Syria Conference: EU and UN brought international partners together to agree on common ground

The EU and the UN brought the international community around a table in Brussels to discuss the future of Syria and the region. The delegations recommitted to relaunch the political process under UN auspices as the only solution to the conflict, to support Syrians both inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries, and the hosting communities.

"The Conference is bringing together Foreign Ministers of countries that normally do not spend much time together, like the Foreign Ministers of Iran, of Saudi Arabia, of Qatar - just to mention a few," said on Wednesday the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini following a ministerial plenary session on the political aspects of the Second Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region". Mogherini highlighted how the EU and UN are natural partners that believe in multilateralism and how the EU has the convening power of bringing different actors to sit together, including...
representatives of the Syrian civil society.

"This is the first result of today - having this diversity around the table, respect - all delegations listening to each other - and trying to identify some common ground," said Mogherini.

The high level of participation of ministers from the region showed an interest in trying to avoid that "Syria will become for a long time a black hole that would affect the life of the entire region and Europe," Mogherini said.

The more than 80 delegations present at the Conference agreed that there can be no military solution to the conflict, and there is a need to relaunch the political process, the only one that can lead to a lasting peace.

"What would be the face of Syria after a military victory? What would be the condition on the ground?" Mogherini asked.

"How do you rebuild the fabric of mutual trust among Syrians? This is a battle you don't win militarily and there is no way anyone can win this battle militarily," the High Representative said.

The High Representative, together with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan De Mistura, analysed how the so-called Astana process failed to guarantee both a de-escalation of military activities and the release of political prisoners, the objectives that the three guarantors of the Astana process – Iran, Turkey and Russia – gave themselves.

"Just one week ago we were on the brink of a major, I would say regional if not global, military confrontation spiking out of an extremely dramatic chemical weapons attack," Mogherini said. That has been a wakeup call that is producing a lot of high level contacts, De Mistura added.

"A military victory could come and it's true. We see some actors pursuing that kind of strategy, but what next?" Mogherini asked indicating that even the Iran, Turkey and Russia signalled an interest in contributing to a political solution. High Representative Mogherini held a bilateral meeting – among others – with Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif to discuss both Syria and the JCPOA.

A political process is key also for the reconstruction of Syria, devastated after more than seven years of conflict.

"We stated here again that the money for the reconstruction of the country will come only once the political process started and is well underway under UN auspices," the High Representative stated.

"Even for pragmatic reasons," she added. "Who do you give the money to? Is it realistic to think that any international institution gives the money to Assad?"

All delegations, Mogherini said, recognised and shared also the role of the Syrian civil society.

During the political ministerial session, the delegates listened to three interventions from representatives of the Syrian civil society.

"Let me underline two women and a man," Mogherini said, who brought a "very in-depth analysis of the situation, of the needs and of the hopes of Syrians."

Syrians participated to the Conference with representatives of NGOs and Civil Society organizations.

The High Representative said she wanted "to pay tribute to the work that Syrians are doing, both
inside the country and outside the country, to help their fellow citizens, but also to try and build the basis for reconciliation and the rebuilding of the social fabric of the country once the war will be over."

The last point on which the delegates found common ground was the need to support Syrians, inside Syria and in neighbouring countries with humanitarian aid and financial support to also further help the population of the countries hosting refugees.

The Conference pledged EUR 6.2 Billion for 2018 and 2019. The EU and its Member States provided 77 percent of the total pledges.

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