

**To: Ministries and Parliamentary Committees of Foreign Affairs of the EU Member States
Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament**

Regarding: The spending of EU aid to Syria in light of the refusal of the EEAS to engage with representatives of The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria that represents one-third of Syria

Dear Sir/Madam,

At 24 and 25 April last the EU institutions organised 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region - Brussels conference'. From the EU institutions the conference was headed by Mrs. Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (European External Action Service (EEAS)). A specific amount of support from the EU Member States was pledged for aid inside Syria. As both our organisations have been gathering political and practical support for the people in North-East Syria we welcome that development. However we would like to share our recent experience with the EEAS that fits in a repetitive pattern which raises doubts on the willingness of the EEAS to support aid inside Syria in an effective way consistent with EU values and standards.

At 10 and 11 April our organisations had the honour to host a delegation from the Executive Council from The Democratic Federation of North Syria (DFNS). The DFNS delegation was composed of both men and women of all ethnic and religious groups in The Federation and lead by Sanharib Barsom, Co-President of The Federation of Northern Syria. During those days we organised a conference in the European Parliament together with the delegation and arranged meetings with relevant EU and NGO representatives. The focus of this effort was the situation in northern Syria and the functioning and future of The Federation of Northern Syria.

The DFNS is founded on the principles of gender equality, ethnic and religious tolerance, sustainable ecology, and self-defense. Currently, the region is home to over 4.5 million residents, but this number consistently increases due to the ongoing arrival of (an estimated 250.000) refugees from newly liberated territory. The defense forces of the DFNS have been crucial for the defeat of ISIS in Syria. The DFNS created a multi-ethnic and multi-religious governance at local and regional level across North-East Syria. Women take 50% of the governance positions in these bodies. This governance replaced ISIS and through practical implementation of fundamental freedoms and rights (such as the freedom of religion and equality of men and women) the DFNS also replaced the mentality of ISIS. The DFNS welcomes humanitarian organisations and gives them protection wherever needed. Our organisations have visited these regions (more than one time) and can testify to the reality of the above as can many others. We see the developments in Northern Syria not only as solution for the crisis in Syria but also as key policy input to overcome European challenges around migration, integration and terrorism. We believe that policy ideas on these issues need to be rooted in realities on the ground and The Federation of Northern Syria provides these realities in one-third of Syria.

The official EU and EEAS policy goals for Syria and Syrian refugees are similar to those of The Federation of Northern Syria. The EEAS has been emphasizing the need for the inclusion of women and all ethnic and religious groups in the future of Syria and is openly promoting these goals via (for example) Facebook advertisement.

Therefore we were unpleasantly surprised in the morning of 11 April when all of a sudden we were told that the Syria desk of the EEAS had no time to meet the above-mentioned delegation of the Executive Council of the DFNS in the afternoon of the same day. This was regardless of the fact that a meeting was in principle scheduled almost two weeks in advance and that we provided the EEAS with all relevant information. The Syria desk did not even make any effort to inform us that they had 'no time' to meet the delegation as we received this via other EEAS staff who admitted that the Syria desk should have informed us.

The main problem however is that this is symptomatic for the EEAS attitude towards one-third of Syria. There is a sustained EEAS policy of exclusion of The Federation of Northern Syria. Representatives of the EEAS on the Syria dossier have between 2014 and 2017 openly stated that they did not want to meet with representatives of The Federation regardless of many calls from the European Parliament to include The Federation in EU policies. **The EEAS consistently refuses to meet the representatives of one-third of Syria where they actually implement the stated EU policy goals.**

This policy of deliberate exclusion of the DFNS is completely out of touch with both National Parliaments and the European Parliament. Furthermore both the German and Dutch Ministries of Foreign affairs had interest in meeting the delegation although they were approached only a week beforehand. President Macron met personally with another delegation of the DFNS at 29 March last.

The fundamental question is why the EEAS acts against the stated policy goals of the EU in Syria. The EEAS only considers the High Negotiating Committee (HNC) and the related Syrian National Council as representation of the Syrian opposition. It is no secret that the HNC is fully supported by Turkey and represents radical islamists. Its actual presence in Syria consists for a large part of islamist factions such as Ahrar al Sham and Jaysh al-Islam (that both include Salafist groups). It is incomprehensible that the EEAS only recognizes representatives of radical Islamic militias and refuses to talk with those representing a democratic alternative in one third of Syria.

As a consequence the EEAS does not actively work to create support for the hundred thousands of internal refugees (IDP's) that found shelter in the region. In addition it is stated policy of the EU institutions not to support rebuilding while that is possible in the Federation of Northern Syria. Rebuilding cities such as Raqqa will enable a massive number of IDP's to stay in Syria. As The Federation of Northern Syria does not get support for sheltering these IDP's nor for the rebuilding of the places where they came from, it is certainly possible that overtime these hundred thousands will leave Syria to create an additional stream of refugees. It is pointless and counterproductive to refuse to help one-third of Syria while it is perfectly possible. **This means that funding for Syria is not used as effectively as possible although the NGO's have underlined at the EU conference on Syria at 25 April the need to cooperate with local governance in Syria to create effective aid.**

In that regard the political stance of the EEAS is very unhelpful. It gives political support to those who represent the groups who for example attacked the (mainly Kurdish) Afrin region together with Turkey. This created a new refugee stream that recently arrived in Greece through the landborder between Greece and Turkey. At the same time there is no cooperation with the Federation in helping the refugees that found shelter in Federation areas.

The conclusion is that the EEAS is actively supporting extremist groups that create more refugees coming into Europe and refuses to meet and support The Federation of Northern Syria that tries very hard to defeat terrorism and tries to prevent refugees from leaving Syria.

We strongly suggest that EU Member States Parliaments and Governments ask the EEAS to end this counterproductive policy and start a dialogue with The Federation of Northern Syria. Furthermore the EEAS and related EU institutions should allocate a serious part of the funding for Syria that is coming from the Member States to support for internal displaced people ('internal refugees') in areas of The Federation of Northern Syria. In addition the rebuilding should start of specific cities that were liberated from ISIS (such as Raqqa) to allow the inhabitants to return and prevent wholly unnecessary refugee streams.

This policy will be in line with the military efforts of the International Coalition against ISIS and deliver a tangible way forward in preventing refugee streams and terrorism.

We as Sallux and ESU are available to provide more and detailed information on the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) and the possibilities to support the implementation of fundamental freedoms and equal rights in North-East Syria.

Kind regards,

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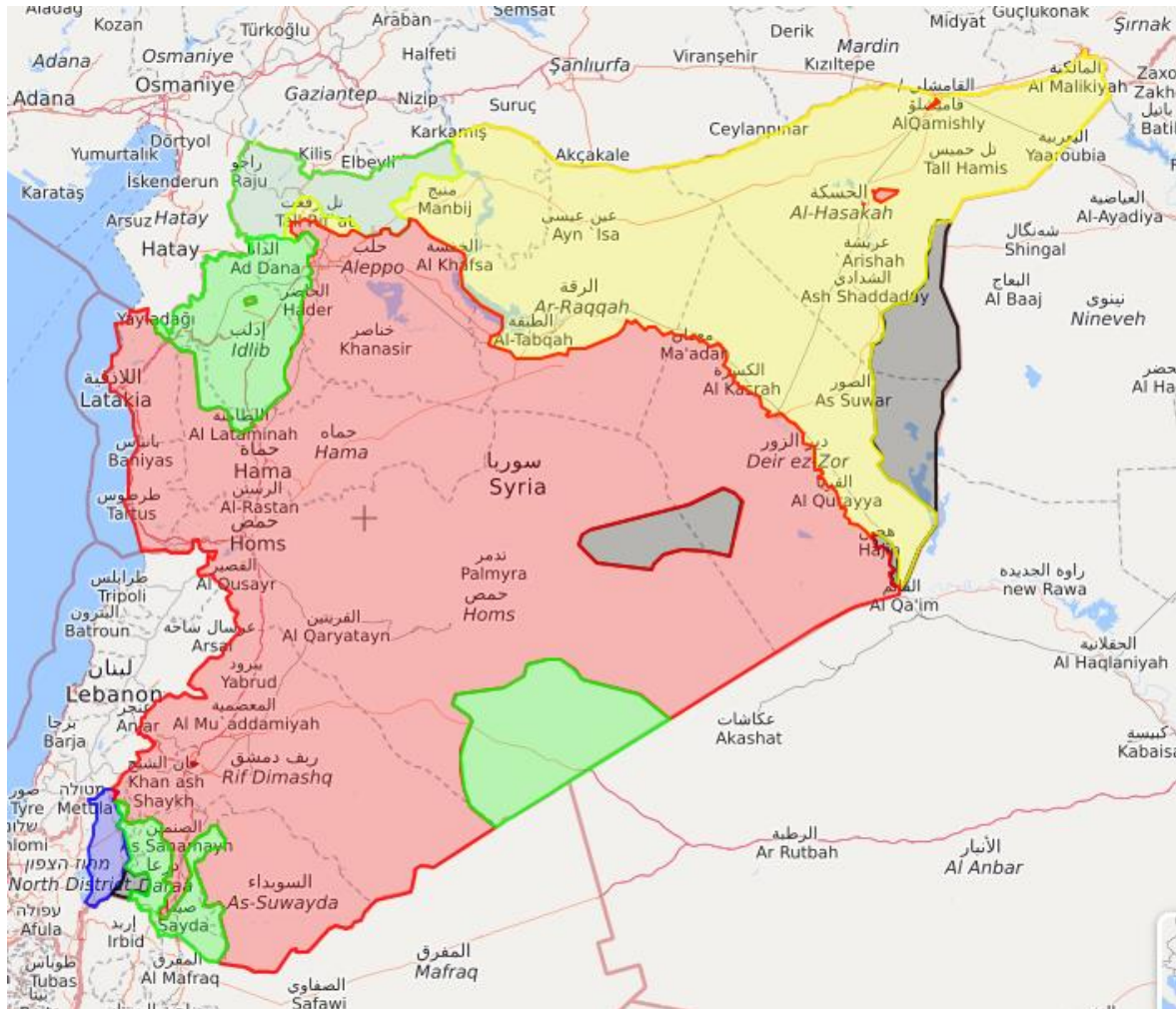
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ATTACHMENT: Political Map of Syria

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(Pink = Assad regime/Iran/Russia, grey = ISIS, yellow = Federation/SDF (in cooperation with USA & France), green = (Islamist) rebels, grey-green = Turkish occupied zone).

Please note that the political coloring of Golan heights is done by Liveuamap and not by our organisations.