

EU supports Lebanese security sector with €50 million

This package includes €46.6 million for promoting the rule of law, enhancing security and countering terrorism until 2020 and €3.5 million in support of airport security.

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica **Mogherini** made the [announcement](#) during today's Rome II Ministerial Meeting on support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) in Rome. She said: *"Lebanon can count on the European Union's longstanding partnership in facing its current challenges, from humanitarian aid to development cooperation, but also on economy and security. With this new package, the EU reconfirms its support to the Lebanese security sector and the strengthening of Lebanon's institutions, which are crucial to ensure the stability, security and unity of the country, for the benefit of the Lebanese people and of the entire region"*.

The new package is part of the EU's overall and longstanding support to the security sector in Lebanon where the EU has invested more than €85 million across the entire sector since 2006. EU activities have included support to the Lebanese security forces' capacity building, integrated border management, civilian oversight, as well as the mitigation of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear threats and mine action. In 2018, the focus is placed on integrated border management and countering terrorism.

Background

The €46.6 million commitment to support Lebanon in promoting the rule of law, enhancing security and countering terrorism until 2020, funded under the [European Neighbourhood Instrument \(ENI\)](#), aims at supporting the security and justice sector in Lebanon.

The €3.5 million measure, adopted under the [Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace \(IcSP\)](#), specifically aims at securing Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport against illicit trafficking and the threat of terrorism. It will provide training for relevant agencies working at the airport under civilian authority, and allow for the improvements of existing security infrastructures.

In November 2016, the European Union and Lebanon adopted [Partnership Priorities](#) for the period 2016-2020, which set up a renewed framework for political engagement and enhanced cooperation. The Partnership Priorities include security and countering terrorism, governance and the rule of law, fostering growth and job opportunities, and migration and mobility. They were agreed in the context of the [revised European Neighbourhood Policy](#) and the [EU's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy](#).

For More Information

[European Union in Lebanon](#)

[European Neighbourhood Instrument \(ENI\)](#)

[Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#)

Syria: Declaration by the High Representative Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU

Press contacts

Catherine Ray

Lead EEAS spokesperson

+32 2 296 99 21

+32 498 96 99 21

Maja Kocijančič

EEAS spokesperson

+32 2 298 65 70

+32 498 98 44 25

Seven years ago, what began as a peaceful demonstration in the midst of the promise of the so-called Arab Spring quickly became a full-scale civil war in Syria that has left more than 400 000 people dead, more than 11 million displaced and close to 19 million Syrians in need of assistance. Neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey struggle to cope with the largest exodus in recent history.

Pro-democracy protests started in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa and soon expanded to the entire country, only to be met with brutal repression by the Syrian security forces. The regime's merciless violence and brutal war against its own people has not only led to civil war, chaos and destruction, it also paved the way to the rise of extremism and terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al-Nusra.

Today the conflict takes civilian lives every day despite the promises of de-escalation and countless calls by the international community to silence the guns.

Saving lives in Ghouta and everywhere in Syria as well as protecting civilians must be paramount. Humanitarian needs exist across Syria but are especially critical in Eastern Ghouta, Idlib and Afrin right now. UNSC resolution 2401 is the international community's unanimous response to

address the violence and deteriorating humanitarian situation throughout Syria, but it remains largely unobserved due to the continued ground offensive and aerial bombardment, as well as the deliberate targeting of civilians and medical infrastructures in Eastern Ghouta by the regime, supported by Russia and Iran. We deplore also the impeded access to humanitarian assistance due to the regime, and the consistent removal of medical items from humanitarian convoys. The EU also expresses deep concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afrin following the Turkish military operation. The implementation of the UNSCR 2401 by all parties is necessary to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuation which are urgently needed across Syria, but particularly in Eastern Ghouta and Afrin.

Today, we reiterate our call to all parties for the immediate and full implementation of UNSC Resolution 2401 demanding a ceasefire without delay and call again on Russia, Iran and Turkey, as the EU did in the HR's letter to their respective ministers after the 26 February Foreign Affairs Council, to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as Astana guarantors.

From the very beginning the European Union was clear that there can be no military solution to this conflict. We reiterate that this horrific humanitarian crisis can only be brought to an end by a sustainable political solution. This can only be achieved through a genuine and inclusive political process that meets the democratic aspirations and needs of the Syrian people in line with relevant UNSC Resolutions, including the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and the UNSC Resolution 2254. The EU reiterates its support for the work of the UN Special Envoy and the UN-led Geneva process in this regard. The EU played its part in the fight against Da'esh and now that this terrorist organisation is almost defeated in Syria we believe that a political agreement remains the only way towards a sustainable solution to the conflict, including the lasting eradication of violent extremism.

Reaching a meaningful and inclusive political agreement, which meets the aspirations of all Syrians and includes with adequate representation of women in intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, is vital.

Democracy, human rights and rule of law are fundamental principles and the European Union is working to translate them into concrete initiatives. There can be no meaningful transition in Syria without justice and fair representation of all communities. We commend the constructive role played by the Syrian Negotiation Commission and its engagement in the process. We call on the regime to engage meaningfully in talks and on its backers to use their influence to ensure this.

We will pursue accountability for war crimes relentlessly; this is the indispensable basis for national reconciliation. We also condemn the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and Da'esh confirmed in the reports of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism and stress our grave concern at continued reports of chemical weapons use. These recent reports need to be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators of these horrendous crimes need to be brought to justice. The international community cannot tolerate impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The EU will continue to support the resilience of the Syrian population. In opposition held areas the local administrative structures will continue to profit from the EU support. Syria has to be brought back together as a sovereign and undivided country. In this regard, the EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria, only once a comprehensive, inclusive and genuine political transition is firmly in place in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communique and will keep supporting the neighboring countries.

The European Union is the leading donor in the international response to the Syrian crisis with an overall total of over €10.6 billion since 2011. The Brussels II conference on 24-25 April 2018 will be another step taken by the EU and the UN to ensure that the international community remains focused on the Syria conflict and to address the urgent humanitarian needs of those affected by it as well as supporting the resilience of refugee-hosting countries.

Syria's destiny lies in peace, democracy, equal citizenship and the rule of law. The European Union will continue to work for this with determination and with consistency, for the Syrian people.

The EU will continue to stand with the Syrians.

[Download as pdf](#)

[What is not allowed in the real world, must also be a no-go in the virtual world](#)

EESC calls on Commission to fight violent and discriminatory online content more effectively

The EESC acknowledges the Commission's Communication *Tackling Illegal Content Online – Towards and enhanced responsibility of online platforms* as a first and useful step but is not satisfied with its scope. It therefore calls on the Commission to establish programmes and effective measures to provide a stable and consistent legal framework for the efficient removal of illegal content.

The EESC also considers the cases of illegal content mentioned in the Communication as too narrow and proposes to review and catalogue them in order to achieve greater inclusiveness rather than limit them to the explicitly mentioned ones (terrorism, xenophobic speech, child sexual abuse material). For instance, malicious defamation and dissemination of material that violates human dignity or contributes to gender violence should also be

included.

“Spreading illegal content must be nipped in the bud”, said [Bernardo Hernández Bataller](#) when presenting his opinion on [Illegal content/online platforms](#), adopted at the EESC plenary on 14 March 2018.

This is why the EESC also proposes to pay special attention to the development, processing and dissemination of purely informative content which appears – at a first glance – legal but is hiding illegal.

The focus should also be extended to anything that relates to mega data and the benefits that online platforms obtain by exploiting this data.

Illegal content is a complex and cross-cutting issue that needs to be tackled from a range of perspectives:

“Firstly, it is important to assess the impact of illegal online content and secondly, we need to harmonize the way it is dealt with in the legal framework of the Member States. When we talk about the adoption of criteria and measures, the starting point must be that what is forbidden in the real world must also be forbidden in the virtual world. We need to put a stop to illegal and inhuman content,” explained the rapporteur.

“Publishing illegal content, hate speech or incitement to terrorism is not a peccadillo. In order to avoid, combat and remove such material, we need to strengthen the measures. This is also important in order to protect minors”, said Mr Bataller.

Given the impact that digital platforms already have on our daily life and the risks they pose, it is essential to have clear and harmonised legislation all over Europe. “We need a healthy mix between regulatory measures and self-regulatory measures”, emphasised Mr Bataller.

The EESC believes that online platforms themselves should provide users with the tools to display fake news and thus make other users aware that the veracity of the content has been put into question.

Due to the potential consequences of too much concentration of economic power, the economic growth of some digital platforms also deserves increased vigilance.

Last but not least, the EESC believes that for a more coherent approach the E-Commerce Directive, the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive and the Directive on Misleading and Comparative Advertising should be revised.

Press release: PM hosts Business Advisory Council meeting: 15 March

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

“This afternoon the Prime Minister hosted a further meeting of her Business Advisory Council at Downing Street.

“The Prime Minister opened the roundtable with a summary of key moments in the past few weeks, including progress in the Brexit negotiations, the Chancellor’s Spring Statement and the Industrial Strategy.

“On the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, the Prime Minister spoke about the need to reach agreement with the EU on the terms of the implementation period ahead of the March European Council next week, which the attendees agreed would be vital in providing certainty to businesses and people across the UK.

“She then reiterated the themes from her Mansion House Speech which set out an ambitious partnership with the EU, one driven by principled practicality rather than ideology. The business leaders welcomed the detail provided in the speech and gave their support.

“The Prime Minister and business leaders also discussed the government’s Industrial Strategy, agreeing on the importance for government and business to work together on all aspects of the plan, particularly investing in the infrastructure and skills needed to support UK productivity growth and the ambition of the government’s “Grand Challenges”.

“The meeting was also attended by the Chancellor of the Exchequer who provided an update on the Spring Statement, the Business Secretary, Greg Clark, who discussed the Industrial Strategy and Brexit Minister, Suella Fernandes, who spoke about Ministerial engagement with European Member States.”

Attendees

Ivan Menezes, CEO, Diageo

Constantin Cotzias, Director of Bloomberg Europe, Bloomberg

António Horta-Osório, CEO, Lloyds Banking Group

Jan du Plessis, Chairman, BT

Moya Greene, CEO, Royal Mail

Sir Charlie Mayfield, CEO, John Lewis Partnership

Ian Davis, Chairman, Rolls Royce

Mike Cherry OBE, National Chairman, FSB

Dr Adam Marshall, DG, BCC

Stephen Phipson CBE, DG, EEF

Carolyn Fairbairn, DG, CBI

Jayne-Anne Gadhia CBE, CEO, Virgin Money plc

Dame Helena, Head of Personal Investing, Legal & General Group plc

Oliver Benzecry, Chairman and Senior Managing Director, Accenture, UK and Ireland

Dame Carolyn McCall, CEO, ITV

Speech: Salisbury nerve agent attack: UK OSCE Permanent Council statement

Mr Chairman,

It is with great regret that I take the floor today to inform the Permanent Council of deeply concerning events that have taken place in the UK over the past days.

On the afternoon of Sunday 4 March, in the beautiful cathedral city of Salisbury in Wiltshire, a father and his daughter, Sergey and Julia Skripal, were taken gravely ill whilst walking through the city centre. Both remain critically ill. A British police officer who was among members of the emergency services responding to the incident also fell seriously ill and has spent the past days in hospital in intensive care. More than 30 other people have also sought medical treatment. As the nature of the Skripals' illness became clear, a major police-led operation sought to identify the poison, locate its source and decontaminate the affected locations and ensure the safety of the public. That operation, and those investigations are ongoing.

As the Prime Minister told the British Parliament, it is clear that Mr Skripal and his daughter had been poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent. I repeat, a military-grade nerve agent.

This agent has been identified by our experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Porton Down, as a type developed in Russia, part of a group of agents known as Novichok. [On Monday, my Prime Minister told Parliament](#) that it was highly likely that Russia, a participating State of the OSCE, was responsible.

Either as a direct act – or because Russia had lost control of a catastrophically damaging military-grade nerve agent.

This assessment was based not only on the positive identification of the nerve agent and our knowledge that the Russian Federation has previously produced this agent and still has the capability to do so, but also on the Russian state's record of state sponsored assassinations, and indeed, public statements indicating that defectors may be seen as legitimate targets.

The British government sought an urgent explanation from Russia, asking Moscow for immediate and full disclosure of the Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Russia's response so far has demonstrated complete disdain for the gravity of these events. There has been no explanation of how this nerve agent came to be used in the UK. And no explanation as to why Russia, a participating State of the OSCE, has an undeclared Chemical Weapon programme – in clear contravention of international law. There is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian state was culpable for this heinous act. This represents an unlawful use of force by the Russian Federation in the UK.

Mr Chairman, I need hardly remind the Permanent Council that no state party which has committed to the Chemical Weapons Convention should in any way be linked to, or responsible for, the use of Chemical Weapons. Indeed, only 1 week ago, Russia reported in the FSC the destruction of historic Chemical Weapon stocks. Events of the last week cast significant doubt on that statement.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is not the only international commitment brought into question by this attack, the first offensive use of nerve agent of any sort on European Territory since the Second World War.

This was a grotesque crime, that not only targeted individuals in a particularly barbaric way, but which was perpetrated without regard to the safety of the British emergency services or indeed to local residents and visitors going about their ordinary lives on a Sunday afternoon.

I repeat Mr Chairman, this was an unlawful use of force against the UK.

But it is not simply a bilateral matter. This crime violates the letter and spirit of the Helsinki Final Act. It damages the concept of confidence building this organisation strives to develop. And it undermines the principles on which this organisation is founded.

No participating State of the OSCE should feel comfortable with what happened on the streets of Salisbury. No participating State.

Mr Chairman, police investigations are ongoing, decontamination operations are ongoing and medical care for the victims of this attack is ongoing.

For now, allow me to express my thanks for the many messages of support from friends, allies and partners around this table and for the strong expressions of solidarity from many capitals represented here.

I will close echoing [the words of my Prime Minister](#). This is an affront to the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. And an affront to the rules-based system on which we depend. We will work with our allies and partners to confront such actions wherever they threaten our security, at home and abroad.

Mr Chairman, please attach this statement to the journal of the day.

Thank you Mr Chairman.

Find out [more about the UK government response to the Salisbury attack](#).