

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-001889/25
to the Commission
Özlem Demirel (The Left)
(12 May 2025)**

Subject: Cooperation between the coastguards of Cyprus and Syria

Cyprus is engaged in a new form of cooperation with Syria that involves boat refugees being returned directly to the Syrian port of Tartus before they reach Cypriot territorial waters. Such action, which prevents asylum applications from being made and examined, is banned under international law because it constitutes refoulement at sea.

1. What does the Commission know about Cyprus' new refoulement practice, and to what extent was it informed in advance or even involved in bringing the practice about?
2. Does the Commission consider that the relevant agreement between Cyprus and Syria is covered by EU law?
3. What efforts is the Commission making to build up and equip the Syrian coastguard, and what structures are already known about in this connection?

Submitted: 12.5.2025

**Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission
(30 July 2025)**

The Commission is aware that Cyprus has in place a bilateral Search and Rescue Agreement with Syria since 2009. Cyprus, like all Member States, is bound by the principle of *non-refoulement* and must ensure that in implementing the said agreement, nobody is sent back to a situation where they may face persecution, in accordance with its international obligations.

The Search and Rescue Agreement referred to was not concluded by the EU pursuant to Article 216 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Following the fall of the Assad regime, the Commission is stepping up its engagement to support an inclusive, peaceful, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led transition and to contribute to the country's socioeconomic recovery and future reconstruction.

An enhanced package of EUR 175 million (EUR 139 million to be adopted for 2025 and EUR 36 million already adopted in 2024) is under finalisation, including a priority area that aims to support the rebuilding of the Syrian state by enhancing its institutions, systems, capacities, and governance.
