



Wilfried  
**Martens Centre**  
for European Studies

# Thin on the Ground

Recalibrating EU-Turkey Engagement in Syria

**Christina Bache**





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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.

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**About the author**



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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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,

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<sup>1</sup> EU, ‘Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on the Situation in Syria’, A 126/11 (Brussels, 26 March 2011).

<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council, ‘Resolution 2254 (2015)’, S/RES/2254 (2015) (18 December 2015); UN, ‘Final Communiqué of the Action Group for Syria’ (30 June 2012); M. Young, ‘As Arab States Normalize With Syria, Will This Push Them to Finance Its Reconstruction?’, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 24 January 2019; J. Ukman and L. Sly, ‘Obama: Syrian President Assad Must Step Down’, *The Washington Post*, updated 18 August 2011; European Commission, *Towards a Comprehensive EU Approach to the Syrian Crisis*, Communication, JOIN (2013) 22 final (24 June 2013).

<sup>3</sup> B. Hubbard and J. K. Patel, ‘Why Is the Syrian Civil War Still Raging?’, *The New York Times*, 8 February 2018; World Vision, ‘Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help’ (14 February 2019).



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 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.<sup>4</sup> Since 2011 more than half a million people have been killed or gone missing.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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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<sup>4</sup> Prior to the war, Syria had approximately 21 million inhabitants, including Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. P. Connor and J. M. Krogstad, 'About Six-in-Ten Syrians Are Now Displaced from Their Homes', Pew Research Center (13 June 2016); IDMC, 'Syria'; Pew Research Center, 'Most Displaced Syrians Are in the Middle East, and About a Million Are in Europe' (29 January 2019). Over 13 million people inside the country are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance. 3RP, 'Regional Strategic Overview 2019/2020' (20 December 2018).

<sup>5</sup> A. McDowall, 'Syrian Observatory Says War Has Killed More Than Half a Million', *Reuters*, 12 March 2018.

<sup>6</sup> F. D'Alema, *The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, IAI Working Paper 17/28 (October 2017).



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.<sup>7</sup> Syrians under ‘temporary protection’ can access public healthcare facilities, the state education system and social services, and can apply for a work permit.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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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<sup>7</sup> Turkey, Law no. 6458 of 4 April 2013 on Foreigners and International Protection; K. Kirişçi, *Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality*, Brookings Institution (2018); Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management, ‘Directorate General’.

<sup>8</sup> 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](http://www.turkiye.gov.tr).

<sup>9</sup> B. Olejárová, ‘The Great Wall of Turkey: From “The Open-Door Policy” to Building Fortress?’, *Pogranicze, Polish Borderlands Studies* (2018).

<sup>10</sup> E. Izadi, ‘There’s a Booming Black Market for Fake Syrian Passports’, *The Washington Post*, 21 November 2015; K. Calamur, ‘The Flourishing Black Market in Syrian Passports’, *The Atlantic*, 18 November 2015.



along the Balkan route. These images renewed, and to some degree sensationalised, the debate about migration in Europe.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> H. Smith, 'Shocking Images of Drowned Syrian Boy Show Tragic Plight of Refugees', *The Guardian*, 2 September 2015; L. Dobbs, 'UNHCR Assists Refugees at Greece–FYR Macedonia Border, Where Calm Is Returning', *UNHCR*, 24 August 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *BBC News*, 'EU to Sue Poland, Hungary and Czechs for Refusing Refugee Quotas', 7 December 2017; *BBC News*, 'Migrant Crisis: EU Ministers Approve Disputed Quota Plan', 22 September 2015.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, 'The non-binding EU–Turkey Joint Action Plan', 29 November 2015; Council of the European Union, 'EU–Turkey Statement', 18 March 2016.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> As of April 2018, 'over 12,476 Syrian refugees' had been resettled from Turkey to EU member states. See European Commission, 'EU–Turkey Statement: Two Years On', statement (April 2018); European Commission, 'EU–Turkey Joint Action Plan', fact sheet, MEMO/15/5860 (November 2015); European Parliament, 'Resolution of 14 April 2016 on the 2015 Report on Turkey', 2015/2898(RSP) (14 April 2016); European Council, 'EU–Turkey Statement', press release, 144/16 (18 March 2016); European Commission, 'Commission Presents a Recommendation for a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme with Turkey for Refugees from Syria', press release, IP/15/6330 (15 December 2015); European Commission, 'EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: €47 Million to Strengthen Migration Management and to Support Education of Syrian Refugees', press release, IP/16/1908 (26 May 2016); European Commission, *Second Report on the Progress Made in the Implementation of the EU–Turkey Statement*, Communication, COM (2016) 349 final (15 June 2016).



The EU's response to the humanitarian crisis that was precipitated by the conflict in Syria is the largest in its history.<sup>16</sup> 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.'<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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).<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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-

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<sup>16</sup> M. Benhamou, *Innocence and War, Searching for Europe's Strategy in Syria*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Daad Brussels, 'EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the "Madad Fund"'; European Commission, 'European Commission and Italy Launch First Ever EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis' (15 December 2014); European Commission, 'Action Document for EU Trust Fund To Be Used for the Decisions of the Operational Board', ref. Ares (2018) 2325529 (2 May 2018).

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, 'The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey' (updated 14 February 2019).

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, 'Turkey', fact sheet (updated 11 March 2019); European Commission, 'The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey'.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, 'The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN): Providing Cash to the Most Vulnerable Refugees in Turkey' (updated 22 August 2017).

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, 'Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) Programme for Refugee Children in Turkey' (updated 8 May 2018).



ity for Refugees in Turkey is due to conclude its final commitments by 2021.<sup>22</sup>

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

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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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> These are all serious socio-economic issues. Overcoming them will require increased cooperation and better communication between local, national and international stakeholders.

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<sup>22</sup> L. Batalla and J. Tolay, *Toward Long-Term Solidarity with Syrian Refugees? Turkey's Policy Response and Challenges*, Atlantic Council of Turkey (2018).

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR, ‘Syria Regional Refugee Response’ (updated 7 February 2019); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Turkey: Syrian Refugee Resilience Plan 2018–2019* (Turkey, 2018), 3.

<sup>24</sup> K. Kirişçi, *Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality*, Brookings Institution (Washington, 2014); C. Letsch, ‘Syrian Refugees Trigger Child Labour Boom in Turkey’, *The Guardian*, 2 September 2014; S. Yalcin, ‘Syrian Child Workers in Turkey’, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 20 December 2016; E. Ceritoglu et al., ‘The Impact of Syrian Refugees on Natives’ Labor Market Outcomes in Turkey: Evidence from a Quasi-Experimental Design’, IZA Discussion Paper no. 9348 (Bonn, 2015); X. Carpio, M. Wagner and M. Christoph, *The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Labor Market*, World Bank Group, Policy Research Working PAPER no. WPS 7402.9 (Washington, DC, 2015). The informal economy in Turkey is significant, representing approximately 29% of the gross domestic product. Informal labour accounts for 34% of Turkey’s labour market. See S. Gürsel, Y. Genç and M. D. Aslan, *The Worst and the Best in Regional Unemployment*, Betam, Research Brief 18/227 (April, 2018).



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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> In many respects, the Turkish Industry and Busi-

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<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group, *Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions*, Europe Report no. 248 (Brussels, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, *Turkey's Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence*, Europe Report no. 241 (Brussels, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> P. Akpınar and E. D. Selvi, *Dialogue and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in the Kurdish Question and Polarization in Turkey*, Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University (2018).

<sup>28</sup> International Crisis Group, *Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Defusing Metropolitan Tensions*; International Crisis Group, *Mitigating Risks for Syrian Refugee Youth in Turkey's Sanliurfa*, Europe Report no. 253 (Brussels, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> O. Karasapan, *The Impact of Syrian Businesses in Turkey*, Brookings Institution (2016).



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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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-

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<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> E. Ozpinar, S. Basihos and A. Kulaksiz, *Trade Relations with Syria After the Refugee Influx*, The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, Report 201527 (2015).

<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

With an unemployment rate hovering around 52%, people in Syria desperately need to work in order to secure their livelihoods.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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 gravely damaged crops. Farmers have attempted to mitigate shortages by drawing

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<sup>33</sup> B. Allen-Ebrahimian, 'Syrian Reconstruction Spells Juicy Contracts for Russian, Iranian Firms', *Foreign Policy*, 20 October 2017; M. Yahya, 'The Politics of Dispossession', *Carnegie Middle East Center*, updated on 9 May 2018; B. Cusack, 'As Syria Plans to Rebuild, New Law Makes It Difficult for Refugees to Have a Say in How', *Forbes*, updated 26 June 2018; S. Heydemann, 'Rules for Reconstruction in Syria', *Brookings Institution*, updated on 24 August 2017; V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic and R. Turkmani, 'War Economy, Governance and Security in Syria's Opposition-Controlled Areas', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 7/1 (2017), 5.

<sup>34</sup> *The Economist*, 'How a Victorious Bashar al-Assad Is Changing Syria', updated 28 July 2018.

<sup>35</sup> C. Bache, 'Mutual Economic Interdependence or Economic Imbalance: Turkish Private Sector Presence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *Journal Middle East Critique* 27/1 (2018); C. Bache, S. Cagaptay and E. Sacikara, 'Turkey and the KRG: An Undeclared Economic Commonwealth', *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, updated 16 March 2015; C. Bache, 'The Presence of the Turkish Private Sector in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, updated 7 March 2016.

<sup>36</sup> The World Bank Group, *The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria* (2017), 26.

<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.

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<sup>38</sup> B. Kahn, 'Climate Change a "Contributing Factor" in Syrian Conflict,' *Climate Central*, updated 2 March 2015. On climate change and the recent Syrian drought, see C. P. Kelley et al., 'Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112/11 (2015).

<sup>39</sup> 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).

<sup>40</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Counting the Cost*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> However, despite the absence of security guarantees, pressure on refugees to return to Syria continues to mount in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Z. Asghar, K. Bode and C. Alfred, '9 Experts to Watch on Mental Health and Refugees', *News Deeply*, updated 20 December 2017.

<sup>43</sup> International Crisis Group, *Lessons from the Syrian State's Return to the South*, Middle East Report no. 196 (2019).

<sup>44</sup> S. Said and J. Yazigi, *The Reconstruction of Syria: Socially Just Re-integration and Peace Building or Regime Re-Consolidation?*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, International Policy Analysis (2018).

<sup>45</sup> M. Yahya, J. Kassir and K. El-Hariri, *Unheard Voices: What Syrian Refugees Need to Return Home*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2018); S. Batrawi and A. Uzelac, *Four Ways in Which the Syrian Regime Controls Refugee Return*, Clingendael, CRU Policy Brief (2018); UNHCR, *Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria* (2018).

<sup>46</sup> W. Staes, 'European Union Must Reconsider Its Role in Syrian Returns', *News Deeply*, updated 12 December 2018.



# 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.<sup>47</sup>

In the absence of the American military—and perhaps the allied French and British contingents as well—the Kurdish forces of the People's Protection Units, which now operates under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces, will be in severe jeopardy. Although the People's Protection Units is an important partner in the US-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State, it is the armed affiliate 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.<sup>48</sup> It is next to impossible to decouple Turkey's hard-line stance against the People's Protection Units 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.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> UN, 'Briefing Security Council, Special Envoy for Syria Warns of "Perfect Storm" with Severe Humanitarian Consequences Taking Shape in Idlib' (7 September 2018); International Crisis Group, 'Syria's Idlib Wins Welcome Reprieve with Russia–Turkey Deal', updated on 18 September 2018; H. Osseiran, 'The Humanitarian Crisis in Syria's Northern De-Escalation Zone', *News Deeply*, updated 1 February 2018.

<sup>48</sup> M. Pierini, 'In Search of an EU Role in the Syrian War', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, updated August 2016.

<sup>49</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer', updated 7 May 2019.



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 offshore 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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

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<sup>50</sup> Turkey conducted Operation Euphrates Shield inside Syrian territory in 2016. See T. Karadeniz, E. Erkoyun and S. Dadouch, 'Turkey Says 260,000 Syrians Have Returned to "Euphrates Shield" Operation Area', *Reuters*, updated 1 November 2018; and G. Aybet, Senior Adviser to President Erdogan, 'Interview on BBC Hardtalk', *BBC*, 18 December 2018.

<sup>51</sup> P. Ivanova, 'Lavrov Says Russia Could Police Syria–Turkey Safe Zone: Agencies', *Reuters*, updated 24 February 2019.



into consideration to prevent clashes between local armed groups and members of the observer group.

## Enhanced border management

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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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.

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<sup>52</sup> Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, 'EU Supports Stronger Border Management in Turkey'.

<sup>53</sup> M. Yeşiltaş, *Neighboring a Civil War: Turkey's Border Security with Syria*, SETA, no. 17 (2015); I. M. Vammen and H. Lucht, *Refugees in Turkey Struggle as Border Walls Grow Higher*, DIIS Policy Brief (2017).



## De-mining activities

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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.<sup>54</sup> 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 ordnance maim and kill civilians and prevent the use of agricultural land well after fighting has ceased.<sup>55</sup> 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

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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 weap-

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<sup>54</sup> 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'.

<sup>55</sup> EEAS, 'EU Leads Action to End the Scourge of Landmines: The Example of Iraq'; EEAS, *The European Union's Support for Mine Action Across the World*, Joint Staff Working Document (Luxembourg, 2018); Elrha, 'Rebuilding from the Rubble: Clearing Explosive Hazards in Post-Conflict Environments'; Mine Action Review, 'Syria'; Mine Action Review, *Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2018* (2018).



ons from Syria to Turkey, Russia and Europe.<sup>56</sup> 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 and equipped the multiple factions of the Free Syrian Army and various jihadist groups.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.

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<sup>56</sup> EEAS, 'Joint Turkey–EU Press Release: Turkey–EU Counter Terrorism Consultations 23 June 2015' (updated 2 July 2015); Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Joint Turkey–EU Press Release: Turkey–EU Counter-Terrorism Consultations'.

<sup>57</sup> A. S. Yayla and C. P. Clarke, 'Turkey's Double ISIS Standard', *Foreign Policy*, updated 12 April 2018; M. B. D. Nikitin, P. K. Kerr and A. Feickert, *Syria's Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (2013); *Reuters*, 'Arms Supplied by U.S., Saudi Ended Up with Islamic State, Researchers Say', updated 14 December 2017; and I. Angelovski and L. Marzouk, 'Revealed: The Pentagon Is Spending up to \$2.2 Billion on Soviet-Style Arms for Syrian Rebels', *OCCRP*, updated 12 September 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Amnesty International UK, 'How Islamic State Got Its Weapons' (updated 12 January 2018); Conflict Armament Research, *Islamic State Recoilless Launcher Systems*, technical report (2018).

<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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.

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<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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.

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<sup>61</sup> AP News, 'A Look at Turkey's Post-Coup Crackdown', 30 August 2018.

<sup>62</sup> EEAS, 'Statement by the Spokesperson on the Latest Developments on Human Rights in Turkey' (updated 21 February 2019).

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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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