



Brussels, 9 February 2023

Ms Ursula Von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles
High representative of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Mr Janez Lenarčič
Commissioner for Crisis Management

Stepping up the EU response to the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria

Dear Ms Von der Leyen,
Dear Mr Borrell Fontelles,
Dear Mr Lenarčič,

This Monday in the early morning hours, a devastating earthquake destroyed thousands of buildings in Türkiye and Syria, burying people still asleep. As of now, this terrible disaster has claimed the lives of at least 16,000 people, while thousands are missing.

It is unquestionable that humanitarian aid has to be shipped as quickly as possible to the affected areas to provide immediate help with the search for survivors buried under the buildings and to set up basic infrastructure.

In continuation of the constant EU's humanitarian aid to Syria since 2011, the EU's response to the earthquake has to be stepped up urgently. Three days after the earthquake, the probability of finding survivors decreases with every hour. This is why the EU and its member states have to act swiftly. Humanitarian aid has to be sent without any further delay to the affected regions both in Türkiye and Syria, especially in the areas neglected by Bashar al-Assad's regime and in the northern Syrian province of Idlib, outside of Assad's control.

To name but one example, rescue teams cannot operate because fuel for the appropriate machines is unavailable. While there fortunately are some stocks in Syria itself, the UN's World Food Program warns that these will soon be exhausted and will have to be refilled. However, refilling is slowed down for two reasons.

On the one hand, many of the roads essential to get aid into Syria are blocked as a result of the earthquake. Along the 909 km long Turkish-Syrian border, only one border crossing point, between Cilvegözü and Bab al-Hawa is currently open. This drastically complicates the shipment of humanitarian aid.

On the other hand, shipping international humanitarian aid to the affected regions in Syria is complicated because of the international sanctions against the cruel Assad regime the European Union is legitimately enforcing. A regime, which, by delivering humanitarian aid only to areas under its control and ignoring the humanitarian needs of the Idlib region, has been violating international humanitarian law for years. In addition, the regime itself is slowing down assistance to the regions controlled by its opponents, particularly in the Northern part of the country, which is the most affected one.

To prevent further deaths, the EU has to take swift action.

First and foremost, we urge the EU to establish an EU Humanitarian Air Bridge or humanitarian corridor to the affected areas and to facilitate efforts of Member States willing to do so.

Second, the EU has to provide technical support to help reopen passageways between Türkiye and Syria for the shipment of humanitarian aid.

Finally, the EU should use its diplomatic influence, including at the level of the United Nations, to significantly speed-up humanitarian aid to Syria.

Yours faithfully,

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