Since the time that the popular uprisings in Syria mushroomed into a civil war, prospects for a negotiated political settlement have been thwarted because of the myriad diverging interests of the regime, local opposition groups, and regional and global actors, all of which are vying for power and influence in the country. Europe is deeply troubled by the human rights situation in the country. However, as currently organised, the EU lacks the foreign- and defence-policy mechanisms that would allow it to make a significant impact on the conflict. Any chance of influencing the situation that the EU may have had in the beginning of the conflict dissipated relatively quickly. This paper recommends that the EU broadens its policy options and engages in 'linkage politics' with key powers, particularly Turkey, which has shared interests on certain fronts and direct influence on the ground in Syria. The EU has a long-standing relationship with Turkey, which was developed through the EU accession and customs union processes and more recently in connection with migration management. Its concerns about Turkey’s descent into authoritarianism notwithstanding, the EU should build on this relationship to promote, as much as possible, a democratic, stable, just and prosperous Syria and greater Middle East region. More specifically, this broader policy framework should emphasise deeper and more sustained coordination of humanitarian responses, border management and de-mining. It should also stress the need for inclusive economic growth as concerns both the displaced Syrian private sector operating in Turkey and its Turkish business counterpart.
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About the Martens Centre
The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, established in 2007, is the political foundation and think tank of the European People’s Party (EPP). The Martens Centre embodies a pan-European mindset, promoting Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values. It serves as a framework for national political foundations linked to member parties of the EPP. It currently has 31 member foundations and 2 permanent guest foundations in 25 EU and non-EU countries. The Martens Centre takes part in the preparation of EPP programmes and policy documents. It organises seminars and training on EU policies and on the process of European integration.

The Martens Centre also contributes to formulating EU and national public policies. It produces research studies and books, policy briefs and the twice-yearly *European View* journal. Its research activities are divided into six clusters: party structures and EU institutions, economic and social policies, EU foreign policy, environment and energy, values and religion, and new societal challenges. Through its papers, conferences, authors’ dinners and website, the Martens Centre offers a platform for discussion among experts, politicians, policymakers and the European public.
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This paper is dedicated to all those who lost their lives during the civil war and to those longing for a more inclusive and democratic Syria.
Executive summary
Rather than address the demands of those involved in the peaceful uprisings in Syria in 2011, the Bashar al-Assad regime brutally cracked down on the anti-government protest movement. It employed heinous tactics to stay in power, such as the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, forced disappearances and the widespread use of torture. Since the time that the popular uprisings mushroomed into a civil war, prospects for a negotiated political settlement have been thwarted because of the myriad diverging interests of the regime, local opposition groups, and regional and global actors, all of which are vying for power and influence in Syria. Europe is deeply troubled by the human rights situation in the country. However, as currently organised, the EU lacks the foreign- and defence-policy mechanisms that would allow it to make a significant impact on the conflict. Any chance of influencing the situation that the EU may have had in the beginning of the conflict dissipated relatively quickly. There are two reasons for this: first, the reluctance of its members to get involved in Syria after the disastrous intervention in Libya; and second, the war fatigue brought about by the never-ending military engagement in Afghanistan. This paper recommends that the EU broadens its policy options and engages in ‘linkage politics’ with key powers, particularly Turkey, which has shared interests on certain fronts and direct influence on the ground in Syria. The EU has a long-standing relationship with Turkey, which was developed through the EU accession and customs union processes and more recently in connection with migration management. Its concerns about Turkey’s descent into authoritarianism notwithstanding, the EU should build on this relationship to promote, as much as possible, a democratic, stable, just and prosperous Syria and greater Middle East region. More specifically, this broader policy framework should emphasise deeper and more sustained coordination of humanitarian responses, border management and de-mining. It should also stress the need for inclusive economic growth as concerns both the displaced Syrian private sector operating in Turkey and its Turkish business counterpart.
Introduction
At the onset of the popular uprisings in Syria, the EU and Turkey urged the Bashar al-Assad regime to listen to and respect the demands of the Syrian people. The EU issued several statements condemning the brutal government crackdown on the public protests, ‘urging the authorities to exercise the utmost restraint across the country and to meet the legitimate demands and aspirations of the people with dialogue and urgent political and socio-economic reforms.’

As the severity of the government repression of civilians intensified, many assumed the Syrian regime would collapse under pressure from the united opposition. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 2254 and the subsequent Geneva Communiqué, advocating a political solution to the war based on a de-escalation of violence, unimpeded humanitarian access, the formulation of a new constitution, and free and fair elections. However, the prospects for a nationwide cessation of fighting and a negotiated political settlement were thwarted due to the myriad diverging interests of the regime, local opposition groups, and regional and global actors, all of which were vying for power and influence in Syria.

Now, after eight years of fighting, the Assad government has almost completely won the war against the armed opposition. Russia and Iran are well positioned to remain involved in Syria, especially as the US moves forward with the withdrawal of its ground forces from the north-eastern part of the country. Turkey, which is hosting more registered Syrian refugees than any other country, has its own security concerns about developments across the border.

Although Europe is deeply troubled by the human rights situation in Syria, the EU, as currently organised, lacks the foreign- and defence-policy mechanisms it would need to make a significant impact on the trajectory of the war. Any chance of influencing the situation that the EU may have had in the beginning of the conflict dissipated relatively quickly. There are two reasons for this: first, the reluctance of its members to get involved in Syria after the disastrous intervention in Libya; and second, the war fatigue brought about by the never-ending military engagement in Afghanistan. This paper recommends that the EU broadens its policy options and engages in ‘linkage politics’ with key powers, namely Turkey, which

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has shared interests on certain fronts and direct influence on the ground in Syria. The EU has a long-standing relationship with Turkey, which was developed through the Union’s accession and CUSTOMS UNION processes and more recently in connection with migration management. Its concerns about Turkey’s descent into authoritarianism notwithstanding, the EU should build on this relationship to promote, as much as possible, a democratic, stable, just and prosperous Syria and greater Middle East region. More specifically, this paper suggests that the EU and Turkey emphasise deeper and more sustained coordination of humanitarian responses, border management and de-mining. Moreover, they should focus on the need for inclusive economic growth as concerns both the displaced Syrian private sector operating in Turkey and its Turkish business counterpart.
Humanitarian consequences of the war
Now in its eighth year, the protracted conflict in Syria has forced more than half of the Syrian population to flee their homes. About 6.6 million people have been displaced to other areas in the country, and another 5.6 million have fled to neighbouring front-line states: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Since 2011 more than half a million people have been killed or gone missing. The EU and Turkey have shared interests in protecting and assisting civilians who have been impacted by the war. Enhanced and sustained coordination between Turkey and the EU is critical to ensuring that Syrian refugees and vulnerable members of the host communities are able to secure their livelihoods. Furthermore, the EU and Turkey ought to invest in robust conflict-prevention and peacebuilding measures. Both parties should respect the integrity of international humanitarian law and internationally recognised migration mechanisms, and refrain from engaging in political manoeuvring and outsourcing the management of forced displacement.

Humanitarian responses by Turkey and the EU

As part of the Justice and Development Party’s ‘zero problems’ approach to its neighbours in the Middle East, Turkey–Syria economic relations blossomed, with plans for the establishment of a free-trade agreement including a free-trade zone and the free movement of people, goods and capital. At the beginning of the war in Syria, Turkey upheld an open-door policy allowing Syrian nationals to enter its territory without official documents. Turkey promptly mobilised the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, which was set up under the Ministry of the Presidency, and the Turkish Red

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Crescent to administer vital humanitarian relief and construct temporary shelters for those fleeing the war in provinces located along the Turkish–Syrian border. In 2014, Turkey passed Law no. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection to regulate the legal parameters of protection and assistance for foreigners seeking asylum. Syrians under ‘temporary protection’ can access public healthcare facilities, the state education system and social services, and can apply for a work permit. By 2016, Turkey had taken steps that signalled a change in its policy towards Syria. There were new visa requirements for Syrians entering Turkish territory from other states and work began on reinforcing the physical border with Syria.

Some Syrians believed they could escape the violence, poverty and chaos that engulfed them if they could make it to Europe. Around the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015, information on how to travel from the Middle East including Turkey to Europe started to appear more widely on social media. Facebook pages were created to facilitate the smuggling of people wanting to emigrate west. WhatsApp groups were formed to provide guidance on the safest and most viable routes, including those that offered the best chance of avoiding being picked up by security services. Applications for smartphones were created to give GPS coordinates to circumvent formal border controls. As the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey increased, criminal networks were also eager to exploit those looking for protection and a life of dignity. The black market flourished as refugees purchased fake passports and paid human smugglers fees for passage to different points along the route from Turkey to Europe.

Images of refugees in dire situations surfaced in the media: people clinging to the sides of dinghies in fear of falling into the water while crossing the Aegean Sea to the Greek islands; the body of little Alan Kurdi, who washed ashore on the coast of Turkey; and people being beaten by border police

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8 Although Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it maintains a geographical limitation: it only grants refugee status to European citizens seeking asylum ‘due to events occurring in Europe’. See H. Battjes, European Asylum Law and International Law (Leiden/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006), 9 Employers submit work permit applications through the online e-government services portal: www.turkiye.gov.tr.
along the Balkan route. These images renewed, and to some degree sensationalised, the debate about migration in Europe. By the end of the summer of 2015, Hungary, Czechia and Poland had refused to comply with the EU asylum quota system proposed by the European Commission—although these countries did provide assistance to the newly arrived refugees. Despite fervent disagreement among member states over the nature of a humanitarian response, the EU proposed strengthening cooperation with Turkey and intensifying interventions to decrease irregular migration from Turkey to Europe. The EU offered to increase funding to mitigate the economic shortfalls precipitated by the humanitarian crisis, advance the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, reinvigorate negotiations over the EU accession process and accelerate the modernisation of the Customs Union. In exchange, Turkey agreed to expand its border-management capacity, especially on the shores of the Aegean Sea, to deter refugees from crossing to the Greek islands. Turkey also agreed to accept any new irregular migrants and asylum seekers who arrived in Greece from Turkey and whose applications for asylum were rejected. A designated number of refugees were to be resettled directly from Turkey to Europe. However, the number of refugees who have been resettled under the agreement has remained considerably less than what was initially expected.

14 European Commission, ‘Commission Visa Progress Report: Turkey Makes Progress Towards Visa Liberalization’, press release (4 March 2016). Regulation (EC) no. 539/2001 would allow Turkish citizens to travel in the Schengen area without a visa for short stays of 90 days within any 180-day period for business, tourism or family purposes. There are 72 requirements listed in the Roadmap. These are organised in five thematic groups: document security, migration management, public order and security, fundamental rights and readmission of irregular migrants.
The EU’s response to the humanitarian crisis that was precipitated by the conflict in Syria is the largest in its history.\textsuperscript{16} The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the Madad Fund, was launched in 2014 to ensure an ‘integrated European response to the massive needs resulting from the Syrian refugee crisis.’\textsuperscript{17} The Madad Fund has channelled more than €1 billion to organisations which largely focus on the educational, economic and social needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in front-line states: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In addition, the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey was established in 2016 in response to the European Council’s call for supplementary funding to support Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey.\textsuperscript{18} Since its inception, the Facility for Refugees has had a total budget of €6 billion for both humanitarian relief and non-humanitarian efforts, of which €3 billion was designated for the first phase (2016–17) and €3 billion for the second (2018–19).\textsuperscript{19} Monthly cash transfers to those registered under the temporary protection regime were provided by the Emergency Social Safety Net programme, an initiative administered in collaboration with the EU, the World Food Programme, the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish government institutions.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme, a partnership between the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the Ministry of National Education, the Turkish Red Crescent and the UN International Children’s Fund, administered both cash transfers to families whose children attended school regularly and a child protection outreach service.\textsuperscript{21} In addition to these two flagship initiatives, funding was given to increase the quality of the public education and health systems, widen the capacity of migration management, develop municipal infrastructure, and increase the prospects of refugees and vulnerable members of host communities being able to secure their livelihoods. While the financial mechanism that emerged out of the EU–Turkey humanitarian deal provided vital funding to an array of stakeholders, including local institutions and civil society organisations engaged in the humanitarian response, the EU Facil-
ity for Refugees in Turkey is due to conclude its final commitments by 2021.22

Helping Syrians secure their livelihoods and fostering the economic recovery of Syria

Approximately 6.5% of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees registered by the Turkish government live in the 21 official Temporary Accommodation Centres located mostly in the south of Turkey, contiguous with the Syrian border.23 Unlike in other front-line states, there is a relatively straightforward avenue to the economic integration and social inclusion of holders of ‘temporary protection’ status in Turkey. However, refugees in the country will likely remain in a state of protracted vulnerability unless the following issues are dealt with: the prevalence of the informal labour market; the hurdles to joining the formal labour market; the need to adopt negative coping mechanisms (accepting unfair wages, unsafe work environments and child marriage, and sending children to work instead of to school in order to supplement family income); the lack of a common language; and discrimination towards minorities, including the Syrian refugee diaspora.24 These are all serious socio-economic issues. Overcoming them will require increased cooperation and better communication between local, national and international stakeholders.

The participation of Syrian refugees in the informal labour market has put downward pressure on wages and working conditions. It has also displaced local low-skilled workers, especially women and youth, which is a major source of tension in some host communities. In provinces such as Gaziantep, Sanliurfa and Hatay, where the Syrian refugee community is significant compared to the local population, there has been an increase in the cost of living, as measured in the cost of consumer goods, energy, housing and transportation. At the same time, Syrian refugees—in particular, Syrian-owned businesses—have invigorated communities which had previously experienced economic decline, and have contributed to overall growth in the host country. Increased tensions between the Syrian diaspora and host communities over labour-market grievances, perceived security risks and cultural dissonance are threatening the country’s social cohesion. For instance, government-led initiatives to provide Arabic language translation services, Arabic signs in hospitals and schools, and Arabic language hotlines have facilitated access to social services for Arabic-speaking refugees. But these same initiatives have angered some Kurdish-speaking citizens, who represent about 20% of the population and have repeatedly asked the Turkish state for these same accommodations in connection with their own mother tongue. While these efforts might be positive for the refugee community, they could have the effect of instigating negative sentiments towards the refugees. According to a recent report by the International Crisis Group, clashes between the Syrian refugee and host communities are on the rise, especially in metropolitan areas.

Despite the impact of the humanitarian crisis, local chambers of commerce and industry, especially in southern Turkey, have performed exceptionally well in their attempts to manage the situation. They have devised education and employment-generation strategies with sister Syrian private sector associations and other organisations. However, aside from the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, the national private sector has until recently been absent from the discussion on the economic integration and social inclusion of Syrian refugees. In many respects, the Turkish Industry and Busi-

ness Association and the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation drive the agenda on inclusive business practices, good governance, corporate social responsibility and the promotion of democracy in Turkey. Both associations could complement the efforts being made by other organisations to improve the employability and expand the career development of both Syrian refugees and the members of host communities.\textsuperscript{30}

The displaced Syrian private sector is a powerhouse in its own right. Many companies are already operating in Syria out of Turkey, while others are waiting for the right moment to engage in Syria once again. The numerous business-oriented initiatives that aim to develop the capacity of Syrian-owned micro, small and medium-sized companies are critical when it comes to increasing these companies’ operational efficiency in Turkey and to preparing those with the desire to do so for re-entry into the Syrian market.\textsuperscript{31} A 2016 study of Syrian-owned small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) in Turkey highlights the positive impact that the Syrian private sector has had on local and regional economies in areas where significant numbers of Syrian refugees reside. According to the study Another Side to the Story, more than 6,000 Syrian-owned companies have registered in Turkey since 2011, each employing 9 people, on average. Syrian-owned SMEs have invested over $300 million in the country, with many indicating that if the opportunity arises to open an enterprise in Syria, they will likely maintain business activities in Turkey, and in this way contribute to both markets.\textsuperscript{32}

As pockets of stability have emerged in Syria, disproportionate infrastructure development has been reinforced by the pervasiveness of the war economy, the chronic corruption that existed before the war, and the formulation of legislation that favours brokers and companies that are affiliated with or sympa-

\textsuperscript{30} The organisations in view here are the International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, UN Development Programme, Turkish Employment Agency, Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, Syrian Economic Forum, Syrian Business Association, Spark, Building Markets, Habitat and Idema.


\textsuperscript{32} The number of Syrian-owned firms established annually in Turkey had increased from 30 in 2010 to 1,599 in 2015, 1,764 in 2016 and 6,075 by July 2017. In 2013 Syrian firms consistently accounted for 25% of foreign firms registered in Turkey. Syrian-owned firms established in Kilis, a city situated along the Turkish–Syrian border, accounted for 34% of new firms there in 2014. See Building Markets, Another Side to the Story, A Market Assessment of Syrian SMEs in Turkey (2016); and TOBB, ‘Turk Is Dunyasinin Turkiye’deki Suriyeliler Konusundaki Gorus, Beklenti ve Onerileri’ [Opinions and Expectations of the Turkish Business World Concerning Syrians in Turkey] (updated July 2015).
thetic to the Assad regime. In the absence of a nationwide political settlement, and so long as American and European sanctions are maintained, major reconstruction efforts—soft infrastructure (schools and hospitals) and hard infrastructure (road networks, waste-water treatment plants and electricity grid networks)—will likely remain disjointed with an emphasis on pro-regime territories. Without major road networks, transportation services and a solid customer base, cross-border economic activity will lag behind other regional markets. At the same time, Turkey is well positioned to both assist in and benefit from the economic recovery of Syria. The Turkish private sector can build on its proven track record in agricultural productivity, the export of goods and services, and infrastructure development in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

With an unemployment rate hovering around 52%, in Syria desperately need to work in order to secure their livelihoods. The revival of the agriculture sector could enhance food security, generate decent employment opportunities, and contribute to supply chain expansion and integration all the while spurring vital economic activity. Although 58% of the current Syrian population resides in urban areas, agriculture, which is a very labour-intensive sector, now accounts for an estimated 26% of gross domestic product. Before the civil war, agriculture represented 18% of gross national product, due to the contraction of other sectors of the economy. Syria’s state-supported system for the agriculture sector has been subjected to severe damage since the outbreak of the war. This system includes the agricultural extension service, veterinary services, seed banks, low-cost loans, irrigation from dams and wells, storage silos and warehouses, and milling plants. Even prior to the conflict, limited or erratic rain due to climate change had gravelly damaged crops. Farmers have attempted to mitigate shortages by drawing

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37 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Counting the Cost: Agriculture in Syria After Six Years of Crisis (updated April 2017).
down local wells and then drilling deep-water wells. The latter, however, have increased the salinity of the soil.\textsuperscript{38} Although Turkey has been unable to fully pursue the Southeastern Anatolia Project, which would entail the construction of 22 dams, 19 hydropower plants and a sizeable irrigation network on both the Euphrates and Tigris, it has erected numerous smaller-sized dams and pumping stations along the rivers. Thus, despite an obligation to provide Syria with water from the Euphrates, Syria has suffered severe shortfalls in available freshwater due to activities upstream in Turkey.

As security has increased in some provinces, internally displaced persons are slowly returning to rural areas and resuming farming and animal raising, thereby increasing the availability of food products.\textsuperscript{39} Internally displaced persons are slowly returning to rural areas and resuming farming and animal raising, thereby increasing the availability of food products. However, rural recovery is being hindered by high production costs, coupled with destroyed and damaged agricultural infrastructure from the war, including farm-to-market road networks. The domestic production of grain has been unable to meet demand, and thus since 2017 Damascus has been receiving Russian wheat to cover the shortfall.\textsuperscript{40} Since the outbreak of the war, various organisations have been partnering to support (1) the economic inclusion of the Syrian refugee community in Turkey and the local host communities—especially those dependent on the agriculture sector for their livelihoods—and (2) the management of natural resources and ensuring food security in Syria.\textsuperscript{41} The organisations providing this kind of support are the Turkish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock; the UN Food and Agriculture Organization; the UN World Food Programme; various EU Member State Development Cooperation Agencies; the EU Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, and local stakeholder organisations. Coupling de-mining activities with livelihood security initiatives, including those related to the revival of the agriculture sector in Syria, would benefit communities dealing with remnants of the war.

\textsuperscript{39} Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic (Rome, 9 October 2018), 54. For a list of border crossings, see United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Turkey–Syria: Border Crossings Status’ (updated 1 August 2018).
\textsuperscript{40} Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Counting the Cost, 26.
\textsuperscript{41} Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Turkey: Syrian Refugee Resilience Plan 2018-2019; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ‘Managing Natural Resources in Syria’; CIHEAM Bari.
Prospects for the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees

Ongoing sieges, starvation tactics, forced disappearances, conscription, torture and exploitation have forced millions of Syrians to flee to other parts of the country or to neighbouring front-line states. This has triggered a deep-rooted trauma which, if not addressed with the proper mental health and psycho-social support, will have a negative impact on the social fabric of Syrian society for generations.\(^\text{42}\) Although some Syrians have started to return home, the large-scale safe and voluntary return of internally displaced people and refugees is not a viable prospect for the time being.\(^\text{43}\) The Syrian government is in no hurry to accept the return of the millions of Syrians who were forced to flee the fighting during the civil war, or to consider the departure of Assad or any of the political concessions desired by Syrians, the EU or the international community.\(^\text{44}\) However, despite the absence of security guarantees, pressure on refugees to return to Syria continues to mount in Europe and the Middle East.\(^\text{45}\) The EU and Turkey should respect the integrity of international humanitarian law and internationally recognised migration mechanisms, and refrain from political manoeuvring and outsourcing the management of forced displacement.\(^\text{46}\)

Security implications of the war
Despite Damascus’ desire for a military victory, the probability of a complete defeat of armed opposition groups is unlikely without the continued support of Russian airpower; Iranian military advisers; and Iranian proxy ground forces from Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. Now that the Trump administration has signalled that it will conduct a partial military withdrawal from Syria, other actors—such as Turkey, Russia and the Assad regime—will likely advance in the north and north-eastern parts of the country. Indeed, since April Syrian and Russian forces have been attacking Idlib province, one of the last rebel-held territories. The relentless and systematic striking of civilians and civilian infrastructure has already forced thousands of Syrians to seek protection and humanitarian assistance from local authorities and relief organisations situated near the border with Turkey.47

In the absence of the American military—and perhaps the allied French and British contingents as well—the Kurdish-controlled political apparatus known as the Democratic Union Party, which is active in north-eastern Syria, will be in severe jeopardy. Turkey considers the Syrian Democratic Council and its military wings, the People’s Protection Units and the Syrian Democratic Forces, to be extensions of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a terrorist group that has been in armed conflict with the Turkish State for over three decades and has long operated with sanctuaries in northern Syria and Iraq.48 It is next to impossible to decouple Turkey’s hard-line stance against the Democratic Union Party from that of the PKK. The breakdown of the previous iteration of peace talks between the Turkish state and the PKK, in 2015, deepened the securitisation of Kurdish communities living along the Turkey–Iraq border. The pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) has had 6,000 party officials and members, including its co-chairs, Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas, sent to prison. Many of those arrested could have played a positive role in defusing the armed conflict between the Turkish security services and the PKK. However, Turkey’s uncompromising posture towards anyone critical of the government has diminished the prospects of an inclusive peace process emerging in the near future.49

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Russia is unlikely to depart from the Syrian theatre since its political, economic and geostrategic interests in the region are dependent on the survival of the Assad regime. Damascus’ control over the western coast of Syria is vital to preventing attacks from the sea and to pursuing the exploitation of off-shore Mediterranean gas and oil fields. Russia’s use of its air base in Latakia and naval station in Tartus will ensure that anti-regime forces will not be able to split the country or separate Damascus from the sea. Moscow will likely balance the interests of the Syrian Kurds and Damascus by encouraging some degree of autonomy for the former, perhaps within a more open state structure. The Russian desire that the Kurds continue to suppress the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) coincides with US strategic interests, but conflicts with Turkey’s red lines about a ‘terror corridor’ existing along its border.\textsuperscript{50} The Turkey–Syria border is a major source of discontent as Syria, Russia and Turkey are all vying to consolidate control of the northern and north-eastern areas of the country.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite deep divisions between the US and Turkey, discussions about providing security along the Turkey–Syria border, including the establishment of a safe zone in northern Syria along the Turkish border, have been intensifying. There are serious problems with the proposed safe zone: first, the Syrian government is unlikely to accept the deployment of additional Turkish soldiers within its national borders; second, the Syrian Democratic Council has clearly stated its opposition to such a safe zone; and third, Kurdish communities will likely feel threatened by the presence of the Turkish military. The establishment of a multinational border-monitoring group along the Turkey–Syria border, preferably under the UN, would assist Syria to navigate the difficult path from violent conflict to peace as well as reduce Turkey’s fears of PKK cross-border attacks. Its mandate would be to identify, report and, if possible, resolve threats to stability, including providing verification that fighters and military equipment such as weapons and explosives are not smuggled across the border. Furthermore, the multinational force should prevent Turkish military incursions including the use of weaponised drones in its operations against the PKK and other armed groups in Iraq and Syria. The group would consist of lightly armed military observers and support troops from Troop Contributing Countries. The task of assembling such an observer force would have to take political and cultural sensitivities on the ground into consideration to prevent clashes between local armed groups and members of the


observer group.

Enhanced border management

Expanded cooperation between the EU and Turkey should include enhancements to the current Integrated Border Management system. The EU should become more involved along Turkey’s south-eastern border with Syria and Iraq, an area that is rife with drug, weapon and human smuggling. The Integrated Border Management programme is currently focused on Turkey’s borders with Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran—when the programme started, Turkey decided against having the EU participate directly in extending it to its turbulent borders with Syria and Iraq. The Land Forces Command of the Turkish Armed Forces has been responsible for managing the land borders with Syria and Iraq. Its main concerns have been the ongoing cross-border insurgency of the PKK, the People’s Protection Units and Syrian Democratic Forces operations in Syria, and ISIS operations in both Iraq and Syria. The Land Forces Command’s actions have included assigning infantry units to operate border watch-towers (located every 500–1,000 metres), positioning rapid reaction forces, and building a well-defended border wall that includes paved patrol roads running parallel to the border, concrete walls, trenches and concertina razor wire barriers. The EU should indicate its willingness to extend border-management technologies, vehicles, non-weaponised drones, technical training and advisory teams. Such efforts ought to assist Turkey in eventually transferring management of the southern border from the Turkish military to the appropriate civilian agency.

De-mining activities

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52 Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, ‘EU Supports Stronger Border Management in Turkey’.
There has been a good deal of cooperation between Turkey (representing the implementing partner), the EU (which provides financial assistance) and the Turkish office of the UN Development Programme (which offers technical assistance in de-mining and border management). The history of their collaboration could serve as a model for the deployment of risk-assessment technicians, followed by specialised technical teams and equipment to locate and destroy landmines, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices in Syria. There is a strong case for EU funding of de-mining activities and of the clearing of both unexploded and abandoned munitions across the country. The inclusion of regime-held territories in such efforts needs to be considered, as mines and unexploded ordinances maim and kill civilians and prevent the use of agricultural land well after fighting has ceased. These programmes should be initiated as soon as it is safe and politically possible. The EU—perhaps in partnership with the Turkish Office of the UN Development Programme and the UN Mine Action Service—could prepare for the deployment of specialised teams and position equipment such as non-weaponised drones, vehicles and robots inside Turkish territory near the Syrian border for rapid deployment.

**Counterterrorism cooperation**

Turkey shares with Russia, the EU and the US an interest in disrupting and defeating armed jihadist groups associated with ISIS or Al Qaida, and in preventing the movement of foreign fighters and weapons from Syria to Turkey, Russia and Europe. Since the beginning of the war, Russia, China and Iran have equipped the Syrian military and their client paramilitary groups with weapons and ammunition. At the same time, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Israel and the US have armed

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54 Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, ‘The €80 Million EU-Funded Programme Aims to Eliminate the Landmines at Turkey’s Borders’; Humanity and Inclusion, ‘Protecting Syrians from Explosive Remnants of War’.


and equipped the multiple factions of the Free Syrian Army and various jihadist groups.\(^{57}\) Jihadist groups expanded their arsenals with thousands of US-supplied conventional weapons, captured when the Iraqi military collapsed before a few hundred ISIS fighters in 2014. These weapons ranged from small arms to self-propelled vehicles, all of which were used by ISIS in Syria.\(^{58}\) The EU and Turkey should intensify their dialogue on counterterrorism and deepen cooperation to prevent or intercept the movement of foreign fighters, and shipments of weapons, ammunition and explosives, along with chemicals and other elements used in making various types of improvised explosive devices.\(^{59}\) Nations have a responsibility to repatriate their nationals who became jihadist ‘foreign fighters’ in Syria and Iraq. Paying the Syrian Democratic Forces to administer the indefinite provision of prison services to thousands of captured fighters and their family members is not a sustainable solution.


\(^{59}\) EEAS, ‘Joint Statement Following the High Level Political Dialogue Between the EU and Turkey’ (updated 22 November 2018). Fertiliser was imported from Turkey to Syria to be used in improvised explosive devices. See Conflict Armament Research, *Turkish Fertilisers Used in Islamic State IEDs in Iraq* (London, 2016).
Conflict sensitive and ‘Do-no-harm’ principles
Recipients of EU funds should be required to incorporate conflict sensitive principles and conduct a series of ‘Do-no-harm’ assessments throughout the life cycle of the programmes so funded. Understanding how aid impacts the multidimensional layers of society would help mitigate any unintended negative consequences. For instance, vocational training that aims to improve Syrians’ employability and expand their career development opportunities is a positive measure. However, it might spark resentment in local host communities that do not benefit from the same initiatives. Many of the organisations engaged in implementing such programmes have pre-empted the issue by including members of the host communities. But if local cultural dynamics are not fully understood, such a ‘simple’ adjustment in operations might still prevent organisations from properly addressing grievances and from pursuing inclusive practices, especially in multicultural and multi-ethnic environments. ‘Do-no-harm’ assessments could uncover practices, by an array of stakeholders, which have exacerbated structural injustices and social tensions among the refugee and host communities.60 Equipped with this crucial insight, the EU would be compelled to be accountable for the impact that its funding has on beneficiaries. Despite the absence of a robust ‘Do-no-harm’ assessment strategy, local administrations and civil society in Turkey have performed exceptionally well. They have served as a bridge between, on the one hand, the international humanitarian and development communities, the donor governments and central government authorities, and, on the other, the local host and refugee communities. Since the attempted coup in 2016, many organisations, including municipalities located in the south-east of the country, have been operating under severe stress due to government crackdowns, increased pressure to perform without adequate funding and restrictions on their functions.

60 CDA, ‘Conflict-Sensitivity and Do No Harm’; European Commission, ‘Facility for Refugees in Turkey: Updated Strategic Concept Note’.
Policy recommendations
• The EU and Turkey should intensify their diplomatic efforts. They should encourage the meaningful inclusion of women, youth and members of civil society—from all confessional groups, ethnicities and political orientations—in the negotiation, decision-making, reconciliation and transitional justice processes that are critical for the post-war regeneration of Syria.

• The EU and Turkey should invest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding measures. Rather than engaging in political manoeuvring and outsourcing the management of forced displacement, they should respect the integrity of international humanitarian principles (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence) and internationally recognised migration management mechanisms.

• The EU should facilitate the development of the Turkish private sector and the displaced Syrian private sector operating in Turkey. This can be done by modernising the Customs Union and encouraging financing and investment by the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the European Investment Fund.

• Organisations that receive EU funds should be required to incorporate conflict-sensitive principles and conduct ‘Do-no-harm’ assessments throughout the life cycle of their programmes. Such assessments would prevent organisations and individuals from exacerbating structural injustices and social tensions among the refugee and host communities.

• The EU should consider establishing a joint border-monitoring group, possibly under the UN. This group would consist of both unarmed military observers and a number of armed troops. Its mandate would be to identify and resolve threats to stability along the Turkey–Syria border.

• Expanded cooperation between the EU and Turkey should include enhancements to the current Integrated Border Management project on the border with Syria, an area that is rife with drug, weapon and human smuggling.

• The EU and Turkey should enhance dialogue on counterterrorism and deepen cooperation to prevent or intercept the movement of foreign fighters; shipments of weapons, ammunition and explosives; and shipments of chemicals and other elements used to make improvised explosive devices.

• In collaborating with Turkey to respond to the humanitarian and security implications of the war in Syria, the EU should encourage the Turkish authorities to respect democratic principles in the country.
Conclusion
Turkey’s descent into authoritarianism notwithstanding, the EU should build on its relationship with Turkey to promote, as much as possible, a democratic, stable, just and prosperous Syria and greater Middle East region. More specifically, the EU and Turkey should emphasise deeper and more sustained coordination of humanitarian responses, border management and de-mining. Moreover, they should focus on the need for inclusive economic growth as concerns both the displaced Syrian private sector operating in Turkey and its Turkish business counterpart. Turkey’s democratic backsliding—apparent even prior to 2016—accelerated at a rapid pace after the coup attempt on 16 July 2016. Within days of the failed coup, Turkey declared a state of emergency, targeting everyone deemed even remotely affiliated with the network accused of trying to topple the government. Under the emergency security measures that Parliament passed, some 160,000 people were detained, of whom more than 77,000 were formally arrested. Many were dismissed from their jobs, had their assets seized, had their passports cancelled and were blacklisted.61 The deplorable actions of a small group of people did not justify the abandonment of the rule of law. Nor did it justify acquiescing to the demands of ultra-nationalists to crackdown on the opposition, including parliamentarians, academics and civil society activists. While those who tried to topple the government should have been prosecuted under due process, the widespread targeting of people through arrests and imprisonment severely undermined the rule of law and democratic norms in Turkey. The emergency security measures came to an end in 2018. However, Turkish citizens and foreign nationals continue to live in fear due to the draconian anti-terror laws under the new executive presidential system. The recent indictment of Osman Kavala and 15 other civil society leaders in connection with the 2013 Gezi Park protests is particularly worrying.62 How the EU and Turkey navigate these delicate, yet critical issues will depend on how both seize opportunities and mitigate threats to peace and prosperity in the region.

Bibliography


Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Joint Turkey–EU Press Release: Turkey–EU Counter-Terrorism Con-


Since the time that the popular uprisings in Syria mushroomed into a civil war, prospects for a negotiated political settlement have been thwarted because of the myriad diverging interests of the regime, local opposition groups, and regional and global actors, all of which are vying for power and influence in the country. Europe is deeply troubled by the human rights situation in the country. However, as currently organised, the EU lacks the foreign- and defence-policy mechanisms that would allow it to make a significant impact on the conflict. Any chance of influencing the situation that the EU may have had in the beginning of the conflict dissipated relatively quickly.

This paper recommends that the EU broadens its policy options and engages in ‘linkage politics’ with key powers, particularly Turkey, which has shared interests on certain fronts and direct influence on the ground in Syria. The EU has a long-standing relationship with Turkey, which was developed through the EU accession and customs union processes and more recently in connection with migration management. Its concerns about Turkey’s descent into authoritarianism notwithstanding, the EU should build on this relationship to promote, as much as possible, a democratic, stable, just and prosperous Syria and greater Middle East region. More specifically, this broader policy framework should emphasise deeper and more sustained coordination of humanitarian responses, border management and de-mining. It should also stress the need for inclusive economic growth as concerns both the displaced Syrian private sector operating in Turkey and its Turkish business counterpart.