

**Question for oral answer O-000188/2012
to the Commission**

Rule 115

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on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

Subject: EU response to the Syrian refugee crisis

Europe's commitment to supporting people in need of shelter has been tested twice in recent times – and has failed that test.

From Libya, 700 000 people fled the violence last year; many ended up in refugee camps in neighbouring countries; of the 8 000 people identified by the United Nations as being in particular need of help, EU Member States only agreed to receive 400; Norway, a non-EU country, accepted nearly as many by itself. In 2011 more than 50 000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean in rickety vessels to the EU; many died trying, others arrived at the Italian island of Lampedusa and in Malta, but only 300 refugees were relocated from Malta to other Member States.

Now, 285 000 UNHCR-registered refugees from Syria have fled to neighbouring countries since the fighting started 18 months ago. The UN estimates that more than 2.5 million people are directly affected by the war. There is no immediate end in sight to the violence, nor any hope of a quick resolution to the conflict. The EU has granted nearly EUR 200 million in direct aid, almost half of the entire aid granted to deal with the consequences of the conflict, and is one of the main donors.

Nevertheless, Europe is dragging its feet in protecting, assisting and helping people fleeing the conflict. Instead of taking concerted steps to help Syrians fleeing war, such as relaxing visa requirements or providing assistance to countries already hosting Syrians, the European Commission recently admonished Turkey – where over 100 000 Syrians are staying in camps – for allowing 300 Syrians to cross into Greece.

The closing of the border at Evros in Greece, assisted by Frontex, has forced an increasing number of refugees to use the much more dangerous sea route across the Mediterranean to try to reach EU territory. The coming winter will also worsen the situation of refugees from Syria.

How does the Commission ensure effective access to the EU asylum protection system for asylum-seekers from Syria, considering that a substantial effort is made, notably in Greece, to prevent people crossing into the EU? How is the Commission sharing the responsibility and helping neighbouring countries, notably Turkey, to cope with the increase in refugees from Syria? What operations will be financed through Frontex to respond to the Syrian crisis? Is the Commission considering the possibility of activating the Temporary Protection Directive? Is the Commission planning to establish or expand resettlement programmes for refugees from Syria? How does the Commission plan to ensure that international obligations are fully respected through the Regional Protection Programme?

Tabled: 8.11.2012

Forwarded: 12.11.2012

Deadline for reply: 19.11.2012