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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Plenary session of the European Parliament <i>Statement by the HR for foreign affairs and security policy</i> Situation in Syria Strasbourg, 11 September 2013

The High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy (HR) delivered the speech in Annex.

On behalf of political groups.

M. Salafranca, EPP, ES stated that the case of Syria was demonstrating both the relative irrelevance both of the UN and the EU's external policy, despite the new provisions of the treaty and the valuable action by the HR. He regretted that Assad was gaining ground and time and the civilian population suffering more as a result. He welcomed the recent proposal for a political solution whilst calling for the rapid adoption of a UN Resolution. He said that Chapter VII of the UN Convention would need to be enacted in case the political solution would not bring about the expected results. He argued that if President Assad were to continue military action in the same way, the establishment of a humanitarian corridor and a no-fly zone ought to be envisaged. He expressed concern at the fact that the EU was continuing to provide financial aid to the countries of the Southern neighborhood in a difficult political context and asked the HR about possible measures to be taken towards protecting the seven hostages taken in the Ashraf Camp, six of them being women.

Mr Swoboda, S&D, AT argued that without the threat of a military intervention by Western allies, there would have been no proposal for a political solution. He suggested to give this a chance. He advocated however appropriate pressure to be exerted by the EU and the international community towards ensuring the effectiveness of a ban on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, making sure that the Syrian regime would effectively destroy the chemical weapons it holds and that Syria becomes part to the Chemical Weapons Convention. He called on the EU to act in a more decisive way to help and show concrete solidarity to the Syrian refugees.

Mr. Verhofstadt, ALDE, BE argued that he had been calling for more decisive action by the EU on Syria for over two years and that the lack of appropriate action had led to a situation whereby some 100,000 Syrians had died and two million Syrian refugees and six million displaced persons had fled the atrocities committed in Syria. He said that there was no doubt that the Assad regime was the only one that could have used chemical weapons in the way it happened. He advocated a two-track approach by which there would be first an effective control on the use and detention of chemical weapons whilst ensuring that the Assad regime would not take advantage of the situation to gain time and delay compliance with the demands by the international community, and second the imposition of a no-fly zone to stop the slaughter. He regretted that the US was not even considering this option and that the EU was not to be part of the meeting to take place between M. Kerry and M. Lavrov.

Ms. Lunacek, greens/EFA, AT welcomed the positive international momentum towards a diplomatic solution to the crisis, called on a Geneva II initiative involving Iran and suggested that if no good solution were to be found with the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly be asked to deal with the issue as provided for in the UN Convention. On the issue of refugees, she called on the EU to do more, both in financial terms and by accepting more Syrian refugees in the Member States.

Mr. Tannock, ECR, UK agreed on the need for a no-fly zone, welcomed the US decision to give up the option of military strikes on condition that there would be appropriate control of the chemical weapons detained by Syria. He considered however that the diplomatic solution envisaged was raising questions about enforcement, impunity and the Geneva II option. He deplored what he saw as cynicism by Russia and China.

Mr. Meyer, GUE/NGL, ES stated that his group was opposed to any unilateral military action that would not take place within the UN framework, and advocated a political solution. He argued that lies had often been used in the past to justify illegitimate military interventions, as had been the case to justify the US military action in Iraq. He called for not repeating past mistakes and argued that an intervention outside the UN would be barbaric. He called for an international Convention that would ban all ABC armaments.

Mr. Farage, EFD, UK said his group was opposed to a military intervention in Syria as such a decision would be based on an oversimplified analysis of the situation in this country that would not be in line with reality. He argued that bombing Syrian territories would only make the situation more difficult for the Syrian people. He welcomed efforts towards a diplomatic solution. He conceded that there was no guarantee so far that such a solution would work, but argued that this path was providing a chance for a peaceful solution. In reply to a blue card, he agreed that what had happened in Syria was absolutely appalling, but argued that one should be certain that the situation would not be made even more difficult before deciding on military intervention.

Mr. Gollnisch, NI, FR argued that lies had often been used in the past to justify military action and quoted the cases of Iraq, Kosovo, Bosnia, Libya as some examples of political leaders lying to obtain the agreement of the international community to intervene in a country.

In the individual interventions which followed, MEPs largely echoed previous interventions and welcomed efforts towards a political solution (Flautre, greens/EFA, FR, Piotrowski, ECR, PL, Matias, GUE/NGL, PT, Borghezio, NI, IT, Danjean, EPP, FR, Rancek, S&D, CZ, Watson, ALDE, UK, Griffin, NI, UK, Koppa, S&D, EL) while stressing the need to remain cautious (Van Orden, ECR, NL). The Chair of the Security and Defense Committee M. Danjean, EPP, FR questioned the overall strategy behind the planned military intervention by the US and France, arguing that there had not been enough thinking on a proposal for a political solution on the day after in Syria and that the language used of "punitive" strikes was inappropriate. He added that any peace process ought to be inclusive and realistic. Some called for the international community to work towards an effective ban of non-conventional weapons (Brok, EPP, DE, Van Orden, ECR, NL, Lochbihler, Greens/EFA, AT). Many MEPs across political groups called for the EU to be more generous and do more when it comes to the situation of Syrian refugees (De Keyser, S&D, BE, Matias, GUE/NGL, PT, Sargentini, Greens/EFA, NL, Gabriel, EPP, BG, Iacolino, EPP, IT). Several referred to the persecutions of Christian communities (Mikolasik, EPP, SK, Borghezio, NI, IT, who criticized the HR for only paying lip service to the issue, Griffin, NI, UK).

Many other MEPs welcomed the action by the HR and congratulated her (Lambsdorff, ALDE, DE, Trautmann, S&D, FR, Oomen-Rijten, EPP, NL, Deva, ECR, UK, Gabriel, EPP, BG).

In her concluding remarks, the HR agreed that proper enforcement of any diplomatic solution had to be ensured, stated that the UN inspectors' report was still awaited and was an important element to take into account once it is released, agreed that a peace Conference ought to be as inclusive as possible. She further remarked that a humanitarian corridor and a no-fly zone was not on the agenda at the moment and that such a solution was not easy to put in place. She stated that a huge amount of work had been done to find solutions to the Syrian crisis, including by meeting the representatives of the various components of the Syrian opposition and trying to bring together the international community for a solution, and that there were many difficult challenges in bringing up a peace project. She recalled that the EU was the biggest donor in humanitarian aid and would be called to do much more, especially when the time came to rebuild the country. She stated that the best way to help Syrians would indeed be to help them return to their homes. In reply to M. Vidal-Quadras, EPP, ES, who stated that members of the Iranian opposition had been basically physically eliminated within the Ashraf Camp and that the international community and the EU ought to react strongly, she recalled that 52 people had indeed died and that seven were missing. She said that she had spoken to the Iraqi Prime Minister on the issue and had offered the EU's support to the new UN envoy posted in Iraq.

**Statement by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and security policy
Plenary session of the European Parliament,
Strasbourg, 11 September 2013
(check against delivery)**

Mr President, Honourable Members,

On 21 August chemical weapons were used to kill hundreds of people, which constituted a war crime and a crime against humanity, running contrary to all values shared by the international community. We had extensive discussions at the informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Vilnius last week and we agreed that a clear and strong international response is needed in the face of that crime. We must help ensure that there is no impunity and prevent creating a horrific precedent for further chemical weapons use.

We must now pay utmost attention to the developments following the Russian proposal made on Monday. Namely, to put Syria's chemical weapons under an international surveillance regime. Let me come back to that later.

But we must also see the broader picture. In the past weeks, we witnessed yet another round of spiralling violence in Syria. The Syrian regime has stepped up its military campaign against the opposition-held areas, sometimes taking recourse to indiscriminate shelling of entire neighbourhoods.

We have seen deeply disturbing reports of increased violence along confessional and ethnic lines. There were attacks against the Alawi population at the hands of extremist rebel groups, followed by a harsh response from the regime. Some Christian communities were recently targeted too. In the north east, intensive fighting involving the Syrian Kurds lasted for weeks and resulted in increased refugee flows to Iraq.

I commend the UN investigation mission for engaging in their field inquiry into the attack of 21 August with courage and speed in a difficult security situation. It is now of paramount importance that the mission complete their report as soon as possible.

Several EU Member States and the United States have come forward with their own assessment considering that only the regime possesses chemical agents and means of their delivery in a sufficient quantity. This leads them to conclude that the Syrian regime was behind the attack and to support an international response by force given the blockage of the Security Council.

I have consistently emphasised the need to continue efforts in the Security Council in order to effectively end the violence in Syria. I reiterate that the role of the Security Council is crucial and irreplaceable. It is regrettable that the Council has been unable to reach agreement on how to shoulder its responsibilities with regard to the Syrian conflict.

Internationally, I have worked tirelessly with the US, Russia, the UN and Arab partners to achieve a united international response in view of the developments in Syria.

In Vilnius, we were able to find a common language of all 28 Member States. While we did not go, at some points, as far as the statement signed by the like-minded at G20, we clearly formulated the substance of the EU position:

(1) condemnation of the chemical attack and recognition of the apparent evidence of the regime's responsibility; (2) the necessity for the international community to respond and a strong call on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibilities; (3) the emphasis on a political solution and support for the Geneva II initiative; and (4) our commitment to continue providing aid at present and in future.

Now let me turn to the most recent developments. Russia has proposed putting the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal under international control and destroying it eventually. The Syrian foreign minister has welcomed the proposal. The UN Secretary-General has stated he is considering urging the Security Council along these lines and support is coming from many directions.

It is vital that we seize this new momentum. For the first time in many months the international community is uniting toward an action on Syria. However, we need to proceed with prudence and examine these developments in details. First and foremost, the Syrian regime must agree to such an international action fully and without conditions. It has to follow up with all possible transparency and adherence to all related requirements. Today, the regime's response needs to be different from the recent past, when it broke its promises repeatedly and put obstacles in the way of international efforts.

I reaffirm that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict. Only a political solution can deliver Syria from this traumatic experience of suffering, ruin and flagrant disregard for human dignity.

The pain and loss has gone on for far too long and it is high time that the innocents are given the opportunity to start putting their wrecked lives back together again, for their own sake and for that of the entire region. We cannot ignore the plight of the refugees and displaced, especially the children who are being deprived of their basic needs.

The latest developments provide an occasion to reinvigorate the broader diplomatic process. I urge all stakeholders to use this opportunity to further a political settlement of the conflict.

The Geneva II initiative launched by Secretary Kerry and Minister Lavrov must move ahead as soon as conditions permit. It is time for the international community to put aside their differences and bring the parties of the conflict to the negotiations table. The challenge facing us is not only that of bringing an end to this horrific conflict, but also to map out the steps that will follow to ensure that the future holds a stable prospect for Syria.

The EU will remain ready to provide all support needed to achieve that goal. We are ready to work with the parties, notably the opposition, as well as the UN and international partners to make a political solution in Syria reality.

Crucially, we will uphold our commitment, as the largest donor, to deliver aid and assistance to the most vulnerable and needy. So far, including Member States' contributions, we have been able to provide € 1.3 billion to address the crisis.

We are putting intensive efforts into ensuring that our assistance reaches the right beneficiaries in all parts of Syria. All channels are used to access the north of the country, both from the south through the front lines and from the north across borders.

For the sake of Syria's future, I have no hesitation to re-affirm that the EU will be at the forefront of efforts to secure a successful, healing transition, in full accordance with and respect for the needs of the Syrian people.