FACT SHEET

The European Union and Syria

The European Union has responded decisively to the violent repression of anti-government protests in Syria, which began in March 2011. The EU called for an end to the deteriorating situation in Syria and the unacceptable levels of violence, which continue to cause suffering to millions of Syrians and destruction of infrastructure and cultural heritage.

As the violence and repression continued, the EU decided to introduce restrictive measures to increase pressure on the regime of President Bashar al-Assad (see annex for an overview).

In May 2011, the EU froze the draft **Association Agreement** that had been negotiated with Syria and suspended bilateral cooperation programmes between the EU and the Syrian government under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The participation of Syrian authorities in EU's regional programmes and the loan operations and technical assistance by the European Investment Bank to Syria were also suspended.

The EU continues to condemn in the strongest terms the continuing violence and the widespread and systematic violations of human rights in Syria. The EU remains deeply concerned by the regional effects of the conflict on neighbouring countries and supports their efforts to contain it.

The EU has continuously urged the regime to stop targeting civilians, halt airstrikes and artillery attacks, and called for an immediate end to all violence. The EU has reiterated its attachment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

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The EU has also expressed its concerns with regards to the involvement of extremist and foreign non-state actors in the fighting in Syria, which is further fuelling the conflict and posing a threat to regional stability.

On 21 August 2013, a large-scale chemical attack was perpetrated in the outskirts of Damascus, killing hundreds of people, including many women and children. That attack constituted a blatant violation of international law, a war crime, and a crime against humanity. The EU and Member States were unanimous in condemning this horrific attack in the strongest terms and agreed on the need for a clear and strong international response. The EU has also been at the forefront of supporting the proposals for putting the Syrian chemical weapons under international control, leading to their eventual destruction.

On 27 September 2013, a resolution adopted by United Nations Security Council, on the Syrian Chemical weapons was warmly welcomed by the EU as it represented a major step towards a sustainable and unified international response to the crisis in Syria. The EU responded to the appeals for support from OPCW for achieving the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons by proving armoured cars and technical assistance amounting to close to €5 million. The EU's major contribution was an additional €12 million provided to the OPCW Special Trust Fund for the destruction phase. Several EU Member States also made important financial contributions and contributions in kind to support the plan and offered to accept the destruction of waste materials on their territory in recognition of the need to prevent these terrible weapons being used again against the Syrian people. All declared chemical weapons material and equipment were removed from Syria in the first half of 2014. There is ongoing destruction of 2% of industrial chemicals and effluent by March 2015. Destruction of the remaining 12 production facilities and further investigation by the Fact Finding Mission on discrepancies of the Syrian declarations and abandoned chemical weapons, and alleged use of chlorine continue. OPCW/UN Joint Mission was formally closed on 30 September 2014.

In this respect it is noted as well that a specific derogation from the asset freeze has been introduced in the EU's sanctions regime to allow Syrian State-owned entities to make payments in relation to the OPCW verification mission and the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons.

The EU is a vocal promoter of accountability. The perpetrators of the atrocious chemical attacks, but also those responsible for the numerous grave violations of human rights and the murder of thousands of civilians including women and children, need to be held to account. The EU has been supporting specific efforts aimed at documenting crimes committed during the conflict for the purpose of subsequent accountability. The EU welcomes the report of the independent international Commission of Inquiry published in August 2014.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the EU has repeatedly called for the urgent need for a political solution of the conflict. The EU will continue to work with all interested parties, specifically with the UN and its Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, the League of Arab States, regional and international partners and all those sincerely committed to the success of this initiative.
The Syria crisis has become the largest humanitarian and security disaster in the world. The EU with its Member States will continue its support as the largest donor with the total aid contribution reaching nearly €3 billion. The EU calls for the respect of International Humanitarian Law and the protection of civilians and safety of humanitarian personnel.

The EU is committed to tackling in a comprehensive and coordinated manner the regional threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism and addressing the underlying instability and violence which has given ISIL and other terrorist groups a foothold. The EU supports efforts by more than sixty States to tackle the threat from ISIL, including military action in accordance with international law. It notes that military action in this context is necessary but not sufficient to defeat ISIL and it is part of a wider effort comprising measures in the political/diplomatic, counter-terrorism and terrorism funding, humanitarian and communication field.

The EU has welcomed the declaration of 20 April 2013 by the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC) – which the EU accepts as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people – setting out the principles of a democratic, pluralistic and inclusive Syria respectful of human rights, including the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, and the rule of law, rejecting extremism and committing to guarantee the security of the chemical weapons present in Syria as well as to support international non-proliferation efforts and comply with its international obligations on that matter.

The EU underlines the importance of the meeting of the SOC General Assembly in Istanbul that ended on 15 October 2014 and calls on the SOC and all opposition groups to continue to work towards a political settlement and to enhance inclusiveness. A stronger and more united opposition that represents a credible alternative for all Syrians remains essential.

**Background**

**History of EU-Syria relations**

The legal basis for relations between the EU and Syria is the Cooperation Agreement signed in 1977.

Prior to the conflict the EU sought to develop a closer relationship with Syria, which would provide for political dialogue, mutually beneficial trade and investment relations, and cooperation on economic, social and democratic reform.

The European Commission and Syria initialled a draft EU-Syria Association agreement in 2004. However, its signature was put on hold as the EU considered the political circumstances were not right at the time.

In late 2008, the Commission and Syria updated the 2004 draft agreement to take into account the reform of the Syrian customs tariff and EU enlargement. They initialled the revised version of the agreement on 14 December 2008, but it was never signed. Priorities of
EU co-operation with Syria were defined in the Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme. The main aim of this co-operation was to support Syria’s domestic reform process.

ANNEX - RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ON SYRIA

– in force as on 21 October 2014 –

The restrictive measures on Syria consist in:

- Prohibition on the import of arms and related material from Syria. Export restrictions on certain equipment, goods and technology that might be used for internal repression or for the manufacture or maintenance of such products. The measure includes a prohibition on related financial assistance as well as insurance and reinsurance.

- Obligation for member states to inspect vessels and aircraft if there are reasonable grounds to believe they carry arms, related material or equipment which might be used for internal repression. This applies in member states’ seaports, airports and in their territorial sea, in accordance with international law. Items that may not be exported from the EU to Syria must be seized.

- Import ban on crude oil and petroleum products from Syria. The prohibition concerns import, purchase and transport of such products as well as related finance and insurance. The ban also includes a prohibition on related technical and financial assistance. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.

- Ban on investment in the Syrian oil industry. This covers loans and credits, acquisition or extension of participations and the creation of joint ventures. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.

- Ban on investment in companies engaged in the construction of new power plants for electricity production in Syria.

- Prohibition to participate in the construction of new power plants, including related technical or financial assistance.

- Ban on exports to Syria of key equipment and technology for the oil and gas industry. The ban also includes a prohibition on related technical and financial assistance. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.
• Ban on trade in goods belonging to Syria's cultural heritage which have been illegally removed from Syria with the objective of facilitating the safe return of those goods.

• The assets of the Syrian central bank within the EU are frozen and it is prohibited to make funds or economic resources available, but the provision allows for legitimate trade to continue under strict conditions.

• Ban on trade in gold, precious metals and diamonds with Syrian public bodies and the central bank.

• Ban on supplying banknotes and coinage to the Syrian central bank.

• Member states must not give new grants and concessional loans to the Syrian government.

• Asset freeze on 63 entities and 211 persons responsible for or associated with the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria or supporting or benefiting from the regime. The release of certain frozen funds or economic resources may be authorised exceptionally under certain conditions if they are intended, inter alia, for humanitarian purposes; for evacuations from Syria; or in order to make payments on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for activities related to the OPCW verification mission and the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons,

• Travel ban on 211 persons responsible for or associated with the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria or supporting or benefiting from the regime.

• Export ban on equipment, technology or software primarily intended for monitoring or interception of the internet or telephone communications.

• No disbursements and payments in connection with existing loan agreements between Syria and the European Investment Bank, as well as the suspension of technical assistance contracts relating to projects in Syria.

• Prohibition to trade Syrian public or public-guaranteed bonds to or from the government of Syria or its public bodies and Syrian financial institutions. No brokering or issuing services for such bonds are allowed.

• Prohibition for Syrian financial institutions to open new branches or subsidiaries in the EU or to establish new joint ventures or new correspondent banking relationships with EU banks.

• EU banks are prohibited from opening offices or accounts in Syria. Under certain conditions and after consultation with the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, member states may authorise derogations from this prohibition.
• Member states are to restrain short and medium term financial support for trade with Syria, including export credits, guarantees and insurance. No more long-term support.

• No insurance or re-insurance to the Syrian government, public bodies, corporations or agencies (except health and travel insurance or compulsory third party insurance for Syrian persons or entities in the EU).

• Cargo flights operated by Syrian carriers and all flights operated by Syrian Arab Airlines may not have access to EU airports.

• Prohibition to export luxury goods to Syria.

For more information, see legislation instituting these restrictive measures and Frequently Asked Questions on EU restrictive measures.