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News | 11.10.2019

Turkey-Syria

Group statement

Again, a major disaster is unfolding in Syria. The sudden announcement by President Trump of the withdrawal of US troops from northern Syria has given Turkish President Erdogan the opportunity to let his armed forces invade Syria and thereby bring further chaos, bloodshed and human misery to the country and the region at large. This is not only a slap in the face of the Kurdish people whose forces have proven decisive in the fight against Da'esch, and who are now in imminent danger, it is also extremely dangerous for all residents of northern Syria and the 2 million refugees that President Erdogan has threatened to send back to Syria.

In front of the European Parliament on Wednesday 9 October, EU High Representative Mogherini strongly condemned Turkey's military action, on behalf of all EU Member States, and voices around the world have equally denounced this unilateral step with profound humanitarian and security implications. The EU Foreign Affairs Ministers need to firmly condemn this military attack as a violation of international law, warn against the plans of forced population transfer - a crime against humanity, and call for the immediate withdrawal of Turkish troops and draw the necessary consequences for EU-Turkey relations, commensurate to the gravity of this act.

However, warnings or condemnations alone will not stop President Erdogan from violating human rights and international law and bringing further chaos to a country in ruins. The EU should use the whole range of its instruments, such as diplomacy, trade and financial cooperation to prevent this disaster from happening. To start with, the EU should immediately suspend arms exports and security assistance of its Member States to Turkey.

The EU also has a strong responsibility for the Syrian refugees in Turkey, as it designed the EU-Turkey deal to prevent the refugees from entering the EU territory. Syrian refugees are therefore blocked in Turkey, dependent on the protection offered by the Turkish government. Erdogan's threat to deport them back to Syria, shows they can no longer rely on the Turkish authorities. They are in a very vulnerable and unsafe situation. The EU and its Member States should therefore take their responsibility and ensure the protection of the refugees by stepping up resettlement measures and by evacuating them to real and sustainable safe places. We cannot afford to wait and see another disaster happening in Syria, and leave the peoples of Syria alone.

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