

Syria: Council extends sanctions against the regime for another year



The Council today extended EU **restrictive measures against the Syrian regime** for one additional year, until **1 June 2022**, in light of the continued repression of the civilian population in the country.

The Council also removed from the list five deceased persons. The list now includes 283 persons targeted by both an assets freeze and a travel ban, and 70 entities subject to an assets freeze.

Current sanctions against Syria were **introduced in 2011** in response to the violent repression of the civilian population by the Assad regime. They also target companies and prominent businessmen benefitting from their ties with the regime and the war economy. Restrictive measures also include a ban on the import of oil, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Central Bank of Syria held in the EU, and export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression, as well as on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications.

EU sanctions in Syria are designed to avoid any impact on humanitarian assistance therefore **not to affect the delivery of food, medicines and medical equipment**.

The EU keeps developments in the Syrian conflict under constant review and can decide to renew sanctions and amend the list of targeted entities or persons based on developments on the ground.

The EU remains committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria on the basis of the UN Security Council resolution 2254 and of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

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CPVO signs new Administrative Arrangement with Chinese authorities

The Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO), the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs of China (MARA), and the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China (NFGA) signed a new Administrative Arrangement on 26 May 2021, after the previous Administrative Arrangement for the period

2018-2020 had expired.

The new Administrative Arrangement with a duration of five years is an opportunity to reinforce the collaboration in Plant Variety Protection (PVP) and to continue the fruitful exchange that started almost 5 years ago.

During the signing ceremony that took place virtually, Martin Ekvad, President of the CPVO, said: *"The cooperation between the EU & China on IP policies has advanced in the recent years, and this is good for innovators, businesses and consumers in both the European Union and China. Policies on plant variety rights are no exception. European breeders show an ever increasing interest to invest in China and applications are made in China for many species."*

"At the time when an EU breeder makes an application in China, a DUS report has in most cases already been established in the EU for the same variety. Breeders advocate that reports from the EU can be accepted in China in line with the guidelines for technical cooperation between UPOV members".

"I believe that during the implementation of the Administrative Arrangement signed today, we can develop the "take-over" cooperation further. These are concrete deliverables that will decrease administration for the innovators whilst at the same time ensuring high quality DUS testing."

By signing the Administrative Arrangement, the three administrations show that there is a strong commitment to strengthen their cooperation and to work together so that the scope of protection of plant varieties rights will be the same in the EU and in China. This will not only be to the benefit of breeders, but also farmers, producers and in the end the consumers and citizens.

After the ceremony, a meeting was held during which CPVO, MARA and NFGA discussed the continued technical cooperation.

It was agreed to follow up on possibilities and challenges as regards taking over reports between the three institutions in line with UPOV principles. Such cooperation would benefit the industry by avoiding multiple testing of the same variety and ultimately provide access to the breeding progress to the growers and consumers in Europe and China.

Another topic discussed amongst the participants concerned the activities planned for the end of the year, notably a DUS on-line training and a virtual PVP Awareness Raising Seminar.

It was also agreed to continue an exchange in relation to questions raised by the Chinese sides on matters related to how certain provisions under the UPOV 1991 Act have been implemented in the EU PVP system.

Tourism in Europe for the Next Decade: Council adopts conclusions

The Council today adopted a set of conclusions setting out its vision for an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable and resilient tourism sector in Europe.



Tourism is hugely important for our regions' sustainable economic, social and environmental development. It also contributes significantly to the preservation and promotion of European values and cultural heritage. But tourism is also the worst hit economic sector by the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's conclusions are a clear signal of our commitment to revive European tourism.

Pedro Siza Vieira, Portuguese Minister of State for the Economy and Digital Transition

With preparations for the Summer touristic season in full swing, the Council urges the EU and its member states to move towards a collective and well-coordinated response to the current pandemic crisis with a common and cohesive approach, including by supporting the development of voluntary standards for health and safety protocols by tourism services and establishments.

In this context, the Council conclusions call for the smart use of existing funding opportunities under the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework and the "Next Generation EU" instrument for reviving the ailing European tourism ecosystem and make it more resilient in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

They also call on member states and the Commission to come forward by the end of 2021 with a jointly co-designed European Agenda for Tourism 2030/2050, in order to support the green and digital transitions of the European tourism ecosystem and strengthen its competitiveness.

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Petra Hielkema appointed chair of

EIOPA



The Council today adopted a decision to appoint Petra Hielkema as the chairperson of the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA).

The Council adopted this decision based on the shortlist of candidates for the position of chairperson drawn up by EIOPA's board of supervisors and following confirmation by the European Parliament. In agreement with EIOPA and her current employer, De Nederlandsche Bank (the Dutch national central bank), Ms Hielkema will take over this role from 1 September 2021 for a period of five years. This term may be extended once.

Background

EIOPA is one of three European financial supervisory authorities which form part of the European system of financial supervision (ESFS) introduced in 2010 to address the risks revealed by the 2007-2008 financial crisis. It is an independent advisory body to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Its mission is to protect the public interest by contributing to ensuring the stability and effectiveness of the financial system for the EU's economy, businesses and people. This is achieved by promoting a sound regulatory framework for and supervision of insurance and occupational pensions sectors in Europe.

Curriculum Vitae

Petra Hielkema is currently director for insurance supervision at the Dutch central bank, where she is responsible for the prudential supervision of the Dutch insurance sector. She holds a European Master's in law and economics and a Master's in Russian studies.

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Visa information system: Council adopts regulation to strengthen checks of visa applicants



In response to changing migration and security challenges, the EU is improving its Visa Information System (VIS), a tool used by authorities of the member states to register and check persons applying for a short-stay

visa to enter the Schengen area. The Council today adopted a regulation amending the Visa Information System. The legal act now needs to be adopted by the European Parliament and signed before being published in the EU Official Journal.

The main aims of the amending regulation are to:

- further strengthen the security of the short-stay visa procedure
- include long-stay visas and residence permits in the VIS database
- ensure interoperability between the VIS and other relevant EU systems and databases

In recent years the EU has consistently worked to improve controls of those entering the Schengen area, through the adoption of the travel authorisation system (ETIAS), the entry/exit system and the interoperability of databases. The update to the VIS is the next step in this direction. The new rules will allow for better checks of visa applicants to identify those who may pose a security threat or risk abusing our migration rules.

Eduardo Cabrita, Minister for Home Affairs of Portugal

Under the new rules, the VIS will not only include information on short-stay visas as before, but also cover long-stay visas and residence permits, as these documents allow for free movement within the Schengen area. In addition, a scan of the biographical data page of the travel document will be included in the VIS.

Before issuing a visa or residence permit, the new rules will allow for enhanced background checks on the applicant in relevant security and migration databases. The VIS would automatically launch a query of these databases and any hits will be manually verified and followed up by the competent authority.

Background

The Visa Information System, which has been operational since 2011, is a database to facilitate the short-stay visa procedure. It helps visa, border, asylum and migration authorities to check third-country nationals who need a short-stay visa to travel to the Schengen area. It connects member states' consulates around the world, as well as all external border crossing points. On 16 May 2018, the Commission submitted a proposal to amend the VIS regulation.

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