

**Conclusions and Policy Recommendations based on the Böll Lunch Debate
'The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighbouring Countries: What Role Should the European Union Play?' organised by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union in co-operation with IKV Pax Christi on 27 November 2013**

An end of the Syrian conflict is not remotely within sight. So far, more than two million people have left the country, more than four million are displaced internally; at least seven million are affected by the conflict and are in need of humanitarian assistance. Three quarters of the Syrian refugees are received in neighbouring countries, the great majority in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, a situation which puts great political, economic and social pressure on these countries. The security of both the Syrian refugees and of the hosting communities is at risk. The European Union may be the largest donor with the total humanitarian assistance committed by the EU over 1.85 billion euro, but there is more the EU and its Member States should do. The refugee situation asks for a sustainable solution. EU assistance should not just focus on humanitarian aid, but also on strengthening the self-reliance of both the refugee communities and their hosting communities. Even in case of a negotiated settlement of the conflict, it would take a very long time for all the refugees to return. Part of them will have left the country for ever, even if they do not realise that yet. Others will still leave the country after a settlement of the conflict. It can be expected that tens or even hundreds of thousands of Syrians will end up in Europe somehow. The question is not only what the EU can do to help the regional host countries, the question is also how many Syrian refugees the EU and its Member States are willing to accept.

The panel of the Böll Lunch Debate "The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighbouring Countries: What Role Should the European Union Play?" consisted of representatives of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, IKV Pax Christi and NGOs from Lebanon and Turkey as well as Members of the European Parliament.¹ Among the audience were diplomats from Syria's neighbouring countries and representatives from think tanks, NGOs and the European Institutions dealing with refugee issues. In the debate it was pointed out that the neighbouring countries are doing a great deal to help the refugees. The burden is clearly not to be left solely on the neighbouring countries' shoulders. The focus in the debate lay not so much on more aid from the European Union's side, but on different aid and support.

Conclusions and recommendations for EU measures:

1. Although the European Union is the biggest donor of financial aid with nearly €2 billion in relief and recovery aid for Syrian refugees, the EU has been lacking a role of leadership since the beginning of the crisis in March 2011. Neither could the EU play an important role when the escalation began nor in dealing with its consequences. There is an evident focus on 'ad hoc problems' (e.g. the arms embargo or raising financial aid) and a lack of a long term perspective or strategy. Unfortunately, there has not been a lot of positive

¹ Speakers were **George Ghali**, Monitoring & Advocacy Programme ALEF Act for Human Rights, **Sema Genel Karaosmanoglu**, Executive Director *Support to Life / Hayata Destek*, **Judith Sargentini**, Member of European Parliament (GREENS/EFA) and **Marietje Schaake**, Member of European Parliament (ALDE) Moderators were **Bente Scheller**, Director Middle East Office Beirut, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung and **Jan Jaap van Oosterzee**, Advisor Policy and Public Affairs Middle East and Caucasus, IKV Pax Christi.

development within the last months or even years. The humanitarian situation has neither been solved nor could the ferocious fighting be stopped. Neither the EU as a whole nor any of its institutions or Member States has by now developed a broader strategy. The distribution of power among the Member States and the EU causes procrastination, there is a lack of cooperation and willingness to work together under the EU flag (e.g. through the European External Action Service) on the side of many Member States.

2. A strategy for the EU could be to reinforce the support of the local communities in Syria and the neighbouring countries to provide for educational and health care institutions as well as crime prevention programmes. Moreover, the EU has to strengthen its cooperation with the neighbouring countries to obtain a clearer understanding of the circumstances at the borders. In light of examples of abusing provided financial aid, the cooperation between the international community, the EU, national governments and NGOs is even more important.
3. The international community should show the neighbouring countries its gratitude and respect for continuing to host Syrian refugees and other countries. EU Member States should be more willing to open their borders to host Syrian refugees and to provide more financial support. If the international community does not maintain the level of financial assistance, the neighbouring countries might feel forced to change their policies and close the borders, which most likely would cause an increasing tension in the border area and in the camps.
4. The EU needs to be more open for the resettlement of Syrian refugees and prepare for much larger numbers to come. The positive signals sent out by Sweden or Germany hosting around 8.000 Syrian refugees each is not comparable with e.g. the efforts of Lebanon where thousands of people are arriving at the border on a daily basis. The EU has to move from border protection to the protection of people, a point on which political families across the EU and EU Member States disagree heavily. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be the political will among the Member States to take the hosting or resettlement of refugees seriously enough, which carries the political risk that the consequences will be a lot worse than today's situation. The least EU Member States could do is to reactivate the temporary protection measures that were put in place during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo and start resettlement programmes at least for family reunification among Syrians.
5. The EU needs to work together with the neighbouring countries towards a more sustainable and permanent solution of the refugee crisis. Since the settlement of refugees in the neighbouring countries is a taboo subject, this issue will be difficult to address, but it has to be put on the agenda.
6. Donors, the international community and other stakeholders should realise that providing protection for Syrian refugees can no longer be realised without addressing security and economic concerns of the neighbouring host countries. This will only happen by addressing the refugee crisis as a long-term problem and address the many problems (e.g. poverty, unemployment, economic deficiencies) which affect both refugee and host communities in a similar way.

7. The EU needs to think about ways to assist countries in maintaining security. As the UN mandate allows the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to “assist the Government of Lebanon in securing its borders and other entry points”, fulfilling this mandate to the letter would at least offer an easy way to get more troops involved in maintaining stability in Lebanon if desired so by the Lebanese government, without having to enter in difficult processes of negotiations with the UN Security Council.
8. Refugees are not docile victims. They try to rebuild -- against all odds -- their own lives. They try to find work. They learn Turkish when in Turkey. This is, however, no reason to think that we can leave the refugees to solve their own problems. If we want to develop a sustainable and effective way to handle the refugee crisis, we should use the refugees’ energy and creativeness and build on their self reliance.
9. The international Geneva II Middle East Peace Conference (Geneva II) on 22 January 2014 will bring together the Syrian regime, the Syrian opposition and the international community to work together closely to stop the fighting and violence in Syria and concentrate on a peaceful solution. The conference should create a long term roadmap, a ‘Syrian Marshall Plan’, focussing on the access to aid for refugees in and outside Syria, the protection of aid workers and the reconstruction of the country. Unfortunately, it is to be feared that the conference is unlikely to lead to a settlement.
10. Even if there will be a political solution after Geneva II, the humanitarian crisis will not be over and refugees will remain in the neighbouring countries for a long period of time, making a sustainable long-term strategy to deal with the refugee situation an absolute urgency.

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