



## *~FACTSHEET~*

Brussels, 14 May 2012

### **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. We have called for an end to the appalling and unacceptable violence, the withdrawal of the Syrian army from besieged towns and cities, the implementation of genuine democratic reforms and a credible, genuine and inclusive national dialogue. The EU has condemned in the strongest terms the widespread human rights violations, which include the killing, mass arrest and torture of civilians, peaceful protestors and their relatives, that according to the Independent International Commission of Enquiry may amount to crimes against humanity. It has also condemned several times actions aimed at inciting inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict as well as targeted assassinations of renowned political figures.

As the violence and repression continued, the EU decided to introduce restrictive measures to increase pressure on the government of President Bashar al-Assad. In total, 15 sets of restrictive measures have been introduced since the beginning of the crisis (see annex for an overview). The EU has called consistently for President Assad to step aside and make way for a peaceful transition, along the lines of the action plan adopted by the League of Arab States (LAS).

In May, 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 MEDA/European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI). The European Commission has suspended the participation of Syrian authorities in its regional programmes and the European Investment Bank has suspended all its loan operations and technical assistance to Syria.

The EU is also working closely with the international community to put pressure on the Syrian Government to stop the atrocities. The EU has supported the LAS in its efforts to solve the crisis and has praised its commitment and leadership. The EU provided technical support to the LAS for its observation mission in Syria, in particular through helping to set up its situation room.

The EU continues to urge members of the UN Security Council to assume their responsibilities and agree on strong UN action towards Syria: the time has come to speak with one voice, demand an end to the bloodshed and call for a democratic future for Syria. The EU welcomes the resolution on Syria adopted in the UN General Assembly on 16 February which backs the LAS's plan for a Syrian-led solution to the crisis, supports the work of Special Envoy Kofi Annan and welcomes the resolution by the UN Human Rights Council on 1 March. We are active participants in the 'Friends of the Syrian people' group and are cooperating closely with our international partners, including the LAS, United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

## **P R E S S**

The EU also has grave concerns about the humanitarian situation in Syria, and underlines the pressing need to protect civilians. The EU has already given more than EUR 32 million in humanitarian assistance (EUR 10 million from the Commission and more than EUR 22 million from member states) and is willing to increase this depending on need. We continue to call for unhindered access for humanitarian organisations and back all efforts to achieve a ceasefire, which could develop into a permanent end to violence. It is vitally important to secure unhindered access to assess the needs of the civilian population and to provide humanitarian and medical aid where needed.

## **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 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.

Syria is a signatory of the 1995 [Barcelona Declaration](#) and a member of the Union for the Mediterranean. Syria was among the countries benefiting from the European Neighbourhood Policy.

## **ANNEX: RESTRICTIVE MEASURES ON SYRIA**

**- in force as on 15 May 2012 -**

In response to the continued brutal repression and widespread violation of human rights by the Syrian government, the EU has gradually introduced comprehensive restrictive measures, starting in May 2011. They consist in:

- Export ban on arms and related material and on equipment which might be used for internal repression, including export restrictions on certain other equipment, goods and technology that might be used for internal repression or for the manufacture or maintenance of such products. This also includes a prohibition on related technical or financial assistance.
- 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.
- Ban on investment in the Syrian oil industry and in companies engaged in the construction of new power plants for electricity production in Syria. This covers loans and credits, acquisition or extension of participations and the creation of joint ventures.
- 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.
- 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 43 entities and 128 persons responsible for or associated with the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria or supporting or benefiting from the regime.
- Visa bans on 128 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.
- 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 may not have access to EU airports (except mixed passenger and cargo flights).
- Prohibition to export luxury goods to Syria

For more information, see [legislation](#) instituting these restrictive measures and [Frequently Asked Questions on EU restrictive measures](#).

