalf of political groups:

- Mr Weber (EPP, DE) said that all efforts had to be made to stop violence in Syria. He considered that Europe had to do more to take refugees and regretted that the Council was reluctant to act. He also described as disgraceful the fact that the Council had not yet adopted the draft amending budget for 2013 to allow the EU to live up to its commitments on humanitarian assistance.
- Mr Swoboda (S&D, AT) felt that Europe should be more open to refugees and regretted that some Member States did not do "their job". He said that he was disappointed by the conclusions of the Council adopted the day before: it was time for action and not for further task-forces. He said that it was now up to the European Council to deal with the issue of Syrian refugees. In his view, European borders had to be opened and safe humanitarian corridors created so as to give a chance to Syrian refugees to come to Europe and be appropriately trained to be able to participate in the post-war reconstruction.
- Mr Verhofstadt (ALDE, BE) called on the Commission and the Council to take a clear stand on the EP's proposal for a European humanitarian conference. He said that the fact that only three MS had accepted Syrian refugees amounted to a scandal and called for the activation of the temporary protection directive. Finally he said that the attitude of the international community on the Syrian crisis was shameful: the chemical problem was supposed to be tackled but nobody cared about continuing massacres carried out by other means.
- Ms Sargentini (Greens, NL) also spoke of a scandal, referring to the vast majority of Member States that had not hosted any Syrian refugees. She argued that simply providing financial support was no longer enough. Borders had to be opened. She hoped that a gesture could come from the Lithuanian Presidency.
- Mr Kirkhope (ECR, UK) said that although he was against the common asylum system, the moral imperative of solidarity had to be applied when lives were at stake.
- Ms Zimmer (GUE/NGL, DE) described the JHA Council meeting of the day before as a scandal. In her view, if Member States did not show solidarity to Syrian refugees, they were like accomplices in the massacre. EU credibility on the world stage was at stake, she concluded.

- Mr Salavrakos (EFD, EL) outlined the dramatic situation of Greece, the country that was most affected by the migrations.
- Mr Stadler (NI, AT) said that Europe was now suffering because of its failed policy in Syria and argued that it was up to rich Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to pay for refugees.

Commissioner Barnier asked for the floor to reply to Mr Verhofstadt's question and said that the Commission was certainly in favour of a European humanitarian conference. Such a conference, organised at high level, could deal with crucial issues such as the situation of the most affected countries, the conditions for resettlement, criminal networks, civil protection, development and peace in the region, etc.

Members speaking on an individual basis echoed group leaders. There were strong criticisms of the EU in general, for keeping its borders closed, and of Member States for not showing enough solidarity. Mr Howitt (S&D, UK) summarised those feelings by wondering if the fact that 60% of resettlements of Syrian refugees in Europe took place in two Member States could be called "solidarity". Some MEPs went beyond simply calling for the opening of borders and noted that Europe did not lack specific tools to welcome refugees: Article 5 of the Schengen Borders Code, Article 25 of the Visa Code, temporary or permanent resident permits and humanitarian visas were some of those mentioned (Ms Guillaume (S&D, FR), Mr Lopez Aguilar (S&D, ES), etc.). Ms Gomes (S&D, PT) called for a common asylum and migration policy and Ms Keller (Greens/EFA, DE) for a comprehensive resettlement programme. MEPs coming from Member States particularly affected by the phenomenon of migrations, such as Mr Scurria (EPP, IT), emphasised the fact that those countries could not be left alone. A few of those speaking (Ms Millan Mon (EPP, ES), Ms Essayah (EPP, FI)) noted that quotas were only a part of the answer and only by addressing the root causes - the conflict in Syria - could the problem of refugees be tackled. Ms De Keyser (S&D, BE) was almost alone in commending the EU - together with the UN - for the excellent job done in the region.

Taking the floor again at the end of the debate, Mr Barnier, on behalf of the Commission, came back to the issue of humanitarian visas. He noted that the Commission had called on Member States to use them "generously", but he stressed that the delivery of such visas was a purely national and sovereign decision. He considered that convening a European conference, as requested by the EP,

would give the opportunity to have a common debate on such sensitive issues. He noted that the Commission had organised some fact-finding missions to evaluate the technical and financial needs of those Member States most affected by the refugee pressure. The Commissioner reminded those MEPs who had called for increased EU assistance to Syrian neighbouring countries that there was no more money available in the 2013 budget and greater resources had to be found for 2014. Finally the Commissioner again drew attention to the arguments in favour of a common European response to the problem of Syrian refugees.

Mr Leškevičius, on behalf of the Council, stressed the fact that the EU and its Member States had done a lot to combat the Syrian crisis, but acknowledged that there should be no complacency. He noted that the best solution would be a lasting peace deal addressing the reasons why Syrians were fleeing their country. In the meantime, international humanitarian law had to be respected and donors should increase their coordination in order to strengthen efforts in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of aid. He reassured MEPs that the Lithuanian Presidency was actively engaged on the Syrian crisis. He welcomed the proposal for a humanitarian conference, as well as the Commission positive response, and said that the Council stood ready to work with the Commission on this. But he also pointed out that a conference was not enough and that the key issue was rather to put an end to the conflict and its humanitarian consequences.

On the same day, the EP adopted a resolution on "EU and Member State measures to tackle the flow of refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria" (see [Annex II](#)).

Mr President, Honourable Members,

During the last two years of conflict in Syria we have been witness to a number of tragic milestones, but early September saw a particularly depressing one: the number of refugees registered or awaiting registration passed 2 million. More than half of them are children, another quarter are women.

As I speak to you today, the number of refugees from Syria has risen yet again, to more than 2.1 million. Not only is this an appalling reality for those whose lives are marred by the traumas of violence and displacement. It also constitutes a huge challenge for Syria's neighbours. And unless things change for the better inside Syria, the UN estimates there may be almost three and a half million refugees by the end of the year.

In recent months in particular the number of Syrian nationals heading towards EU Member States has significantly increased. The Council has been following with great concern developments in the Syrian crisis and is aware of the potential challenges to Member States of increasing migratory pressure from nationals fleeing from Syria. The issue was discussed most recently at yesterday's Justice and Home Affairs Council. At that meeting ministers reiterated the firm commitment of the EU to step up assistance to those affected by the crisis. The Council also received a report from the Commission on the results of a recent fact-finding mission to some of those EU Member States most directly affected by migratory pressures from Syria.

We are aware that the scale of this plight places an enormous burden upon the governments and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon, and in Iraq and Turkey. We therefore commend Syria's neighbours for having kept most of their borders open, providing safe haven for those who have lost everything. We strongly encourage these countries to continue on this path. At the same time we acknowledge the international community's responsibility to share part of this burden by offering support to those who so generously host large numbers of refugees.

The EU and its Member States have been at the forefront of providing assistance in response to the Syria crisis from the outset. Almost every Member State is seeking to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people both inside and outside the country. This is despite the current difficult economic climate and in some case very strict budgetary constraints.

To date, EU humanitarian funding for the Syria crisis stands at more than 1.5 billion euros, with two-thirds coming from the Member States. A further 412 million euros has been mobilised through non-humanitarian EU instruments, a large part of which will benefit host communities and local societies. This brings total funding by the EU and the Member States to more than 1.9 billion euros. The EU has also called on donors to increase their coordination and asked humanitarian partners to reinforce the monitoring of their activities so as to help provide an overview of the assistance being provided and so ensure better accountability towards our citizens.

This action to address humanitarian needs must be strengthened, given the lack of any immediate prospects to an end to the conflict. But the EU is also considering measures over the medium and long term. The objective of the EU is not only to provide assistance to refugees but also to support the countries and communities in the region affected by the current refugee flow. The Commission, in close cooperation with relevant international partners, is preparing a Regional Protection Programme (RPP), which is specially designed to address the medium and long-term challenges of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, and is expected to start functioning early next year. The Council yesterday welcomed the progress towards the establishment of this Programme and invited the Commission to continue its important work.

The resettlement of Syrian nationals in need of protection - and the relocation of refugees between EU Member States - are amongst the measures currently under consideration at EU level. These measures can benefit from funding through the European Refugee Fund, which will become the Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) when negotiations between the Council and the EP are concluded.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

We are focusing this morning on the particular issue of the plight of refugees, but we must not lose sight of the most important goal: ending the violence and heading towards a peaceful and democratic transition in Syria.

We have consistently emphasised the need for a political solution – the only possible solution to this war - and the need for the Security Council to act and effectively end this conflict. The High Representative has welcomed the UNSC resolution on Syrian Chemical weapons as representing a major step towards a sustainable and unified international response to the crisis in Syria. It follows on from the important decision taken by the OPCW Executive Council in The Hague.

This decision should pave the way to the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria, and set a standard for the international community in responding to threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. The legally binding and enforceable resolution condemns the attacks of 21 August and calls for accountability for this crime and envisages a forceful international reaction in the event of non-compliance. The EU has reiterated its readiness to support actions foreseen under the resolution as well as under the decision of the OPCW Executive Council – and we are indeed in contact with them to discuss practical support.

We need to take full advantage of this momentum. Internationally, we have continued to work with all partners: with the US, with Russia, with the UN, with many Arab nations, to achieve a united international response. The UNSC resolution contains a very clear endorsement of the Geneva agreement reached on the 30 June 2012 and calls for the convening of the follow up conference as soon as possible.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

Over the past two years, the Syria conflict has deteriorated into a full-blown civil war. The need to provide innocent Syrian civilians with humanitarian assistance is greater than ever before. The EU and its Member States have made outstanding contributions to this effect, and will continue to be among those leading the way to securing further funding. Most importantly, we are increasingly pooling our resources, and the Presidency is ready to play its full role in this endeavour.

The Council takes note of the Parliament's draft resolution on the table today. It proves once again the attention with which this Parliament has been following the appalling situation in Syria and its spill-over effects in the whole region.

In humanitarian assistance, as in other policy fields, it is clear that we can act most effectively when we coordinate amongst ourselves and build on the particular strengths and experience of the EU, of its institutions and of each and every Member State together.

Thank you.

EU and Member State measures to tackle the flow of refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria

European Parliament resolution of 9 October 2013 on EU and Member State measures to tackle the flow of refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria (2013/2837(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, in particular those of 16 February 2012¹, 13 September 2012², 23 May 2013³ and 12 September 2013⁴, and on refugees fleeing armed conflict,
- having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Syria of 23 January, 18 February, 11 March, 22 April, 27 May, 24 June, 9 July and 22 July 2013; having regard to the European Council conclusions on Syria of 8 February 2013,
- having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), Catherine Ashton, of 21 August 2013 on the latest reports of use of chemical weapons in Damascus, of 23 August 2013 on the high urgency of a political solution to the Syrian conflict (reflecting the agreed position of the EU on Syria of 7 September 2013), of 10 September 2013 on the proposal to place Syria's chemical weapons under international control, and of 14 September 2013 following the US-Russian agreement on chemical weapons in Syria, as well as to the statements made by the VP/HR during Parliament's plenary debate in Strasbourg on 11 September 2013,
- having regard to the statements made by the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva, on Syrian refugees and the EU's response, in particular her statement of 3 September 2013 on the latest figure regarding refugees fleeing from the Syrian crisis, and to the ECHO (Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection) situation reports and factsheets on Syria,
- having regard to the remarks made by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, at the Informal Meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Vilnius, on 18 July 2013⁵,
- having regard to the Security Council briefings on Syria issued by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, in particular that of 18 April 2013,
- having regard to the joint statement of the Ministerial Meeting of Syria Bordering Countries organised by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on 4 September 2013,

¹ OJ C 249 E, 30.8.2013, p. 37.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0351.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0223.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0378.

⁵ <http://www.unhcr.org/51b7149c9.html>

- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council resolutions on Syria,
 - having regard to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol thereto on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, to all of which Syria is a party,
 - having regard to Articles 78, 79 and 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols thereto,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas up to 20 September 2013 the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had registered a total of 1 929 227 Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and in North Africa; whereas the total number of refugees, including those unregistered, is estimated at 2 102 582; whereas according to the same sources 76 % of the Syrian refugee population are women and children; whereas 410 000 Syrian refugee children are of primary school age (between 5 and 11); whereas according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as at 9 September 2013 was 4,25 million;
- B. whereas according to the UNHCR the number of refugees (including those awaiting registration) present in receiving countries as at 20 September 2013 was as follows: Turkey, 492 687; Lebanon, 748 608; Jordan, 531 768; Iraq, 190 857; Egypt, 124 373; Morocco, Algeria and Libya, 14 289 (registered); whereas thousands of Syrians are fleeing on a daily basis to neighbouring countries and the UN Syria Regional Response Plan is projecting a total of 3,5 million refugees from Syria by the end of 2013;
- C. whereas asylum claims in the EU from Syrians have continued to increase in 2013, with a total of 52 037 asylum claims having been made since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 in the EU and its closest neighbours (Switzerland and Norway);
- D. whereas, within the EU-28, Germany (14 842) and Sweden (14 083) have received 59 % of the claims lodged; whereas, while other countries have experienced significant increases in applications, only one other Member State has received more than 2 000 claims (the UK, with 2 634);
- E. whereas there is a lack of fully accurate and reliable data about the total number of Syrians coming to Europe, and of information on the numbers seeking asylum in European countries and the number present overall; whereas, according to the UNHCR, despite these gaps, and the fact that statistics and data on adjudication practices in respect of asylum claims in EU Member States have flaws, there are indications that gaps in the protection of Syrians within the EU persist;

- F. whereas the Syrian refugee crisis constitutes a first test for the newly revised Common European Asylum System (CEAS);
- G. whereas EU legislation already provides some tools, such as the Visa Code¹ and the Schengen Borders Code², making it possible to grant humanitarian visas;
- H. whereas the Member States should be encouraged to make use of the funds that will be available under the Asylum and Migration Fund and of the funds available under the Preparatory Action ‘Enable the resettlement of refugees during emergency situations’, which covers, among other things, the following measures: supporting persons already recognised as refugees by the UNHCR; supporting emergency action in the case of groups of refugees, identified as priorities, who are under armed attack and who face conjunctures of extreme vulnerability and of a life-threatening nature; providing, where needed, extra financial support during emergencies to the UNHCR and to its liaison organisations in the Member States and at EU level;
- I. whereas the latest tragedy off Lampedusa, on 3 October 2013, left 130 migrants dead, with hundreds of others missing; whereas tens of thousands of migrants have died trying to reach the EU; pointing once more to the need to do everything possible to save the lives of people in danger and to the need for Member States to abide by their international sea-rescue obligations;
1. Is deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria and the heavy strain it is putting on neighbouring countries; expresses concern that the exodus of refugees continues to accelerate with no sign of the outflow ending soon;
 2. Praises the efforts and solidarity of the authorities of those countries and the generosity of their populations in assisting refugees from Syria;
 3. Welcomes the open-door policy of Syria’s neighbouring countries and urges them to keep their borders open to all refugees fleeing Syria;
 4. Expresses concern that a growing number of Syrians are risking their lives by embarking on dangerous boat crossings across the Mediterranean to the EU;
 5. Welcomes the fact that the EU and its Member States have committed more than EUR 1 billion in humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance to Syrians inside and outside Syria; notes that the EU is the largest humanitarian donor to the Syrian crisis; calls also on the EU to monitor the distribution of that funding;
 6. Calls for the EU to continue its generous funding of humanitarian and non-humanitarian efforts in response to the needs of people in Syria and refugees from Syria in neighbouring countries;
 7. Encourages the Member States to address acute needs through resettlement in addition to existing national quotas and through humanitarian admission; encourages the Member States to make use of the funds still available under the preparatory action / pilot project on resettlement;

¹ Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code) (OJ L 243, 15.9.2009, p. 1).

² Regulation (EC) No 562/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 establishing a Community Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code) (OJ L 105, 13.4.2006, p. 1).

8. Calls for the international community, the EU and the Member States to continue providing support in response to this exceptional humanitarian crisis and to commit themselves to providing effective assistance to Syria's neighbouring countries;
9. Calls for the EU to convene a humanitarian conference on the Syrian refugee crisis, with priority being given to actions directed at host countries in the region (in particular Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq) in order to support them in their effort to host ever-growing refugee populations and maintain an open-door policy; stresses that such a conference should involve all EU institutions and civil society organisations and focus on humanitarian efforts and on strengthening the EU's role and involvement in the diplomatic efforts to help end the conflict in Syria;
10. Stresses the importance at this stage of exploring concretely whether, how and when Member States could do more to reinforce their protection response to Syria; points to the need for solidarity and for proactive strengthening of the overall protection response in the EU through enhanced cooperation, information sharing, capacity building and policy dialogue;
11. Welcomes the general consensus existing among Member States that Syrian nationals should not be returned to Syria; stresses, however, that a more coherent approach and greater solidarity with Member States facing particular pressure are needed in the reception of refugees from Syria; calls on the Member States to make sure that all the provisions of the different instruments of the CEAS are correctly implemented;
12. Calls on the Member States to explore all existing EU law and procedures for providing safe entry into the EU in order to temporarily admit Syrians fleeing their country; notes that legal entry into the EU is preferable to more dangerous irregular entry, which could entail human trafficking risks; notes that some of the Member States have granted Syrians either permanent residency (e.g. Sweden) or temporary admission (e.g. Germany);
13. Reminds the Member States that Syrians fleeing the conflict who are seeking international protection should be referred to competent national asylum authorities and have access to fair and efficient asylum procedures;
14. Calls for the EU to take appropriate, responsible measures regarding a possible influx of refugees into its Member States; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue monitoring the current situation and to work on contingency planning, including the possibility of applying the Temporary Protection Directive¹, if and when conditions demand it;
15. Points out that the Member States are required to come to the assistance of migrants at sea, and calls on Member States which have failed to abide by their international obligations to stop turning back boats with migrants on board;

¹ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof (OJ L 212, 7.8.2001, p. 12).

16. Calls on the Member States to respect the principle of non-refoulement, in compliance with existing international and EU law; calls on the Member States to put an immediate end to any improper and extended detention practices in violation of international and European law, and points out that measures to detain migrants must always be subject to an administrative decision, and must be duly substantiated and temporary;
17. Calls on its relevant committees to continue monitoring the situation in Syria and neighbouring countries and the measures taken by the Member States in this respect;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, the Parliament and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, and the parliaments and governments of those countries neighbouring Syria and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.
