(English version)

Question for written answer E-000888/25
to the Commission
Petra Steger (PfE)
(3 March 2025)

Subject: Lifting of EU sanctions against Syria and repatriation of Syrian asylum seekers

Now that the foreign ministers of the Member States have unanimously approved several legal instruments provisionally suspending the EU sanctions against Syria in the banking, energy and transport sectors, which have been in place for years, the conditions must be created for an EU-wide initiative to step up deportations to Syria. It cannot be the case that Syria benefits from significant economic relief while more than a million Syrians, who are urgently needed to rebuild their country, remain in the EU — one hundred thousand of whom in Austria. However, a return of Syrian refugees to their home country would not only contribute to the development of Syria, but would also mitigate the security risks in the host countries, which are suffering massively from the consequences of illegal mass migration.

1. What concrete measures does the Commission plan to take to ensure that the lifting of EU sanctions goes hand in hand with a coordinated return of Syrian asylum seekers to their country?

2. Is the Commission planning to revise the existing asylum regime for Syrian nationals to take into account the changed political circumstances in Syria?

3. How does the Commission plan to support Member States in the implementation of return programmes to enable rapid and efficient remigration of Syrian citizens?

Submitted: 3.3.2025

Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission
(28 May 2025)

The EU supports the transition process towards a unified, stable and peaceful Syria. As of 6 March 2025, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that over 356 200 Syrians have returned to Syria via neighbouring countries since early December 2024, and that almost 890 000 internally displaced persons have returned to their home region since November 2024.

While remaining cautious due to the volatile situation in Syria and the many challenges which still lie ahead, and in line with the European Council conclusions of 19 December 2024 ([1]), the EU is committed to help create the conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees.

The EU will continue to work with neighbouring countries as well as specialised agencies ([2]) in this regard, in particular by supporting Syrians who decide to go home and by stepping up its support for Syria's socioeconomic recovery, including through the gradual easing of EU restrictive measures. The EU support and suspension of sanctions is commensurate with the developments in the country.

Syrian nationals who are beneficiaries of international protection have a right to reside in the territory of a Member State that granted them protection.

Directive 2011/95 ([3]) provides for the conditions to assess whether the person has ceased to be a refugee or to be eligible for subsidiary protection and whether to revoke, end or refuse to renew refugee or subsidiary protection status ([4]).

When a person is no longer a beneficiary of international protection and if they have no other right to stay, they fall under the scope of the Return Directive ([5]). When implementing the Return Directive, Member States shall respect the principle of non-refoulement ([6]).

([1]) https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/12/19/european-council-conclusions-19-december-2024/.
([2]) Such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration.
([3]) Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast).
([4]) This is subject to the procedural safeguards laid out in Directive 2013/32, including an individualised assessment and the right to an effective remedy against a decision withdrawing international protection status.
([5]) Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.
([6]) Articles 4 and 19(2) of the Charter.