



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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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 16 January 2013 Statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy - Situation in Syria

Minister Creighton, speaking on behalf of the High Representative, delivered the speech set out in the Annex.

For the political groups, the following speakers took the floor:

- Mr Salafranca (EPP, ES) stressed the dramatic situation in Syria and considered that the results announced as regards sanctions were as expected; the Russian position had failed to materialise. He noted that Joint Special Representative Brahimi had recently stated that the situation could get even worse. He urged the international community to take appropriate action. Mr Salafranca added that citizens expected not only a humanitarian response from the EU but also an end to the bloodshed.
- Ms De Keyser (S&D, BE) stressed the need to analyse events thoroughly and to take stock of the diplomatic approach. She considered that time was not in the EU's favour and therefore that there should perhaps be a plan B or a riposte. She took the view that there was a lack of strategic vision. Ms De Keyser defended the view that humanitarian aid should be maintained without restrictions.

- Ms Schaake (ALDE, NL) argued that the international community had failed to take decisive action, which was a disgrace and, considering the current circumstances, intervention was needed. She was of the opinion that there should at least be a UN Security Council resolution to make sure that humanitarian aid reached people in need.
- Ms Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR) argued for a change of course. She criticised the disparate contributions to EU humanitarian aid, which, furthermore, often failed to reach the recipients, as the regime was responsible for distribution. She also put particular emphasis on the refugee situation and argued for a temporary European plan for hosting refugees. Ms Flautre moreover stated that there should be a change of course regarding the arms embargo.
- Mr Tannock (ECR, UK) underlined that little had been achieved in terms of finding a peaceful solution and that both sides had been accused of atrocities. Therefore, he considered that the Parliament should be cautious about its endorsement of all opposition forces. He believed that Assad should step down and urged China and Russia to reach agreement with the EU and the US on this matter.
- Mr Belder (EFD, NL) considered that the top priority should be to end the civil war, which meant there should be political dialogue. He hoped that the Council would act accordingly and establish contacts with Syrian opposition forces which were committed to national reconciliation and to ending the armed conflict.
- Ms Matias (GUE/NGL, PT) said that the Syrian crisis demonstrated the failure of the international community and its organisations/actors. She urged the EU to adopt its own policy for democracy and peace in the Middle East.
- Mr Claeys (NI, BE) said that the debate showed that the Parliament's euphoria during the Arab Spring had been naïve, as one set of dictator had been replaced by another; this could happen in Syria too. He condemned the human rights violations by Assad and the opposition forces. He added that Al Qaeda groups should not be allowed to get a foothold in Syria.

Commissioner Georgieva said that the humanitarian crisis in Syria was going from bad to worse and that there was worse still to come. She stressed that there had been a significant deterioration in the situation (fighting, the economic situation and winter). She provided detailed information on European humanitarian assistance, in particular access on the ground and humanitarian advocacy, which enabled one out of every three Syrians to receive assistance. She concluded by saying that only politicians could end the crisis.

Minister Creighton wound up the debate by saying she shared the concerns expressed and that it would require the determination of the international community to find, ultimately, a political solution. She replied to the individual Members and pointed out that cooperation between the EU institutions was essential in order to carry forward day-to-day work on the humanitarian and political front. She assured them that the focus notably at the next Foreign Affairs Council would be on finding better ways to make the EU's efforts more effective.

Speech delivered by Minister Creighton, Strasbourg, 16 January 2013

Mr President and distinguished Members of the European Parliament, permit me to update you, on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Catherine Ashton, on the EU's assessment of the situation in Syria.

I am sure that all of us here would agree that the political solution to the heart-wrenching and almost two-year long conflict in Syria is not yet in sight. The political process that the EU and the international community have been supporting with true resolve has, unfortunately, not moved far enough as yet. Conversely – and there are also no signs that the Assad regime has moved in its own intransigence – we all witnessed the defiance of President Assad in his unacceptable speech, as recognised by many of our supporters and Joint Special Representative Brahimi. From our side, the EU's official statements remain unambiguous: there is no future for Assad in the political future of Syria.

The EU has incessantly worked with all partners on the bilateral, multilateral and interinstitutional levels to address the whole array of pressing issues. Political efforts continue, and there is no need to recall all of the daily diplomacy that operates in Brussels as well as in European and world capitals. From our side, we can count the most recent statement of the High Representative on Assad's speech, the European Council and FAC conclusions of December that covered very broad areas of our approach to the Syrian tragedy. We must also mention the extension of the sanctions regime, official recognition of the Syrian Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people, or support to the Third Committee, as well UNHRC resolutions. And we will keep on examining if further sanctions can be adopted in order to put pressure on the regime.

The EU commends and continues to support the mission of Mr Brahimi. His perseverance in reaching a workable solution over the last months has earned him much deserved respect. We do hope that within the international community we are nearing a compromise on how to best assist Syria's future. Here we will be watching very closely a report from Mr Brahimi that he will present to the UN Security Council on 29 January. He could not attend the Foreign Affairs Council in January, but we have invited him to the FAC in February.

At the same time, the EU has managed to reinforce actions addressing the challenges faced at present by the Syrian population. They range from the increasing flow of hundreds of thousands of refugees into the Syrian neighbourhood countries during an extraordinarily harsh winter and continuing massive internal displacement of millions of Syrians to possible chemical incident scenarios and the consolidation of the opposition. The European Council tasked the Foreign Affairs Council to work on all options to support and help the opposition and to enable greater support for the protection of civilians. This issue will be tackled at the next Foreign Affairs Council on 31 January.

Although financial assistance is only part of the solution, it does help in easing some of these challenges. Since the last debate here in the European Parliament, the EU has almost doubled all types of assistance in and outside Syria. Today, over EUR 500 million (of which over EUR 350 million is in humanitarian aid) go to long-term actions on supporting refugees, Syrian youth and the general population particularly affected by the unrest, including skills, education and mentoring for refugees. The EU is also funding activities, such as the Regional Protection Programme, aimed at building up the resilience of displaced Syrian people as well as enhancing the capacity of communities which host them in neighbouring countries. More, of course, is certainly needed, and improved channels of delivery will have to be devised, given harsher weather conditions descending on refugees and internally-displaced Syrians. I would like to particularly commend the work done in this field by Commissioner Georgieva and her staff.

Our efforts also try to prepare for the day after and the transition, which will include financial assistance to support political transition, institutional and economic recovery as well as support to the population and post-conflict accountability. The EU is also preparing preventive measures in case of a potential chemical weapon incident. At the moment the focus is more on the trans-border element of this threat, on which we cooperate closely with Syria's neighbours such as Jordan and Turkey.

In all of our financial interventions, the EU uses a four-pronged approach. It includes ongoing support to the multilateral institutions such as the UN and INGOs and civil society organisations, alongside just-being-rolled-out support of local Syrian NGOs and civilian structures together with structured support for the opposition. As you know, the EU co-chairs the UN Humanitarian Forum and chairs the donor coordination work within the Friends of Syria working group on economic recovery.

We are working with our partners to improve channels of our delivery, planning and gap analysis. The EU will also participate in the donor conference initiated by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and hosted by the Kuwaiti Emir on 30 January. While on one side we work towards a political solution, on the other we do not lose sight of the human dimension of the Syrian tragedy that has unfolded in the past two years. It has resulted in over 60 000 dead, 2.5 million internally displaced Syrians and 500 000 refugees; numbers which, unfortunately, are rising as we speak.

As Commissioner Georgieva will tell you later, we are working tirelessly every day to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. But we all agree that such a tragedy cannot go on without more action and initiatives. I know that some of you are of the opinion that today, more direct military assistance to the opposition should be envisaged. But such an option is still very divisive and runs the risk of hardening the conflict.

This is why, in spite of all the difficulties and the doubts on the shortcomings, we must remain determined to keep the course, by supporting Mr Brahimi's efforts, assisting the opposition and relentlessly calling for the Syrian leadership to face up to reality in the country and at last put an end to all violence.
