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The European response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Rapporteur: Mr Pietro MARCENARO, Italy, Socialist Group

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy congratulates the rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Mr Giacomo Santini, for his fair, accurate and pertinent report on the European response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, following a request by that committee and a decision by the Parliamentary Assembly to hold a debate under urgent procedure.
2. It fully agrees that the international community's silence and inaction vis-à-vis the influx of refugees have lasted too long and it is time to react to help the refugees live under decent conditions and return home once the conflict has ended.
3. In this respect, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy wishes to highlight a few elements of analysis of the overall political situation in Syria and reiterate some of the recommendations contained in [Resolution 1878 \(2012\)](#) on the situation in Syria, adopted in April 2012 on the basis of a report it presented to the Assembly under urgent procedure. For the committee, the problems raised by the dramatic situation of refugees and displaced persons in Syria and in neighbouring countries can only be solved if there are prospects of peace. And this will only be possible through a political solution to the conflict, requiring, *inter alia*, the emergence of a common initiative of the international community. Only a political solution can open up to Syria the possibility of eliminating violence and embracing the change for which so many lives have been sacrificed.
4. For these reasons, the committee proposes the following amendments.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 3, replace the words “the persistence of the crisis” with the following words:

“the dramatic deterioration of the conflict, which has escalated into a full-fledged civil war,”.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 4, replace the words “the acts” with the words “all acts”.

1. Reference to committee: Debate under urgent procedure, Reference 3896 of 1 October 2012. Reporting committee: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. See [Doc. 13045](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 3 October 2012.



Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 4, add the following text:

“It particularly condemns the continuing, widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity committed by the Syrian military and security forces, such as summary executions, torture and sexual violence, including of and against children. The Assembly reiterates that all allegations of violations and crimes must be properly investigated and their perpetrators, whoever they may be, must be brought to justice, including, as appropriate, before the International Criminal Court.”

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5, at the end of the first sentence add the words: “, as it is in certain areas of Syria itself.”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

Delete paragraph 9.

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 10, insert the following paragraph:

“The Assembly is convinced that the problems raised by the dramatic situation of refugees and displaced persons in Syria and in neighbouring countries can only be solved if there are prospects of peace. And this will only be possible through a political solution to the conflict. For this purpose, it is indispensable that:

- a common initiative of the international community emerges;*
- more voices among the ranks of the supporters of the regime seriously consider the prospect of a political transition;*
- extremist and fundamentalist forces among the ranks of the opposition are marginalised, and the opposition realises that a military solution is a mere delusion;*
- more efforts are made to convince the Syrian democratic opposition to unify around a common political platform and leadership, in order to be ready for the political transition.”*

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 12, after the words “Security Council”, place the rest of the paragraph as a first sub-paragraph and add a second sub-paragraph which reads as follows:

“– agree on a common initiative which will set the conditions for a political solution to the conflict and generate the prospects of peace”.

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 13.8, add the following sub-paragraph:

“recognise the urgent need to provide vital supplies, including food, clothing, medical aid and temporary shelter both to displaced persons in Syria and to Syrian refugees in bordering countries before the onset of winter.”

Amendment I (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 14, add the following paragraph:

“The Assembly reiterates that the possibility of eliminating violence and embracing the change for which so many lives have been sacrificed can open up to Syria only through a political solution.”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Marcenaro, rapporteur for opinion

1. I congratulate the rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, Mr Santini, for his fair, accurate and pertinent report on the European response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, following a request by that committee and a decision by the Parliamentary Assembly to hold a debate under urgent procedure.
2. For my part, I recall that, in April 2012, upon the request of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, the Assembly held a first debate under urgent procedure on the situation in Syria. I was appointed rapporteur and presented a report which led to the adoption of [Resolution 1878 \(2012\)](#).
3. In [Resolution 1878 \(2012\)](#), the Assembly firmly condemned “the widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity committed by Syrian military and security forces such as: the use of force against civilians, arbitrary executions, the killing and persecution of protesters, enforced disappearances, torture and sexual violence, including of and against children”. Reiterating that there can be no impunity for those who committed crimes against humanity whoever they may be, the Assembly asked for all allegations of violations and crimes to be properly investigated and their perpetrators brought to justice, “including, as appropriate, before the International Criminal Court”. The Assembly asked for effective action by the international community in a situation, the emergency and gravity of which could not “accommodate individual countries’ geopolitical considerations”. The Assembly expressed support for the six-point peace plan proposed by the then joint envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr Kofi Annan, stressing that it should be given “every chance of success in order to avoid full-fledged civil war”.
4. Regrettably, since last April, the situation in Syria has seriously deteriorated and the spiral of violence has led to a full-fledged civil war. The narrow opening obtained by the mandate given to Mr Kofi Annan with a view to putting an end to the violence and initiating a Syrian-led political process has been closed. The Syrian regime has never accepted any serious negotiation process, whereas, within the ranks of the opposition, which continues to be weak and fragmented, the influence of those who have pursued the illusion of a military intervention has had a negative effect. The resignation of Mr Annan at the beginning of August 2012 symbolised the failure of the international community’s initiative.
5. Thus, the courageous fight of a large part of Syrian society against a dictatorship and their quest for freedom, dignity and democracy still remains without a political solution.
6. Confronted with these developments, the international community has been incapable of providing a common response and the Security Council of the United Nations, which has the responsibility of stopping such a destructive course of events, has continued to be paralysed by divisions and blocked by the logic of veto(s). It is no surprise that, against such a backdrop, extremist and irrational forces have succeeded in prevailing upon and influencing the whole situation. This has been the case both within the ranks of the regime and within those of the opposition.
7. Just as Assad profits from the support and protection offered by Russia and Iran to avoid a transition which could only lead to his departure, a part of the opposition finds in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar support for the most radical and extremist positions.
8. The violent degeneration of the conflict, and its escalation into a civil war, which have been at the root of the growing phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, now make it extremely difficult for the international agencies to play fully their role on the ground and honour their commitments.
9. This is why I believe that the problems raised by the dramatic situation of refugees and displaced persons in Syria and in neighbouring countries, can ultimately only be solved if there are prospects of peace. And this will only be possible through a political solution to the conflict.
10. The emergence of a common initiative of the international community is indispensable in this respect. It is essential to exercise political pressure in this direction, thereby moving away from the destructive spiral of violence of the last months.
11. It is also necessary that more voices among the ranks of the supporters of the regime seriously consider the prospect of a political transition; that extremist and fundamentalist forces within the ranks of the opposition are marginalised; and that the opposition realises that a military solution is a mere delusion.
12. To conclude, I am convinced that only a political solution can open up to Syria the possibility of eliminating violence and embracing the change for which so many lives have been sacrificed.