



## Story

# Syrian uprising: a spring not in bloom

**The violent crack-down against the Syrian pro-democracy uprising continues, with human rights activists claiming more than 1000 have been killed since the start of the protests in mid-March. Is the EU doing enough to put an end to the violence? During a hearing on 26 May, human rights activists called for tougher measures.**

British Conservative **Charles Tannock** said the Syrian regime has "learnt the lesson from the Arab spring" and deplored the ineffectiveness of EU sanctions, calling them "window-dressing". He warned that Europe could easily be accused of applying double standards with regards to military intervention in Libya and the very different response to Syria.

### Sanctions are not enough



The Human Rights Committee hearing came a few days after EU foreign ministers agreed to extend sanctions, including an arms embargo against Syria. In addition President Assad's assets have been frozen and a travel ban imposed and bilateral EU-Syria cooperation programmes have been suspended.

Parliament had already called for "serious and targeted sanctions against the Syrian regime with the aim of achieving a change in the regime's policies" on 11 May following a human rights debate with Catherine Ashton.

Syrian **Iyas Maleh** told the hearing that since 15 March more than 1000 people have been killed and **11000 detained** in prisons and even sport stadiums. "No real dialogue is possible with this regime," he said. Sanctions are not enough, he added, suggesting it is time to start expelling Syrian ambassadors and pushing for more accountability via a UN resolution or referral to the International Criminal Court.

### Role of global communications

Mr Tannock said global communications had changed the way revolutions were fought. "It's very difficult to stop, mobile phone pictures, all these sort of things that weren't around 30 years ago so dictatorships are struggling now to contain the evidence being shown that could be held against them."

The EP was able to take advantage of global communications to hear from 80-year old human rights activist **Haytham al-Maleh** (a 2010 Sakharov nominee and father of Iyas Maleh) via **Skype**, who spoke about arbitrary arrests, torture and the killings of innocent people. The regime is "a fascist dictatorship that must go and there is no other way and we need your help."

Via **video conference** from Beirut, Human Rights Watch's **Nadim Houry** said a key problem is the lack of a trusted intermediary between the government and the protestors to launch a national dialogue. He suggested the EU could put pressure on regional partners, like Lebanon and Turkey to play that role

He also said human rights activists who have fled Syria to neighbouring countries need help to find "a safe haven", a possible solution being resettlement programme.

### Review of recent events

The protests began in mid-March, inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. However, Syria hasn't seen the kind of "critical mass" of hundreds of thousands of protestors on the streets. Protests have occurred in several towns, the hotspot being Daraa, with the capital Damascus relatively quiet so far.

In May the protests lessened following a crackdown by the Syrian army and police forces. Nevertheless, 20 May saw the biggest protests since April and became one of the bloodiest days of the uprising as police and security forces shot demonstrators. Human rights organisations claim 40–50 casualties.

## **Facebook chat on Arab revolutions: 31 May**

Chat live 31 May on Facebook with Portuguese Socialist Ana Gomes from 1530 to 1615 CET about the Arab revolutions - what the uprisings mean for the region, EU's role and other issues.

### **Syria facts:**

- Population: 22.5 million
- Capital: Damascus
- Area: 185,180 sq km
- President: Bashar Al-Assad - in power since 2000
- Diverse ethnic and religious groups