

**Question for written answer E-008703/2016
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)
Rule 130
Marie-Christine Arnautu (ENF)**

Subject: VP/HR - Cooperate with Syria instead of punishing it

The EU recently imposed sanctions on 17 Syrian government ministers and the Governor of the Central Bank of Syria, adding to its existing list of sanctions against Syria in a display of exceptional stubbornness and political wrong-headedness that run counter to its stated objective – fighting terrorism. This is sure to further undermine Syria's trust in the EU. At a time when the US elections have brought to power a president who is prepared to work closely with the Russian head of state to resolve the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, when European leaders – the Belgian Minister for the Interior, for example – are worried that between 3000 and 5000 jihadists are likely to return to the EU, when the Syrian army loyal to the regime in power has is clearly gaining the upper hand over the armed rebel groups, and when the civilian population – after five years of deadly conflict – is longing for peace, restoring diplomatic relations seems more necessary than ever. This would enable the EU to work more closely with the Syrian intelligence services, which have detailed knowledge of terrorist networks. Like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, however, the EU is stubbornly backing an opposition riddled with Islamists.

Is the High Representative planning to work towards closer cooperation with Syria and to convince the Council to rethink its position?