

Renewed chemical attack in Syria

As the conflict in Syria enters its eighth year, Parliament is due to debate the situation, following a recent escalation. The Assad regime is suspected of having carried out a toxic gas attack on the besieged town of Douma near Damascus on 7 April 2018, killing around 80 people and injuring hundreds. The United Nations Security Council debated the attack during an emergency meeting on 9 April 2018, during which Russia denied Syrian regime responsibility for the attack. The EU has strongly condemned the latest use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict, and the United States, France and the United Kingdom have signalled their willingness to respond with air-strikes in order to uphold the global ban on the use of chemical weapons.

The political and military balance of power

The toxic gas attack on Douma was part of a sustained and ultimately successful regime assault on one of the last rebel-held areas in Syria. Supported by Russia and Iran, the Assad regime has regained control over large parts of the country. President Trump's recent announcement that US troops would leave Syria 'within a few months', may create more room for Turkey to pursue its declared aim of establishing control over important sections of Kurdish-controlled areas in northern Syria. Alternatively, some of these areas may revert to Syrian government control, with Turkey's backing. Overall, Iran, Russia and Turkey are expected to continue to seek a 'rough stabilisation' of the country under the current regime, while pursuing their respective strategic interests in different parts of the country. The humanitarian and security situation in Syria remains dire.

Regime use of chemical weapons

In July 2012, Syria publicly acknowledged that it possessed chemical weapons. Throughout the civil war, and despite international efforts to disarm it, the Assad regime has repeatedly used various [chemical weapons](#) in its attacks on rebel and opposition forces. The US carried out a [military strike](#) on a Syrian airbase after a chemical attack on [4 April 2017](#) on the town of Khan Sheikhoun killed dozens of civilians. The EU has repeatedly [condemned](#) the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime.

The EU's response to the crisis in Syria

In its [response](#) to the crisis in Syria, the EU has focused on six key areas, namely (i) ending the war through genuine political transition, (ii) promoting meaningful and inclusive transition in the country, (iii) addressing the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, (iv) strengthening Syrian civil society organisations, (v) promoting accountability for war crimes, and (vi) supporting the resilience of the Syrian population and society. The EU is the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syria and the region; over [€9.4 billion](#) in aid has been made available by the EU and its Member States since the start of the conflict. On 24 and 25 April 2018, the EU and the UN will co-chair the [second funding conference](#) in Brussels on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region'.

European Parliament position

On 6 February 2018, Parliament held a [debate](#) on the situation in Afrin. On 28 February 2018, the plenary [debated](#) the humanitarian situation in Syria, in particular in Ghouta. In the [resolution](#) on the situation in Syria adopted on 15 March 2018, Parliament once more strongly condemned all atrocities and the widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the conflict, and in particular the acts perpetrated by forces of the Assad regime, including with the support of its allies Russia and Iran, as well as by UN-listed terrorist organisations. Parliament specifically condemned the ongoing violence in Eastern Ghouta and expressed deep concern about Turkey's intervention in areas of Syria controlled by Kurdish forces.

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PE 620.216 – April 2018



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