

Issues of coordination in EU external action;  
the case of intra- and inter-sectorial  
coordination in Syria since 2011.

Eloïse SUISSA

Supervised by Yves Buchet de Neuilly

Paris, 3 May 2024

UFR 11 – Master 1 Science Politique, Affaires Publiques Européennes

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1. SETTING THE STAGE .....	2
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
3. METHODOLOGY.....	9
4. PLAN.....	10
<b>I. INTRA-SECTORIAL COORDINATION IN THE HUMANITARIAN AID SECTOR AS A SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF AGENDA PRIORITISATION BY EU BODIES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1. INTRA-SECTORIAL COORDINATION THROUGH FURTHER INTEGRATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE FEBRUARY 2023 EARTHQUAKE.....	11
2. THE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE AS A YEARLY INTRA-SECTORIAL FUNDRAISER EVENT FOR HUMANITARIAN AID .....	15
3. THE WORKING LEVEL; A BUREAUCRATIC SCALE FACILITATING INTRA-SECTORIAL COORDINATION.....	17
<b>II. THE CHALLENGES, RISKS, AND INCOHERENCE OF INTER-SECTORIAL COORDINATION .....</b>	<b>20</b>
1. THE CRISIS PLATFORM, COORDINATING TO WHAT END? .....	20
2. THE BUREAUCRATIC WORKINGS OF THE EEAS AS AN INTRINSIC OBSTACLE TO INTER-SECTORIAL COORDINATION.....	23
<b>III. ENGAGING IN ‘DECONFLICT’: A SOLUTION FOR EU BODIES TO CIRCUMVENT INTRA- OR INTER-SECTORIAL COORDINATION .....</b>	<b>27</b>
1. DECONFLICTION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION.....	27
2. DECONFLICTION WITH EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS .....	28
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>30</b>

# Introduction

“In Syria, though it sounds funny to say it, but in Syria, there was no such thing as a crisis with the EU.”

– Interview with an EEAS staff member, April 2024<sup>1</sup>

This counterintuitive testimony contradicts what the facts indicate: the Syrian Civil War has been ongoing since 2011<sup>2</sup> and has produced one of the most catastrophic humanitarian disasters in recent history<sup>3</sup>. This has been characterised by political insecurity and the brutal repression of civilians by the Assad regime, ongoing refugee and internal displacement crises, the illegal use of prohibited chemical weapons, the multiplication of terrorist groups fighting the regime, the production and trafficking of captagon, and an ever-worsening humanitarian situation. Throughout, the European Union has constantly attempted to encourage the establishment of a legitimate regime and has deployed humanitarian missions for civilian aid.

The above quotation underlines that different EU bodies, in that sense referring to EU institutions such as the Commission or autonomous entities such as the EEAS, have approached the situation in Syria from opposing perspectives. The question of the situation being dealt with as a crisis, or not, by the EU is at the centre of this dissertation which will emphasise how coordination within a context of crisis management highlights the difficulties in coordination between EU bodies in differing sectors.

## 1. Setting the stage

In the midst of the Arab Spring in February 2011, a group of teenagers drew some graffiti on the walls of Da’ra, a city in the South of Syria close to the Jordanian border<sup>4</sup>. The anti-regime graffiti led to the arrest of fifteen boys who were imprisoned and brutalised. The regime’s violent reaction and treatment of the children spurred peaceful demonstrations

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Syria. Appendix 4

<sup>2</sup> UN OHCHR ‘UN Commission of Inquiry: “Syria, too, desperately needs a ceasefire”’ (11 March 2024) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-commission-inquiry-syria-too-desperately-needs-ceasefire>. Accessed 26 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> DG ECHO ‘Syria’ (2024) [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en). Accessed 26 April 2024

<sup>4</sup> P. Seeberg, ‘The EU and the Syrian Crisis: The Use of Sanctions and the Regime’s Strategy for Survival’, *Mediterranean Politics*, 20/1 (2015), 18–35, 23.

which spread nationwide. However, the regime, under the control of Bashar al-Assad who has been President since 2000, proceeded to violently repress protests. This escalation of tensions led to the outbreak of what the Red Cross denoted as ‘civil war’ in July 2012<sup>5</sup>. Since then, different rebel groups have emerged against the regime, some along sectarian lines. The Kurds became a powerful opposition force and took control of the north-west of Syria with the Kurdish Democratic Front and the Kurdish Democratic Alliance. Radical Islamist groups also emerged against the regime, the most notable of which being ‘Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’, more commonly known as ISIS or Da’esh<sup>6</sup>. This terrorist group started operating in April 2013 and managed to gain control of more than 54% of Syrian territory in 2015. This was, however, mostly in desert areas with low population density. Da’esh therefore controlled approximately 25% of the population, whereas the Kurds only occupied 13% of territory but in areas bringing together 28% of the Syrian population.<sup>7</sup> Other notable opposition forces include the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOC) which is made up of over 70 smaller groups to better coordinate action against the regime. The SOC was considered by the EU to be a legitimate spokesperson for the Syrian people<sup>8</sup> through its Constitutional Committee based in Geneva, and widely perceived as first in line for a transitional government should the Assad regime fall.

In terms of the humanitarian situation, DG ECHO and the UN both emphasise the considerable increase in humanitarian needs since 2011. According to DG ECHO<sup>9</sup>, 16.7 million people currently need assistance, amounting to almost seventy percent of the current Syrian population. Ninety percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Over half the population is food insecure and more than two million people are internally displaced, living in camps without secure access to basic needs. Moreover, 2.4 million children do not attend school, and have lived with the consequences of the civil war their whole lives. The neighbouring states of Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan have taken in the majority of the 5.2 million registered Syrian refugees in the region who have fled the conflict.

Recent discourse surrounding Syria in the European Union has overwhelmingly focused on the Syrian refugee crisis, especially as it peaked in 2015. While some European leaders

---

<sup>5</sup> R. Havlová, ‘The European Union and the Crisis in Syria’, *SOUČASNÁ EVROPA*, 20/2 (2015), 65–93.

<sup>6</sup> Havlová, ‘The European Union and the Crisis in Syria’, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Havlová, ‘The European Union and the Crisis in Syria’, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Havlová, ‘The European Union and the Crisis in Syria’, 70.

<sup>9</sup> DG ECHO ‘Syria’ (2024) [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en). Accessed 26 April 2024

portrayed it as an “invasion”<sup>10</sup>, the EU did not have to deal with migrants in the same order of magnitude that Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan did. However, the refugee crisis caused substantial questioning within the EU concerning border management and asylum criteria. While this aspect of EU dealings with Syrian refugees has been thoroughly debated and criticised in the public eye, the EU has been involved with the Syrian civil war since early 2011, and had been cooperating with Syria ever since 1977. EU-Syria relations were governed by the agreement the EEC signed with Syria in 1977 which focused mostly on trade<sup>11</sup>. Eighteen years later, the Barcelona Process establishing the Union for the Mediterranean also contributed to closer ties between the EU and Syria, in the lead up to the European-Syrian Association Agreement which was negotiated between 1998 and 2004<sup>12</sup>. The latter was paused in the aftermath of the Syrian involvement in the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri in 2005. Four years later, the EU agreed to ratify the Agreement. However, the Syrian authorities delayed their ratification and the Agreement was never signed before the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, at which point Syria was sanctioned by the EU.

The Council of the European Union adopted a Regulation in May 2011 concerning restrictive measures against Syria<sup>13</sup>. As a result of breaching human rights and democratic principles after having concluded an agreement with the EU, the latter was able to sanction Syria on several counts<sup>14</sup>. Firstly, on an economic level, the EU banned all oil imports from Syria. The aim was to exert pressure on the regime and destabilise it financially such that, deprived of its largest trading partner (the EU), the regime might be more inclined to establish a dialogue with civil society rather than engaging in actions of repression against it. It also prohibited any type of assistance that could contribute to worsening the repression. Moreover, it created an Annex to its Agreement, adding thirteen individuals and entities to it whose economic assets would therefore be frozen. This Annex has since been expanded to include 287 individuals and 70 entities who are currently targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze<sup>15</sup>. Sanctions have varied over the past thirteen years, for example there was an

---

<sup>10</sup>S. Lavenex, ““Failing Forward” Towards Which Europe? Organized Hypocrisy in the Common European Asylum System”, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56/5 (2018), 1195–1212, 1196.

<sup>11</sup> Aşkar Karakır and Karacasulu, ‘The dog that didn’t bark? EU crisis management and the Syrian crisis’, 533.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Council Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 of 9 May 2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/442/oj>. Accessed 26 April 2024

<sup>14</sup> J. Peters (ed.), ‘Lebanon and Syria’, *The European Union and the Arab Spring, promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East*, (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 93.

<sup>15</sup> Council of the EU (2024) *Syria: EU response to the Crisis* <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/syria/> accessed 27 April 2024

arms embargo from 2011 until 2013 when some member states pushed for it to be lifted after debates on the delivery of arms to Syrian rebels<sup>16</sup>. Restrictions on the oil embargo were also loosened so that opposition-held areas would be supported economically by being allowed to sell oil<sup>17</sup>. Sanctions effectively crippled the Syrian economy, decreasing trade by almost five billion euros in 2012. This was however, partly offset by higher investments from Iran and Russia who bolstered the regime both financially and militarily.

The EU has kept a close eye on the situation in Syria, producing two key pieces of legislation that have since guided EU action and the ‘European Strategy for Syria’ (ESS) which the Council adopted in 2017. Both ‘Decision 2013/255/CFSP — restrictive measures against Syria’ and ‘Regulation (EU) No 36/2012 — restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria’ agreed by the Council of the EU underline the restrictions on trade in goods, services, and technology, as well as the travel ban and asset freezes. The ESS is the latest guideline indicating the EU’s relation with Syria, it is broken down into six key points:

- “**ending the war** through a genuine political transition
- promoting a meaningful and inclusive **transition** in Syria
- saving lives by addressing the **humanitarian needs** of the most vulnerable Syrians
- promoting democracy, **human rights** and freedom of speech
- promoting accountability for **war crimes**
- supporting the **resilience** of the Syrian population and Syrian society”<sup>18</sup>

These principles are followed by the Council, the Commission and the EEAS when dealing with Syria.

However, these bodies are technically independent from one another, and have their own agendas to carry through as regards Syria. They coordinate actions in different sectors, different domains of intervention that Buchet de Neuilly states can range from humanitarian aid, development aid, international regulation and commerce, political diplomacy, intelligence, or international criminal justice<sup>19</sup>. While the Commission has a larger focus on humanitarian and development aid than the EEAS which emphasises political diplomacy, how can coordination occur smoothly if their objectives do not align? One could suppose a

---

<sup>16</sup> Aşkar Karakır and Karacasulu, ‘The dog that didn’t bark? EU crisis management and the Syrian crisis’, 535.

<sup>17</sup> Seeberg, ‘The EU and the Syrian Crisis’, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Council of the EU, ‘Syria: EU response to the Crisis’ (2024)

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/syria/>. Accessed 27 April 2024

<sup>19</sup> Y. Buchet De Neuilly, ‘Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises ? Attentes et enjeux de cohérence dans les interventions européennes extérieures’, *Revue française d’administration publique*, N° 181/1 (2022), 149–65, 152.

higher degree of goal convergence for EU bodies working on the same sector. On the other hand, when coordinating missions merging different sectors, such as humanitarian aid and political diplomacy, inter-sectorial coordination might highlight the different priorities each institutional body wishes to put forward. From this basis, the **hypothesis advanced would be to suggest that intra-sectorial coordination in the management of the Syrian crisis by EU bodies is more successful than inter-sectorial coordination.**

While these bodies are made to cooperate with one another through the various crisis management mechanisms deployed, the EU is well-known to have struggled in matters of agreeing on an EU-wide, single foreign policy. This remains a competency that the member states (MS) have kept close to their national circles, one for which national sovereignty remains a core value. Delegating matters of foreign affairs is a sensitive topic and this is underlined in decisions in the Council for which unanimity is needed on matters relating to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)<sup>20</sup>. Crisis management mechanisms are therefore highly bound up with national preferences, which themselves might differ from the depoliticised delivery of humanitarian aid the Commission pushes for through DG ECHO, or the missions organised through the EEAS. For the purposes of analysing the coordination (or lack thereof) that relates to EU external action in Syria, I will focus on the Commission, the Council, and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The latter most specifically could be argued to be a product of *bricolage*<sup>21</sup>, a fragmented combination of pre-existing directorates within the Commission and Council before the Lisbon Treaty and the creation of the EEAS led by HR/VP Catherine Ashton. Therefore, my second hypothesis would be that **the bureaucratic structure of EU crisis management mechanisms does not allow for coherent implementation of inter-sectorial actions or policies concerning Syria by different EU bodies.**

These hypotheses will therefore enable me to approach the following research question: *To what extent do EU bodies balance the pursuit of their agenda with attempts at intra- and inter- sectorial coordination, in the case of the Syrian crisis since 2011?*

---

<sup>20</sup> Council of the EU, 'Voting System: Unanimity' (2024) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/unanimity/>. Accessed 28 April 2024

<sup>21</sup> A. Weston and F. Mérand, 'The EEAS and Crisis Management: The Organisational Challenges of a Comprehensive Approach', in D. Spence, J. Bátorá (eds.), *The European External Action Service*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), pp. 323–40, 323.

## 2. Literature Review

The topic of EU crisis management applied in the case of the Syrian Civil War since 2011 has been studied, but not specifically through the prism of intra- and inter-sectorial coordination which is where I will attempt to fill a gap in the literature. The literature has focused more on the lack of coherent CFSP actions as regards Syria<sup>22</sup>, the problems in enacting a comprehensive approach to crisis management there<sup>23</sup>, or the effect of sanctions on the regime and civilians<sup>24</sup>.

I will base most of the theoretical framework I use upon that developed by Buchet de Neuilly<sup>25</sup> through the case study of the use of the *crisis platform* mechanism by the EU in the Central African Republic in 2014. The crisis platform is an EEAS mechanism which aims to gather round the table representatives from all sectors to gather intelligence and facilitate decision-making. Buchet de Neuilly argues that while the crisis platform was intended to ensure a coherent European response, this is an unrealistic and irrational objective. Each institution and each member state have their own motivations which render coordination complicated. The search for coherence is not productive as it highlights the divergence of each sector's priorities which make sense for them but do not always fit in with an inter-sectorial approach. It also maintains hierarchical conflicts that breed tension and impede further cooperation. The constant reorganisation of the EEAS and different programs to promote multilateralism within the organisation itself and the reshuffling of the crisis response centre hierarchy are futile and mostly unproductive attempts to achieve coherence on a pan-European level. In fact, such a concept cannot be put into practice since contradictions in the priorities of actors are a constant.

Buchet de Neuilly also argues that intra-sectorial coordination is more successful than inter-sectorial coordination. Intra-sectorial coordination is more commonplace, more routinely bureaucratised in stable hierarchies, whereas inter-sectorial coordination faces the challenge of an absence of hierarchy and uncooperative actors who are not strictly required to contribute to a search for coherence. Inter-sectorial attempts at coordination reveal the

---

<sup>22</sup> Aşkar Karakır and Karacasulu, 'The dog that didn't bark? EU crisis management and the Syrian crisis'.

<sup>23</sup> C. Bedin, T. Guendouz, and A. Levallois, 'From Conflict Management to Shielding EU Stability: How Syria's Fragmentation Diverted the EU(FSP) from Action to Reaction', *The International Spectator*, 59/1 (2024), 79–97.

<sup>24</sup> L. Trombetta, 'The EU and the Syrian Crisis as Viewed from the Middle East', *The International Spectator*, 49/3 (2014), 27–39.

<sup>25</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, 'Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises?'.



underlying tensions within bureaucratic institutions who do not have the same work culture or agenda priorities.

Tercovich was the first to explore the concept of the Crisis Platform in conflict situations and Buchet de Neuilly uses her research to expand his argument. She too explored the difficulty of compromises between different actors in the European arena, which are amplified in matters of foreign policy<sup>26</sup>. The crisis platform is an embodiment of this confused struggle, as even the actors involved are not all known, since the prerogatives of foreign policy crossed with economic or developmental aid remain blurred even after the Lisbon Treaty. Tercovich looks at the general EEAS crisis response system through the Integrated political crisis response (IPCR) mechanism and the Comprehensive Approach. This allows for a subsequent analysis of the EU crisis management toolbox of the Crisis Response and Operational Coordination program. However, it too is at the centre of interinstitutional frictions since it was created by merging elements from the Commission and the Council who want to retain agenda-setting power even if the mechanism is in the EEAS. Tercovich indicates that increased communication between institutions and pre-emptive agreements on what constitutes a “complex crisis” and “crisis response” would be necessary to minimise inter-sectorial friction. On this topic, Buchet de Neuilly seems less optimistic that communication would suffice or that agreement is even possible.

I also draw on analyses of the EU’s *Comprehensive Approach* and its 2016 *General Strategy*. Lavallée and Pouponneau explore the impact of the ‘Comprehensive Approach’<sup>27</sup> (CA) to foreign policy, based on the 2003 European Security Strategy and serving as a guideline for the EUGS. This multilateral approach aims to overcome the conception of crisis management as having to be dealt with militarily. Instead, its goal is to bridge institutional and sectorial divides by promoting cooperation between civilian, military, humanitarian, developmental, and legal representatives of the EU and member states. By using field theory, they touch upon how the ‘Comprehensive Approach’ guided decision-making in Syria. Their theoretical approach demonstrates how the EU’s CA might be aiming for a coherent, unifying strategy for the EU to follow, but this is an irrational expectation. As regards the EUGS, Cottey argues in his piece ‘Astrategic Europe’<sup>28</sup> that despite its

---

<sup>26</sup>G. Tercovich, ‘The EEAS Crisis Response System’, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 22/3 (2014), 150–57.

<sup>27</sup> C. Lavallée and F. Pouponneau, ‘L’approche globale à la croisée des champs de la sécurité européenne’, *Politique européenne*, 51/1 (2016), 8–29.

<sup>28</sup> A. Cottey, ‘Astrategic Europe’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 58/2 (2020), 276–91.

publication by Federica Mogherini, the HR/VP at the time, the EU lacks a defined strategy that can guide its external action in a coherent manner, as well as a unified assessment of its external environment. It is missing the prioritisation necessary to make its objectives attainable in foreign policy, which is contrasted with the more successful control the EU has on trade policies and its strategies within that domain. The disaggregation of its member states enables a standstill in this “Astrategic Europe”<sup>29</sup>. A modification of its objectives is not being envisaged, combined with a lack of means to fulfil vague promises, EU foreign policy remains structurally inefficient.

Lastly, this dissertation will draw upon Mattelaer’s concept of “deconflict”<sup>30</sup> which he develops alongside his criticism of the Comprehensive Approach. He demonstrates how an intergovernmental approach to crisis management prevails instead of a functionalist one. Along these lines, he shows how EU bodies avoid coordination and instead, settle on avoiding the pursuit of conflictual objectives if they must operate within the same sector. Moreover, he argues, similarly to Buchet de Neuilly<sup>31</sup>, that coordination must be organised at the highest level to be able to arbitrate and rank priorities.

### 3. Methodology

My research was divided between an analysis of academic literature broadly on EU foreign policy and the situation in Syria, ‘grey literature’ produced by EU institutions and NGOs, and four semi-structured interviews.

Institutional documents allowed me to understand EU stances *vis-à-vis* the unfolding situation in Syria, so that I received a comprehensive overview of the changes of EU positions since 2011. Moreover, reports from DG ECHO, DG NEAR, and the UN were highly informative in terms of information as regards feedback of EU missions and funding to Syria. I also analysed press conference statements from Commission representatives and the EEAS. As I initially started my research by focusing on the use of the crisis platform, I struggled to find any resources that might provide any information as to when it was used in the Syrian case. There are no accessible online files, nor any results through searches for physical documentation in the EU archives – be it from the Commission, the Council, the EEAS, or the Parliament. This confidentiality impeded my comprehension of the mechanism

---

<sup>29</sup> Cottey, ‘Astrategic Europe’, 277

<sup>30</sup> A. Mattelaer, ‘The Empty Promise of Comprehensive Planning in EU Crisis Management’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 18/Issue 4 (2013), 125–45, 139.

<sup>31</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, ‘Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises?’.

and instead led to an in-depth analysis of Council Conclusions, Foreign Affairs Council minutes, European Council conclusions, and agendas for different working groups on Syria such as the Mashreq/Maghreb (MaMa) working group, as well as Parliament reports by MEPs from the foreign affairs working group.

My requests for interviews were also in majority turned down as the EU employees I contacted, from those working in the Commission and the EEAS especially, refused to talk about the crisis platform, or did not know of its use in the Syrian case. Out of the four interviews I was able to proceed with, one in February and the rest in April – after relentless interview requests – only one interviewee who had been involved in the crisis platform mechanism as a desk officer agreed to briefly mention it, but was unwilling to go further into detail. My other interviews, which were also all online, lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, and brought me to the conclusion that I would not have sufficient material on the crisis platform to focus my research exclusively on that topic. The work of the interlocutors in DG NEAR, the MaMa working group, the Delegation of the EU to Syria, and the Crisis Response Centre, allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted EU interventions as regards Syria, and issues relating to coordination. All but one interview took place in English, and the interlocutors all required anonymity, sometimes stressing that what they were telling me was their personal opinion, or an informal point of view. My questions were broadly centred around their own work, the position of the institution they worked for as regards Syria, and mechanisms of crisis management. An interesting point which I flagged since it occurred in all the interviews, was the interlocutors' reluctance to mention anything they hadn't directly worked on or been involved with: they refused to discuss mechanisms they hadn't had direct experience of. This might have been for fear of providing erroneous information, but it also seemed like they shut themselves off from anything that was outside of their remit. This is interesting especially when focusing on the coordinative aspects of their work outside their directorates.

#### 4. Plan

This dissertation is divided into three parts. Firstly, I will argue that in the case of Syria, intra-sectorial coordination attempts in terms of humanitarian aid allow for EU bodies to maintain a strong hold over their own agenda. I will address how the Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements organised by the Council allowed for a rapidly coordinated response to the 2023 earthquake which aggravated the humanitarian situation; then

demonstrate how the Brussels Conference also brings together various actors to coordinate fundraising for Syria; and finally develop the case study of working level coordination through a water piping project jointly managed by DG ECHO and the Delegation of EU to Syria.

Secondly, I claim that the use of the crisis platform in Syria as an attempt for inter-sectorial coordination underlines how EU bodies both fail to put forward their agenda while agreeing on coherent strategies, and lack the capacity to organise their priorities for action. In this part I will focus on the use of the crisis platform for the more acute crisis in Idlib in 2020, and follow up on an analysis of how the EEAS' "interstitial"<sup>32</sup> bureaucracy undermines the crisis platform in its very conception.

Lastly, I will explore how EU bodies balance both prioritising their agenda with attempting intra- and inter-sectorial coordination by "deconflicting"<sup>33</sup> instead of actively pursuing coherent coordination strategies. I demonstrate how this happens within the EU by focusing mainly on the work of the Council of the European Union. Finally, I will outline how it occurs outside the EU by examining EU-UN relations regarding Syria, the EU's work with the Arab League, and Syrian opposition groups.

## I. Intra-sectorial coordination in the humanitarian aid sector as a successful example of agenda prioritisation by EU bodies

### 1. Intra-sectorial coordination through further integration in the aftermath of the February 2023 Earthquake

The 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023, an earthquake of a 7.8 magnitude on the Richter scale hit South-East Turkey and North-West Syria. This devastating natural disaster affected six governorates in Syria, including the cities of Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo which were already on the front lines of tragic events unfolding within the context of the civil war. The European

---

<sup>32</sup> J. Batora, 'The "Mitrailleuse Effect": The EEAS as an Interstitial Organization and the Dynamics of Innovation in Diplomacy', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51/4 (2013), 598–613.

<sup>33</sup> Mattelaer, 'The Empty Promise of Comprehensive Planning in EU Crisis Management', 139.

Union crisis management mechanisms were swiftly activated as a response to this deadly crisis<sup>34</sup>.

The first semester of 2023 was led by the Swedish Presidency in the Council, who activated the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism the day of the tragedy<sup>35</sup>. The IPCR itself supports, as described by the Council, “rapid and coordinated decision-making at EU political level for major and complex crises, including acts of terrorism. Through this mechanism, the presidency of the Council coordinates the political response to the crisis by bringing together: EU institutions; affected member states; other key actors.”<sup>36</sup>. Tercovich explains that the IPCR replaced in 2013 the *crisis coordination arrangements* (CCA) which had been established in 2006. The IPCR arrangements were supposed to be more flexible, while still allowing the rotating Presidency and the General Council Secretariat to take the lead in situations of crisis management, discussing solutions in COREPER II while being supported by the EEAS and the Commission in their chosen actions<sup>37</sup>.

In the case of the 2023 earthquake, the Presidency activated the IPCR overnight to provide aid in Turkey and Syria, all the while maintaining an absence of normalisation of relations with the Syrian regime. The use of the IPCR is to “streamline information sharing, facilitate collaboration, coordinate crisis response at political level”<sup>38</sup> on an inter-institutional level through an informal roundtable. This meeting is chaired by the rotating Presidency and gathers members of the EEAS, the Commission (from DG ECHO, DG NEAR, FPI), relevant member states, and experts. Other tools include regular analytical reports, a web platform for information exchange, and a 24/7 contact between stakeholders in the situation. Concerning its use for Syria, the platform is an example of swift intra-sectorial coordination (as explored below), crisis management focused on the humanitarian

---

<sup>34</sup> Türkiye, Syria quake latest: full scale of disaster still unfolding, UN humanitarian warn (7 February 2023) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133222>. Accessed 29 April 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Earthquake in Türkiye and Syria: Council presidency triggers activation of IPCR (6 February 2023) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/06/earthquake-in-tuerkiye-and-syria-council-presidency-triggers-activation-of-ipcr/>. Accessed 29 April 2024

<sup>36</sup> How the Council coordinates the EU response to crises (7 February 2024) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crises/>. Accessed 29 April 2024

<sup>37</sup> Giulia Tercovich, ‘The EEAS Crisis Response System’, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 22, no. 3 (September 2014): 155, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12051>.

<sup>38</sup> How the Council coordinates the EU response to crises (7 February 2024) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crises/>. Accessed 29 April 2024

situation and the delivery of aid. Humanitarian aid is therefore a sector for which coordination amongst different EU bodies has in theory succeeded.

Indeed, a few days after the activation of the IPCR by the Council, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM) was activated by the Commission, at the request of the Syrian regime and the World Food Programme. The EUCPM is organised by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) within the Commission, which coordinates delivery of assistance and covers some of the cost so that it is shared between states and EU institutions. The EUCPM allowed the EU to coordinate with their humanitarian partners on the ground through logistics organised partly by the EEAS Delegation to Syria<sup>39</sup>. In addition to the IPCR and the EUCPM, the European Humanitarian Response Capacity was activated to help cover the population's immediate needs: it flew over stockpiles of equipment from Brindisi and Dubai. Moreover, through the operations of the ERCC, the Copernicus emergency management service was also required to support civil protection operations. The latter provides highly detailed satellite maps and reports to better assess the situation on the ground. It can be triggered through the ERCC, member states participating in the EUCPM, the Commission, and the EEAS including its delegations. This demonstrates its multifaceted capacity for use by different actors who aim to coordinate their crisis management as regards specific situations in one or several sectors. For the earthquake, it was activated in the name of the Republic of Türkiye, maybe judging the tragedy from its epicentre or for diplomatic reasons, but the map (see fig.1) clearly demonstrates how the impact stretched beyond the border and affected north-west Syria too. EU actions overall focused on humanitarian aid, from the activation of those crisis management mechanisms to the deployment of civil protection experts and technical assistance & support teams for heavy urban search and rescue. In line with this intra-sectorial focus, they were mainly coordinated by DG ECHO<sup>40</sup>.

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Syria. Appendix 3

<sup>40</sup> Interview with a desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR. Appendix 1

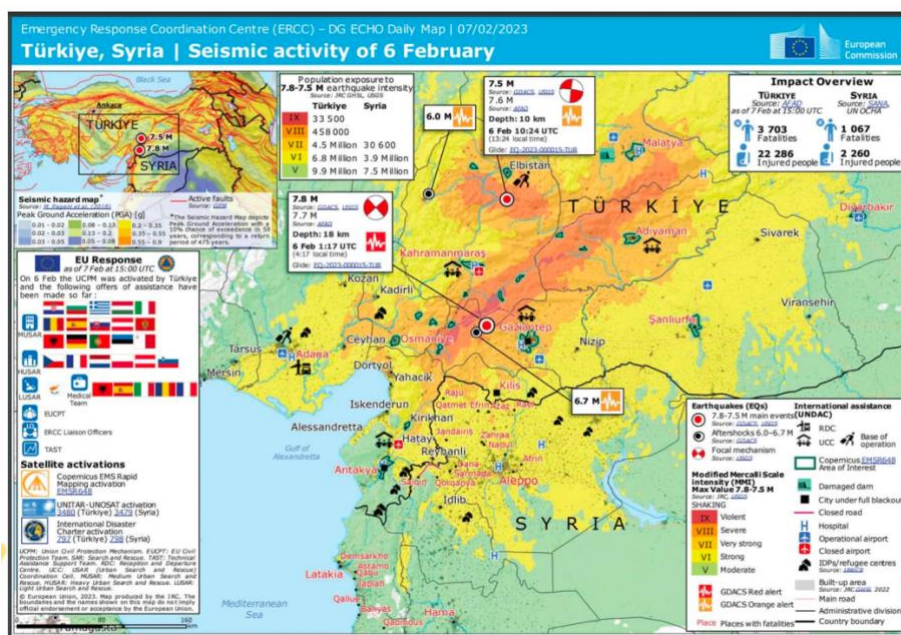


FIGURE 1. COPERNICUS-PRODUCED DG ECHO DAILY MAP (7 FEBRUARY 2023) [HTTPS://WWW.CONSILIUM.EUROPA.EU/EN/POLICIES/IPCR-RESPONSE-TO-CRISES/](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crises/). ACCESSED 29 APRIL 2024

The IPCR was deactivated by the Swedish Presidency on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023<sup>41</sup>, and left in monitoring mode (instead of full activation mode or information-sharing mode) to share existing crisis reports and enable coordination for humanitarian aid operations to subsist. What can be learnt from its deployment, in coordination with the activation of the other crisis management mechanisms cited above, is that the earthquake tested the EU’s capacity to respond swiftly and efficiently to a crisis outside of the EU. While Kulaar<sup>42</sup> argues that results on the ground were mixed due to the politicisation of the situation by the regime who blamed EU sanctions for the complicated implementation of humanitarian aid, the EU congratulates itself on a rapidly coordinated response<sup>43</sup>. Indeed, while the impacts of the response might not have been as effective as those undertaken in Turkey due to the ongoing conflict and fraught EU diplomatic relations with the regime, the actions taken by EU bodies in the aftermath of the event demonstrate a willingness to cooperate as regards the delivery of humanitarian aid. In order to depoliticise this aid and focus on the single sector of

<sup>41</sup> Deactivation of IPCR for COVID-19 and the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria (4 May 2023) <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20231020092150/https://swedish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/deactivation-of-ipcr-for-covid-19-and-the-devastating-earthquakes-in-tuerkiye-and-syria/>. Accessed 29 April 2024.

<sup>42</sup> M. Kulaar, ‘The Syrian Earthquake of 2023: Navigating Diplomacy and Sanctions’, International Institute of Social Studies 2023, 46.

<sup>43</sup> Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell, Commissioner Lenarčič and Commissioner Várhelyi on the 1st anniversary of the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria (6 February 2024) [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representativevice-president-borrell-commissioner-lenarctic-and-commissioner-varhelyi-2024-02-06\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representativevice-president-borrell-commissioner-lenarctic-and-commissioner-varhelyi-2024-02-06_en). Accessed 29 April 2024

humanitarian aid, EU sanctions were even amended. The Council adopted an additional humanitarian amendment (originally for six months, later prolonged until February 2024), which simplified the procedure for humanitarian organisations making transfers to entities listed in the Sanctions Annex, or providing goods and services for humanitarian purposes. This concession from the Council therefore facilitated and reinforced intra-sectorial coordination between the Commission, the EEAS and its delegation, and NGOs on the ground.

By using the framework of Wessel's *fusion thesis*<sup>44</sup>, we can consider that in the field of crisis management, EU bodies are becoming more interdependent as seen through the activation of complementary mechanisms. This intra-sectorial coordination in the humanitarian aid sector reinforces habits of cooperation which allow EU bodies to construct their agenda priorities and mechanisms in an increasingly coordinated and coherent manner alongside each other – with a view to coordinate better in future instances. This fits into a logic of spillover which could present an inter-sectorial fusional character, as successful coordination in the sector of humanitarian aid could influence the possibilities of developing coordination mechanisms in other sectors such as security or diplomacy. Therefore, humanitarian aid in the case of the Turkish and Syria earthquake of February 2023 presented a successful case study demonstrating how EU bodies managed to prioritise their agendas in terms of humanitarian aid thereby succeeding in coordinating a swift intra-sectorial response on the ground.

## 2. The Brussels Conference as a yearly intra-sectorial fundraiser event for humanitarian aid

That the crisis management mechanisms functioned so swiftly to provide humanitarian aid was partly thanks to the funds raised by the International Donors' Conference organised in the aftermath of the earthquake, but also by the Annual Brussels Conferences, the Eighth edition of which took place on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024. It is organised in two parts, the first of which is named the 'Day of the Dialogue', a day of conferences and roundtables engaging with Syrian civil society to better assess Syria's needs. The Conference provides the opportunity to pledge financial assistance to Syria as its humanitarian situation

---

<sup>44</sup> W. Wessels, 'An Ever Closer Fusion? A Dynamic Macropolitical View on Integration Processes', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 35/2 (1997), 267–99.



worsens for its citizens and refugees. In 2023, the international community pledged 5.6 billion euros for the upcoming year, which includes a 3.8 billion euros pledge by the EU and its member states<sup>45</sup>. Most EU press statements regarding Syria proudly underscore that the EU has been the largest donor of humanitarian aid by mobilising over 33 billion euros since 2011<sup>46</sup>.

The Conference is a product of intra-sectorial coordination, as it is in the interests of all EU bodies dealing with Syria to raise funds for their actions. It is co-organised by the MENA.5 section of the EEAS, DG NEAR, and DG ECHO. It showcases European appetite to help through speeches by high level EU civil servants, and through various roundtables. My interview with a desk officer for Syria working in DG NEAR underlined the key domains the funding is used for: most of it goes to DG ECHO for humanitarian aid by the Commission's Foreign Policy Instrument, but DG NEAR is allocated funds to help deal with "early recovery"<sup>47</sup>. Both have strong interests in defending in the organisation of the Conference, as they can thereby coordinate while prioritising topics related to the humanitarian situation in Syria by putting them on the agenda.

Both DGs and the EEAS partly depend on the Conference for funding as Syria's funding. This is because in the case of Syria, contrary to most other states in the MENA region, funding is planned on a yearly basis instead of a pluri-annual one through the multi-annual financial framework<sup>48</sup>. The EU Trust Fund to Syria (Madad Fund') was the main tool for disbursing aid for Syrian civil society in domains as varied as health, education, agriculture, support to civil society, justice, and accounting<sup>49</sup>. It is being replaced by the New Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) as the Madad funding ends in 2025. The NDICI inherits part of the framework established by the Madad Fund by providing financial support to projects in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan (the countries with the most Syrian refugees), as well as functioning according to the 'Whole of Syria' approach. This strategy is jointly led by the UN so as not to overlook aid for any Syrian territories regardless of the political situation. This strategy was also underlined in my interviews with the member of the EEAS delegation to Syria, and the ex-MENA desk-

---

<sup>45</sup> EEAS, 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' (19 February 2024)

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-brussels-viii-conference-2024\\_en#84740](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-brussels-viii-conference-2024_en#84740)

<sup>46</sup> Janez Lenarčič, 'Address by Commissioner Lenarčič at the Brussels VIII Conference on supporting the future of Syria: Day of Dialogue' (30 April 2024)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR. Appendix 1

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

officer for Syria in the EEAS. The main EU bodies involved in providing aid to Syria therefore underline the importance of funding so as to contribute most effectively to improve the situation. Their coordination in terms of funding for humanitarian aid comes under an intra-sectorial basis and follows on from the bureaucratic nature Buchet de Neuilly<sup>50</sup> emphasises for intra-sectorial coordination. He argues that intra-sectorial coordination is more normalised within stabilised bureaucratic hierarchies. This could be applied in the case of the organisation of the Brussels Conference since the co-organisers are used to cooperating with each other at a working level. Moreover, the organisation of the Conference has been reiterated for the past eight years which creates bureaucratic habits simplifying and fostering intra-sectorial coordination for humanitarian aid in Syria. Therefore, it can be argued that the Brussels Conference is a yearly opportunity favouring intra-sectorial coordination between DG ECHO, DG NEAR, and the EEAS: enabling coordination while balancing it with the agenda of institutional bodies, these agenda priorities becoming broadly shared in matters of humanitarian fundraising.

### 3. The working level; a bureaucratic scale facilitating intra-sectorial coordination

On the ground, coordination is essential to implement the projects needed by Syrian civil society. This coordination takes place amongst officers from DG ECHO, DG NEAR, the EEAS but more specifically from the Delegation of the EU to Syria since they are the ones closest to the situation at hand. This first-hand experience the Delegation acquires through their regular missions to Syria serves as an evaluation of local needs and progress of project implementation. The Delegation was withdrawn from Syria in 2012 and has been operating from headquarters in Beirut ever since. It is headed by a *chargé d'affaires* instead of an ambassador given the lack of diplomatic relations with the regime. While an ambassador must be approved by the government they will engage with, a *chargé* is appointed without regard to the government's approval, only by presentation to its ministry of foreign affairs. Officers travel at least monthly to Syria, wherein they engage with civil society, INGOS, or partners who carry out projects the EU has funded. To improve their capacity for action, it is in the Delegation's interests to work closely with other actors

---

<sup>50</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, 'Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises?', 159.

financing and initiating projects. These actors are the Delegation's counterparts in DG ECHO and DG NEAR, and they communicate daily, maintaining productive working relationships<sup>51</sup>.

One way they cultivate coherent coordination is by aligning their agendas and priorities. The needs of civil society span different sectors and while DG ECHO is supposed to focus on humanitarian aid, DG NEAR and the Delegation intervene in the sectors of "agriculture, livelihoods, education, health"<sup>52</sup>. However, depending on how the directorates consider these sectors, they can arguably be considered through the prism of humanitarian aid. By changing the perspective and blurring the lines between immediate and de-politicised humanitarian relief and early recovery, actors on the ground can take advantage of so-called "grey zones"<sup>53</sup> of competency. The desk officer I interviewed in the Delegation explained the confusion surrounding the delimitation of sectors as an opportunity for increased efficiency in their actions: "there's this grey zone between humanitarian and longer-term, early recovery. It's like nobody has a clear definition of what it is, and there's this whole constructive ambiguity around the term."<sup>54</sup> The uncertainty around what should be dealt with in DG ECHO's remit or the Delegation's remit supported by DG NEAR allows for intra-sectorial coordination: actors' ambitions align so they push for the approval of projects together, which might otherwise have failed due to insufficient support.

This was the case for the construction of a water piping system project, co-led by DG ECHO and the Delegation. My interlocutor at the Delegation remained vague on details of where and when it was planned, but he emphasised how the project fell in between the realms of immediate humanitarian relief, early recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. DG ECHO is not supposed to be involved in reconstruction, and the latter is not something the EU is favourable to fund due to the continued non-normalisation of relations with the regime<sup>55</sup>. So, while humanitarian aid is not supposed to be politicised, reconstruction intrinsically is, since the EU considers it would also indirectly benefit the regime. My interlocutor therefore emphasised that the Delegation does "have [their] red lines, and of course there are sometimes discussions about the grey zone around the red lines.". These

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with a desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR. Appendix 1

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Syria. Appendix 4

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> DG ECHO, 'Humanitarian implementation plan (HIP) Syria regional and Lebanon crises' (21 December 2023) [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2024/echo\\_syr\\_bud\\_2024\\_91000\\_v2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2024/echo_syr_bud_2024_91000_v2.pdf)

discussions, taking advantage of the aforementioned “grey zone”, argued for the possibility of replacing water trucks with water piping. Even though piping is less cost effective on the short term for the EU, its benefits are far outweighed on the long-term: it provides access to safe and free water which is not the case with water trucks<sup>56</sup>. The project is therefore jointly coordinated in an intra-sectorial humanitarian perspective by the Commission and the EEAS. DG ECHO also affirms projects of this type, WASH (Water, sanitation and hygiene) should be considered in a perspective of multi-annual intervention strategies, “in coordination with other EU services”<sup>57</sup>.

Intra-sectorial coordination was emphasised as a productive aspect of the individuals’ work. The actors involved build up personal relationships with their counterparts, so they are more inclined to cooperate in a coherent manner on a working-group scale<sup>58</sup>. Indeed, in comparing the comments of the desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR with those of the member of the political section in the Delegation I interviewed and those of the ex-EEAS MENA desk officer, they all stress the importance of close working-level, coordination:

« C'est à la fois formel, très informel, c'est par échange d'email, c'est par réunion, c'est par mission, c'est par... On ne travaille pas du tout en silo, **on est extrêmement coordonnés**. Que ce soit sur les thématiques politiques où le service extérieur a le lead, on est consultés. »<sup>59</sup>

“So the idea is that both the political development and the humanitarian is basically **aligned, work together**.”<sup>60</sup>

“I don't mind the working level. We have a great relationship with the Emergency Response Coordination Centre. It's absolutely excellent. It's **very pragmatic**. We get on with this together, each other, and **we make sure that we complement each other**.”<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> New life in the village: easing water scarcity in Northwest Syria (27 September 2022) [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/new-life-village-easing-water-scarcity-northwest-syria\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/new-life-village-easing-water-scarcity-northwest-syria_en)

<sup>57</sup> DG ECHO, ‘Humanitarian implementation plan (HIP) Syria regional and Lebanon crises’ (2 March 2023), 17. [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2023/echo\\_syr\\_bud\\_2023\\_91000\\_v2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2023/echo_syr_bud_2023_91000_v2.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Interview with a desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR. Appendix 1

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Syria. Appendix 4

<sup>61</sup> Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS. Appendix 3

The different institutional actors agree on the priorities that need to be undertaken in terms of aid to civil society. They support each other through intra-sectorial coordination so as to produce coherent arguments, taking advantage of the “constructive ambiguity”<sup>62</sup> that surrounds the “grey zones”<sup>63</sup> of humanitarian and early recovery needs on the ground. This argument is thus aligned with Buchet de Neuilly’s conclusion that the bureaucracy involved at the working level favours intra-sectorial coordination<sup>64</sup>. It follows that this intra-sectorial coordination at the working level in the broad sector of humanitarian aid is one through which EU bodies manage to pursue their agenda priorities thanks to coordinated action.

## II. The challenges, risks, and incoherence of inter-sectorial coordination

### 1. The crisis platform, coordinating to what end?

While intra-sectorial coordination might allow EU bodies to converge their agendas, especially in the sector of humanitarian aid in the Syrian case, instances of inter-sectorial coordination present more complications in that respect. Buchet de Neuilly argues that the quest for inter-sectorial coordination is never-ending since it plays on issues of social and political hierarchies in decision-making<sup>65</sup>. These practices function on an intra-sectorial working-level bureaucracy, but present additional challenges from sector to sector, including an inherent lack of coherence. While Buchet de Neuilly develops the case of the crisis platform used in the CAP as a challenge to inter-sectorial coordination, this dissertation briefly explores how the crisis platform used in Syria maintained a similar level of inter-sectorial futility.

The crisis platform was last used to provide an EU response to an aspect of the Syrian conflict in 2020. The crisis platform is supposed to facilitate EU crisis management during the “crisis phase”<sup>66</sup> and was conceived as a “crucial mechanism [that] provides the EEAS

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, ‘Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises ?’, 159.

<sup>65</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, ‘Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises ?’, 163.

<sup>66</sup> S. Blockmans and P. Rieker, ‘The EU’s Comprehensive Response to Out of Area Crises: Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap’, *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 388.

(SECDEFPOL, CPCC, EUMS, EUMC, INTCEN, etc.) and the Commission (ECHO, DEVCO, FPI, etc.) with a clear political and/or strategic guidance for the management of a given crisis”<sup>67</sup>. However, it is underlined that coming to a unified EU decision allowing the EU to act remains a challenge. The difficulties in developing a coherent strategy that inter-sectorial coordination aims for were confirmed in what information my interlocutor provided as regards the activation of the Crisis Platform mechanism to manage the situation in Idlib in 2020.

The crisis platform was used several times to manage situations of acute crises in Syria since 2011. However, my interlocutor was unsure how many, or refused to disclose the information. He was involved in the activation of the last crisis platform resulting from the acute crisis in Idlib in 2020 on the EEAS side. The Syrian regime’s military started an advance in April 2019 to regain territory from the rebels, including Turkish-backed forces. Russian and Syrian regime forces created a mass displacement movement of civilians by repeated aerial strikes over hospitals and markets (considered to be war crimes<sup>68</sup>) in Idlib<sup>69</sup>, a city in Northwest Syria, one of the last strongholds of opposition rebels. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates more than 1600 civilians were killed from April 2019 to May 2020 in areas controlled by anti-government armed groups.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the UN puts at one million the amount of people forced to flee because of the offensive, making it the largest exodus since the start of the conflict<sup>71</sup>.

As a consequence of the revived gravity of the crisis, an educated guess would position the activation of the crisis platform at around January or February 2020 since a ceasefire was brokered on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 between Erdogan and Putin. The platform brought together representatives from the Commission including from DG ECHO, and from the EEAS, notably the MENA.5 geographical managing directorate. My interlocutor’s comments remained relatively offhand about the actors participating in the meeting, but he did emphasise the importance of the Strategic Communications taskforce. This seems counterintuitive since there is no publicly-available communication whatsoever on any use

---

<sup>67</sup> Blockmans and Rieker, ‘The EU’s Comprehensive Response to Out of Area Crises: Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap’, 590.

<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Targeting Life in Idlib’ (15 October 2020)

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/15/targeting-life-idlib/syrian-and-russian-strikes-civilian-infrastructure>

<sup>69</sup> A. Frachon, ‘« Russie, Iran et Turquie auront beau multiplier les accolades au sommet, elles n’ont pas les mêmes desseins sur l’avenir de la Syrie »’, (2020).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> BBC, ‘Syria war: Idlib ceasefire between Russia and Turkey begins’, (2020).

of the crisis platform as regards Syria since 2011. My interlocutor highlighted the importance of communicating the fact the EU was engaged in the crisis and was attempting to work together for a coherent response:

“It's important for the EU to show we're on top of things, at least in terms of communications, which is no bad, it's not necessarily a bad thing. It shows that we are at least attempting to work together and to be coherent. That's important for us and it's important for third actors as well. And at least makes us avoid duplications and contradictory responses, public or otherwise.”<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, the task force focuses on fact-based communication and narrative positioning: no contradictory responses were published by EU bodies, and the European Council put out a statement firmly condemning the military offensive of Idlib by the Syrian regime, calling for a ceasing of all hostilities in accordance with international humanitarian law<sup>73</sup>. That statement might be an outcome of the crisis platform meeting.

As regards other outcomes of the crisis platform meeting, my interlocutor seemed inclined to suggest there were none. Since the EU has no military capacity it can deploy to Syria given the diplomatic tensions with the regime and the complex power relations between external powers (Russia, Iran, Turkey) and opposition groups (which include terrorists), its only tool for action on the ground is humanitarian aid. However, the EU in this case seemed to sit by and watch, no specific reinforcements to humanitarian aid seemed to have been organised through the crisis platform, and aid must have been highly complex to deploy given the difficulty INGOs have in accessing Northwest Syria (the Bab al-Hawa border crossing is the only one open from Turkey). Therefore, the crisis platform might have been more useful as a tool to share information between high levels of the Commission and the EEAS, instead of a site for decision-making. Decision-making must have been further complicated by the actors involved in representing each institution and defending their interests based on their different sectors. Inter-sectorial coordination involving humanitarian aid, diplomacy, and potentially security, is immediately less likely to lead to a coherent policy as an outcome of the crisis platform. Actors tend to prioritise their own interests in order to benefit and reinforce their sectors<sup>74</sup>. In the Syrian case, this is combined with the

---

<sup>72</sup> Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS. Appendix 3

<sup>73</sup> European Council, ‘Declaration of the European Council on the situation in Idlib’ (21 February 2020) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/21/declaration-of-the-european-council-on-the-situation-in-idlib/>

<sup>74</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, ‘Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises?’.

impotence of the EU to weigh in effectively in a diplomatic manner from the start of the conflict. Organising crisis platforms does not seem to have bolstered its crisis management capacity. Indeed, as one of my interviewees claimed: “It was all a bit useless. As I was saying, nothing, I mean, apart from flying in, trying to get in humanitarian assistance, there's not much we could do apart from watch. And there are no citizens there, there are no, there are no vital interests, if you see what Russia and the regime took, take a few hundred square kilometres of more territory or less, what difference does it make?”<sup>75</sup>. These comments were highlighted as an informal opinion, but they still reveal the cynical attitude some participants of the crisis platform came away with. This impossibility to act might also underline an unwillingness to pursue inter-sectorial coordination on a higher diplomatic level, instead of on the working-level as previously argued. Bureaucratic turf wars seem to matter more higher up when the situation on the ground is not the priority of those in charge. Moreover, the EU is also restricted by what the MS are willing to agree to and the resources they may provide. Therefore, inter-sectorial coordination is not favoured and the crisis platform did not constitute an opportunity for EU bodies to jointly put forward their interests in the areas of humanitarian aid, military intervention, or development. This was due to a combination of constraints of both UNSCR 2254 and the EU Strategy for Syria, the lack of vital interests in the region, and the absence of a prioritisation of sectorial interests by the actors involved to agree on a coherent policy.

## 2. The bureaucratic workings of the EEAS as an intrinsic obstacle to inter-sectorial coordination

The “interstitial”<sup>76</sup> structure of the EEAS puts the brakes on inter-sectorial coordination. While it was conceived in such a way as to bridge the gap between civilian and military interventions to favour inter-sectorial coordination, the separation between different power structures has arguably not produced the desired results. Established by Catherine Ashton, the first High Representative and Vice President for the Commission, in 2011, it was entrusted with the mandate to carry out European foreign and security policy (broadly the CFSP, including the Common Security and Defence Policy). However, the

---

<sup>75</sup> Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS. Appendix 3

<sup>76</sup> Batora, ‘The ‘Mitrailleuse Effect’.



EEAS struggles to carry out coherent strategies to EU foreign policy (FP), partly as a result of the divisions within its own organisational chart. When the EEAS was established, it merged personnel from the Commission's DG RELEX (so many of them that the Commission's bureaucratic routines became dominant<sup>77</sup>), the Council of the EU, and member states. Without a common building to host everyone in until 2012<sup>78</sup>, the EEAS started out as a *bricolage*<sup>79</sup>, a fusion of several parts of various institutions into one, but lacking an overall sense of purpose and belonging. Vanhoonacker and Pomorska emphasise that staff were therefore either European civil servants or diplomats but not both, so they lacked a "single institutional memory"<sup>80</sup> that would bring those two aspects into productive synergy. Bátorá argues that the EEAS remains an "interstitial"<sup>81</sup> organisation: "an organization emerging in interstices between various organizational fields and recombining physical, informational, financial, legal and legitimacy resources stemming from organizations belonging to these different organizational fields."<sup>82</sup> According to this definition, the EEAS should be in an ideal position to foster inter-sectorial coordination. However, it has been argued that the gap between the interstices is too wide to be bridged to create a coherent foreign policy, since each sector prioritises their own objectives above coordinating and compromising with other sectors.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, the "interstitial"<sup>84</sup> nature of the EEAS sheds light on the futility of the use of the crisis platform for Idlib in 2020. The lack of viable options to intervene in the region combined with the lack of prioritisation of sectorial objectives align with Cottey's view of an "astrategic Europe"<sup>85</sup>. Cottey argues that the EU was unable to prioritise foreign policy objectives, and was marginalised in the Syrian crisis since it lacked leverage over the regime<sup>86</sup>. Moreover, the broad and unranked EU FP priorities have led to fragmented policy-making<sup>87</sup> which further complicates inter-sectorial coordination and underlines a

---

<sup>77</sup> Bátorá, 'The 'Mitrailleuse Effect''.

<sup>78</sup> Bátorá, 'The 'Mitrailleuse Effect'', 604.

<sup>79</sup> Weston and Mérand, 'The EEAS and Crisis Management', 323.

<sup>80</sup> S. Vanhoonacker and K. Pomorska, 'The European External Action Service and agenda-setting in European foreign policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20/9 (2013), 1316–31, 1323.

<sup>81</sup> Bátorá, 'The 'Mitrailleuse Effect''.

<sup>82</sup> Bátorá, 'The 'Mitrailleuse Effect'', 599.

<sup>83</sup> Buchet De Neuilly, 'Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises?', 163.

<sup>84</sup> Bátorá, 'The 'Mitrailleuse Effect''.

<sup>85</sup> Cottey, 'Astrategic Europe', 276.

<sup>86</sup> Cottey, 'Astrategic Europe', 286.

<sup>87</sup> Cottey, 'Astrategic Europe', 277.

capabilities-expectations gap<sup>88</sup> so that the EU is reduced to “muddling through”<sup>89</sup> FP policymaking. There is an EU ambition for increased aid and conflict resolution for Syria<sup>90</sup>, and in theory mechanisms such as the crisis platform should contribute to fulfilling it. However, expectations are dashed by the incapacity of coordinating multiple sectors into agreeing to a coherent strategy, EU FP and the EEAS being dubbed as intrinsically incoherent<sup>91</sup>. Rieker and Blockmans argue that after the capabilities-expectations gap, it is now the “implementation-reception/perceptions gap”<sup>92</sup> which needs to be plugged. This should be achieved by improving inter-institutional coordination and decision-making capacity, as well as basing a conflict-sensitive approach on increased local ownership. This could translate into a greater involvement of field actors such as the Delegation of the EU to Syria, which seems to not have been involved with the crisis platform meetings in 2020.

The distance between Brussels and the field is also a factor which highlights the difficulties of inter-sectorial coordination. Relations that move above the working level enter a realm where bureaucratic turf wars matter more to those in charge. The member of the delegation I interviewed did feel a disconnect between the work on the ground and the work coordinated by the Commission three thousand kilometres away<sup>93</sup>. The needs underlined by field actors and those the headquarters deem necessary to prioritise can differ. Dauvin and Siméant-Germanos underline this, arguing that headquarters for NGOs sometimes remain unresponsive to needs on the ground, without listening to teams in the field<sup>94</sup>. Following on from this idea, Rieker and Blockmans emphasise the EU’s need to reduce the distance between Brussels and the field to improve communication and learn from experience.<sup>95</sup> Without this *rapprochement*, inter-sectorial priorities might never be aligned on a higher institutional level, impeding coordination to the benefit of individual bodies’ agendas.

---

<sup>88</sup> C. Hill, ‘The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe’s International Role’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31/3 (1993), 305–28, 306.

<sup>89</sup> Blockmans and Rieker, ‘The EU’s Comprehensive Response to Out of Area Crises: Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap’, 586.

<sup>90</sup> Janez Lenarčič, ‘Address by Commissioner Lenarčič at the Brussels VIII Conference on supporting the future of Syria: Day of Dialogue’ (30 April 2024)

<sup>91</sup> M. E. Smith, ‘The European External Action Service and the security–development nexus: organizing for effectiveness or incoherence?’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20/9 (2013), 1299–1315, 1299.

<sup>92</sup> Blockmans and Rieker, ‘The EU’s Comprehensive Response to Out of Area Crises: Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap’, 598.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Syria. Appendix 4

<sup>94</sup> P. Dauvin and J. Siméant-Germanos, *Le travail humanitaire. Les acteurs des ONG, du siège au terrain*, (Presses de Sciences Po, 2002), 214.

<sup>95</sup> Blockmans and Rieker, ‘The EU’s Comprehensive Response to Out of Area Crises: Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap’, 596.

Bureaucratic turf wars are more salient on levels above working groups, so distance between headquarters and the field, the *autonomisation*<sup>96</sup> of the latter, and behavioural independence of EU personnel, all contribute to the complexification of inter-sectorial coordination. Personnel on the ground have complained that EU bureaucracy and ECHO dependence on the EEAS have impeded distribution of humanitarian aid where it was most needed<sup>97</sup>. In that sense they reaffirmed a desire for *autonomisation* from their headquarters. Additionally, Henökl and Trondal argue that EEAS officials reveal considerable independence, or “actor-level autonomy”<sup>98</sup>, allowing them to pursue their own objectives without taking pause to factor in external constraints. This behaviour seems unfavourable to an ambition for inter-sectorial coordination and could highlight the unwillingness of actors to produce a coherent strategy following the activation of the crisis platform. This argument also feeds the rumours of bureaucratic tensions between the Commission and the EEAS. The Commission would prefer more agenda-setting power instead of rivalling with the EEAS’ competency in that domain<sup>99</sup> as “a creature of the member states”<sup>100</sup>. Moreover, underlying tensions are rife between the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen, and her Vice-President who heads the EEAS, Josep Borrell<sup>101</sup>. These high-level tensions impede the inter-sectorial coordination and slow down inter-institutional cooperation. While EU personnel hope this might change after the mandate renewal in late 2024, my interlocutor asserted that leadership is “incremental [in] building bridges, building relationships and these becoming settled in time.”<sup>102</sup>. Without leadership willing to compromise agenda priorities for inter-sectorial coordination, the working level is constrained in the results it can produce by using tools such as the crisis platform.

---

<sup>96</sup> Dauvin and Siméant-Germanos, *Le travail humanitaire. Les acteurs des ONG, du siège au terrain*, 228.

<sup>97</sup> DG ECHO, ‘Evaluation of European Union’s humanitarian assistance in Syria, 2016-2018’, 29 [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b4acc23e-4401-4cb0-a020-c7cfff596854\\_fr?filename=syria\\_evaluation\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b4acc23e-4401-4cb0-a020-c7cfff596854_fr?filename=syria_evaluation_final_report.pdf). Accessed 1 May 2024.

<sup>98</sup> T. Henökl and J. Trondal, ‘Unveiling the anatomy of autonomy: dissecting actor-level independence in the European External Action Service’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22/10 (2015), 1426–47, 1441.

<sup>99</sup> Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, ‘The European External Action Service and agenda-setting in European foreign policy’, 1328.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS. Appendix 3

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

### III. Engaging in ‘deconflict’: a solution for EU bodies to circumvent intra- or inter-sectorial coordination

By applying Mattelaer’s concept of “deconflict”<sup>103</sup> to relations between EU bodies, it becomes clear, especially amongst higher-level bureaucracy, that there is an aversion to coordination. This aversion stems from the fact that objectives are not completely aligned since sectorial interests are prioritised by individual actors, and do not fit in the framework of coherent coordination. Moreover, coordination would have to be led by a single entity and bureaucratic power struggles demonstrate continued reluctance to relinquish key competencies, along the same lines as MS regarding EU FP. Therefore, when EU bodies are required to coordinate since they may operate in the same environment, they can implicitly agree to avoid working at cross-purposes<sup>104</sup>. This will be explored on the scale of intra-EU coordination/deconfliction, and then on the scale of relations with actors beyond the EU involved in the Syrian crisis.

#### 1. Deconfliction within the European Union

The EEAS and the General Council Secretariat’s (GSC) working group dealing with Syria avoid working at cross-purposes by having the EEAS chair the meetings. The EEAS sets the agenda of the discussions the Mashreq/Maghreb (MaMa) Working Party holds biweekly. In this manner, the EEAS ensures the member states are holding discussions that follow the lines of the EEAS agenda regarding Syria, so that priorities regarding the situation remain broadly similar. The Commission can also put forward proposals to the EEAS, which are then authorised by the EEAS on the agenda. The Commission therefore participates in directing the agenda so that all EU bodies are on the same page. The GSC itself does not have an agenda, but the member states raise their concerns and national preferences within the MaMa through national experts. The mediation of discussions through the permanent presidency of the group by the EEAS (MaMa is not chaired by the rotating Presidency), allows both the Council as “House of the Member States”<sup>105</sup> and the EEAS to pursue their

---

<sup>103</sup> Mattelaer, ‘The Empty Promise of Comprehensive Planning in EU Crisis Management’, 139.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with an officer of the Mashreq/Maghreb Working Party. Appendix 2

objectives without coming into a conflict of interests, or coordinating hand in hand on a daily basis to the detriment of not prioritising either the member states' agenda, or the EEAS'.

The GSC MaMa personnel reconcile national agendas and their red lines to produce an overall EU position on Syria. Some MS continue to focus on the importance of sanctions (France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden<sup>106</sup>) whereas others have red lines in terms of language relating to gender for example (although my interlocutor did not indicate which MS this was, Hungary and Poland seem the most likely candidates). Romania and the Czech Republic maintain a policy line more willing to cooperate with the Syrian regime as compared to the aforementioned hardliners. They are the only two states that kept their embassy in Syria open during the conflict. The EEAS follows the adopted Conclusions like a “bible”<sup>107</sup>, and although Conclusions are not a product of close intra- or inter-sectorial coordination, they can be considered an example of deconfliction, as both EU bodies work alongside each other on the matter of establishing EU policy and positions towards Syria. The fact that some issues are escalated to the ambassadorial level in the COREPER is also an example of deconfliction. Especially in cases where decisions must be taken urgently, or no agreement is found in the MaMa. Escalation is an option that avoids conflict between MS at the working level, and between the MaMa and the EEAS.

## 2. Deconfliction with external institutional actors

The EU closely follows the United Nations policies regarding Syria since sectorial interests of both organisations are often aligned. The EU has engaged in an attitude of ‘deconflict’ *vis-à-vis* the UN by following its security council resolutions, without necessarily coordinating closely to form coherent inter-sectorial policies to improve the situation in Syria. The Geneva Communiqué of 2012 and UNSCR 2254 (2015) are the cornerstone for EU policy concerning Syria. In EU statements put out concerning Syria, the EU recalls that it fully supports the resolution of the conflict along the lines of UNSCR 2254 which calls for a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political peace process. Council Conclusions on Syria follow the UN’s lead and defer to UNSCR 2254. However, the EU does not engage in intra- or inter-sectorial coordination with the UN as regards contact with the regime. While Syria remains a full member state of the UN, the EU has no diplomatic contact with the government. The UN is therefore allowed to speak directly to the regime and Bachar al-

---

<sup>106</sup> Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS. Appendix 3

<sup>107</sup> Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to Syria. Appendix 4

Assad, whereas the EU and the Delegation can only speak to the assistant minister of foreign affairs (number three in that ministry). The EU adopts a deconflicting attitude which allows EU bodies to pursue their objectives, some of which might try to subtly circumvent certain limits of UNSCR 2254, be it by working discreetly with civil society on the ground, or by funding a segment of Syrian opposition.

A parallel can also be drawn between the role of the UN special envoy and the EU *chargé d'affaires*. The EEAS delegation politically supports the UN special envoy Geir Pedersen in his efforts to achieve a resolution to the conflict following the UNSCR 2254 framework. However, the member of the delegation I interviewed asserted that the EU supports Pedersen's efforts to a fault, to the point that "it becomes a bit embarrassing, because he has very little to show for it"<sup>108</sup>. This could be interpreted as the result of a capabilities-expectations gap<sup>109</sup> between UN diplomatic ambitions and their effectiveness. Moreover, Pedersen is very little in Syria, according to my interlocutor he visits the office in Damascus up to three times a year and on those occasions, meets with the EU delegation. The EU *chargé*, Dan Stoenescu, appears more involved in working towards a solution on the ground than the UN Special Envoy. As a result of the rare visits Pedersen grants the delegation, there is little coordination directly between the special envoy and the delegation, be it intra- or inter-sectorial. The delegation does work with the UN on other projects, but at the highest bureaucratic level it seems like the deconflicting approach best describes the situation. Both entities do not pursue closer coordination or coherent action but seemingly do not get in each other's way even though coordination could contribute to improving the crisis. In any case, actions undertaken by the delegation are supposed to be coherent with UNSCR 2254, but the EU finds itself constrained by that resolution which has not taken into account the fact that the frontlines have been relatively stable since 2020 and the Assad regime seems set to stay<sup>110</sup>. The EEAS is not free to find alternative dialogue partners in the opposition, as the international stance remains to support the Constitutional Committee organised by the Syrian Negotiations Commission (SNC) in Geneva. Although the SNC arguably has little constituency in Syria at all anymore and questions of legitimacy are raised in this context, the EU still funds their office through the FPI. The delegation is also in contact with Istanbul-based Syrian opposition and engages regularly in discussions with

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Hill, 'The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role'.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS. Appendix 3

them, in addition to exchanging with the Arab League, especially since Syria was readmitted (even if in name only). These exchanges widen the EU's capacity for cooperation, inter-institutional and intra-sectorial coordination, complemented by inter-sectorial opportunities. Even if agreeing on coherent strategies that put forward the priorities of various EU bodies is a complex endeavour, the EU at least does not impede coordination since it deconflicts its *rappports* with external actors.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has explored to what extent the Commission, the Council, and the EEAS have attempted intra-sectorial coordination for humanitarian aid and inter-sectorial coordination in the context of the Syrian crisis since 2011.

By demonstrating how the 2023 earthquake spurred an immediate activation of several crisis management mechanisms including the IPCR and the EUCPM, I argued using Wessel's fusion thesis that EU bodies had managed to balance the pursuit of a humanitarian agenda with coordination in this sector. In the same vein, they coordinate to prioritise their own objectives at the Brussels Conference to raise funds for Syria overall. My first hypothesis was further confirmed through the case study of the jointly coordinated WASH project that illustrates the success of intra-sectorial coordination on the working level, by playing with ambiguities in competency remits.

The use of the crisis platform for Idlib in 2020 furthered the hypothesis that inter-sectorial coordination is less successful than intra-sectorial coordination. Inter-sectorial coordination was limited by the diverging priorities (humanitarian or development-based) of EU bodies involved, by the conflicting ambitions of member states regarding Syria, and the environment hostile to any interventions. Moreover, the bureaucratic structure of the EEAS as an organisation intrinsically lacking coherence or clear, prioritised objectives, impeded coherent inter-sectorial coordination when leading the crisis platform. This partially confirms my second hypothesis in that it was the bureaucratic structure of an EU body which hindered inter-sectorial coordination attempts. So when it led the crisis management mechanisms embedded within its framework, decision-making was complexified.

Ultimately, using Mattelaer's framework of "deconfliction" provided an alternative perspective to consider intra- and inter-sectorial coordination. It explored the possibility that

EU bodies are averse to coordination and simply make an effort to not impede each other's work. In the case of the Council and the EEAS, this was applicable wherein the working group on Syria was chaired by the EEAS and so the production of Council conclusions did not run into straightforward opposition by the EEAS. The relationship the EU has with the UN regarding Syria was also not one of close coordination, instead the EU is constrained to follow UN political stances, but the UN is freer in its actions since it can engage directly with the government. Both pursue Syria-related talks and projects relatively independently from one another. However, both lack leverage to push for meaningful, Syrian-led regime change.

Overall, in the case of the Syrian crisis, EU bodies are more successful in balancing their own agendas while coordinating intra-sectorially in the realm of humanitarian aid on a working level. Inter-sectorial coordination failed as EU bodies representing humanitarian, development, diplomatic, and security sectors on a higher institutional level did not engage in any action as a result of the 2020 crisis platform. The information-sharing aspect of inter-sectorial coordination might have been more conducive to effective use in the crisis platform than the decision-making aspect, however. Instead of pursuing coherence through coordination constantly, EU bodies seem to engage in deconflicted relations amongst themselves on a day-to-day basis, as well as with external institutional actors.

In terms of widening the spectrum for further research, several aspects merit more in-depth study. Since my information regarding the use of the crisis platform was limited probably due to confidentiality reasons, researching if inter-sectorial coordination produced results after the different occasions the crisis platform was used for Syria would be highly illuminating and could alter the conclusions drawn here. Moreover, studying intra-sectorial and inter-sectorial coordination between EU bodies and actors on the ground, in particular NGOs or opposition groups would be an avenue for widening perspectives on the coherence, or lack thereof, in extra-EU actions and relations.



# Bibliography

## Academic Literature

- Aşkar Karakır, İ. and N. Karacasulu, 'The dog that didn't bark? EU crisis management and the Syrian crisis', *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 28 (2016), 525–44
- Bátora, J., 'The "Mitralleuse Effect": The EEAS as an Interstitial Organization and the Dynamics of Innovation in Diplomacy', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51/4 (2013), 598–613
- Bedin, C., T. Guendouz, and A. Levallois, 'From Conflict Management to Shielding EU Stability: How Syria's Fragmentation Diverted the EU(FSP) from Action to Reaction', *The International Spectator*, 59/1 (2024), 79–97
- Blockmans, S. and P. Rieker, 'The EU's Comprehensive Response to Out of Area Crises: Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap', *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021)
- Buchet De Neuilly, Y., 'Y a-t-il un pilote dans la gestion des crises ? Attentes et enjeux de cohérence dans les interventions européennes extérieures', *Revue française d'administration publique*, N° 181/1 (2022), 149–65
- Cottey, A., 'Astrategic Europe', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 58/2 (2020), 276–91
- Dauvin, P. and J. Siméant-Germanos, *Le travail humanitaire. Les acteurs des ONG, du siège au terrain*, (Presses de Sciences Po, 2002)
- Frachon, A., '« Russie, Iran et Turquie auront beau multiplier les accolades au sommet, elles n'ont pas les mêmes desseins sur l'avenir de la Syrie »', (2020)
- Havlová, R., 'The European Union and the Crisis in Syria', *SOUČASNÁ EVROPA*, 20/2 (2015), 65–93
- Henökl, T. and J. Trondal, 'Unveiling the anatomy of autonomy: dissecting actor-level independence in the European External Action Service', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22/10 (2015), 1426–47
- Hill, C., 'The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31/3 (1993), 305–28
- Kulaar, M., 'The Syrian Earthquake of 2023: Navigating Diplomacy and Sanctions', International Institute of Social Studies 2023
- Lavallée, C. and F. Pouponneau, 'L'approche globale à la croisée des champs de la sécurité européenne', *Politique européenne*, 51/1 (2016), 8–29
- Lavenex, S., "'Failing Forward" Towards Which Europe? Organized Hypocrisy in the Common European Asylum System', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56/5 (2018), 1195–1212
- Mattelaer, A., 'The Empty Promise of Comprehensive Planning in EU Crisis Management', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 18/Issue 4 (2013), 125–45

- Peters, J. (ed.), 'Lebanon and Syria', *The European Union and the Arab Spring, promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East*, (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012)
- Seeberg, P., 'The EU and the Syrian Crisis: The Use of Sanctions and the Regime's Strategy for Survival', *Mediterranean Politics*, 20/1 (2015), 18–35
- Smith, M. E., 'The European External Action Service and the security–development nexus: organizing for effectiveness or incoherence?', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20/9 (2013), 1299–1315
- Tercovich, G., 'The EEAS Crisis Response System', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 22/3 (2014), 150–57
- Trombetta, L., 'The EU and the Syrian Crisis as Viewed from the Middle East', *The International Spectator*, 49/3 (2014), 27–39
- Vanhoonaeker, S. and K. Pomorska, 'The European External Action Service and agenda-setting in European foreign policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20/9 (2013), 1316–31
- Wessels, W., 'An Ever Closer Fusion? A Dynamic Macropolitical View on Integration Processes', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 35/2 (1997), 267–99
- Weston, A. and F. Mérand, 'The EEAS and Crisis Management: The Organisational Challenges of a Comprehensive Approach', in D. Spence, J. Bátorá (eds.), *The European External Action Service*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), pp. 323–40

### **Institutional sources and reports**

- Council of the EU, 'Syria: EU response to the Crisis' (2024)  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/syria/> . Accessed 27 April 2024
- Council of the EU, 'Voting System: Unanimity' (2024)  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/unanimity/> . Accessed 28 April 2024
- Council Regulation (EU), 'No 442/2011 of 9 May 2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria.' (2011) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2011/442/oj>. Accessed 26 April 2024
- Council of the EU, 'How the Council coordinates the EU response to crises' (7 February 2024)  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crises/>. Accessed 29 April 2024
- DG ECHO, 'Evaluation of European Union's humanitarian assistance in Syria, 2016-2018', 29  
[https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b4acc23e-4401-4cb0-a020-c7cfff596854\\_fr?filename=syria\\_evaluation\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b4acc23e-4401-4cb0-a020-c7cfff596854_fr?filename=syria_evaluation_final_report.pdf). Accessed 1 May 2024
- DG ECHO, 'Humanitarian implementation plan (HIP) Syria regional and Lebanon crises' (2 March 2023), 17.

[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2023/echo\\_syr\\_bud\\_2023\\_91000\\_v2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2023/echo_syr_bud_2023_91000_v2.pdf).  
Accessed 28 April 2024

DG ECHO, 'Humanitarian implementation plan (HIP) Syria regional and Lebanon crises' (21 December 2023)

[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2024/echo\\_syr\\_bud\\_2024\\_91000\\_v2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2024/echo_syr_bud_2024_91000_v2.pdf).  
Accessed 28 April 2024

DG ECHO, 'Syria' (2024) [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en). Accessed 26 April 2024

EEAS, 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' (19 February 2024)

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-brussels-viii-conference-2024\\_en#84740](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-brussels-viii-conference-2024_en#84740). Accessed 28 April 2024

European Council, 'Declaration of the European Council on the situation in Idlib' (21 February 2020) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/21/declaration-of-the-european-council-on-the-situation-in-idlib/>. Accessed 30 April 2024

Human Rights Watch, 'Targeting Life in Idlib' (15 October 2020)

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/15/targeting-life-idlib/syrian-and-russian-strikes-civilian-infrastructure>. Accessed 29 April 2024

UN OHCHR, 'UN Commission of Inquiry: "Syria, too, desperately needs a ceasefire' (11 March 2024) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-commission-inquiry-syria-too-desperately-needs-ceasefire>. Accessed 26 April 2024

## Press

BBC, 'Syria War: Idlib Ceasefire between Russia and Turkey Begins' (6 March 2020)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51763926>. Accessed 30 April 2024

Council of the EU, 'Deactivation of IPCR for COVID-19 and the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria' (4 May 2023) <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20231020092150/https://swedish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/deactivation-of-ipcr-for-covid-19-and-the-devastating-earthquakes-in-tuerkiye-and-syria/>. Accessed 29 April 2024

Council of the EU, 'Earthquake in Türkiye and Syria: Council presidency triggers activation of IPCR' (6 February 2023) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/06/earthquake-in-tuerkiye-and-syria-council-presidency-triggers-activation-of-ipcr/>. Accessed 29 April 2024

DG ECHO, 'New life in the village: easing water scarcity in Northwest Syria' (27 September 2022) [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/new-life-village-easing-water-scarcity-northwest-syria\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/new-life-village-easing-water-scarcity-northwest-syria_en)

DG NEAR, 'Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell, Commissioner Lenarčič and Commissioner Várhelyi on the 1st anniversary of the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria' (6 February 2024) [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representativevice-president-borrell-commissioner-lenarcic-and-commissioner-varhelyi-2024-02-06\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representativevice-president-borrell-commissioner-lenarcic-and-commissioner-varhelyi-2024-02-06_en). Accessed 29 April 2024

Janez Lenarčič, 'Address by Commissioner Lenarčič at the Brussels VIII Conference on supporting the future of Syria: Day of Dialogue' (30 April 2024) <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/address-commissioner-lenarcic-brussels-viii-conference-supporting-future-syria-day-dialogue>. Accessed 1 May 2024

UN, 'Türkiye, Syria quake latest: full scale of disaster still unfolding, UN humanitarians warn' (7 February 2023) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133222> . Accessed 29 April 2024

# Appendices

## Interview Transcripts

Date	Position	Institution
29/02/2024	Desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR	Commission
18/04/2024	Member of the Mashreq/Maghreb Working Party in the General Council Secretariat	Council of the European Union
18/04/2024	Ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS – currently working in the Crisis Response Centre	EEAS
19/04/2024	Political officer in the Delegation of the EU to Syria	EEAS

### Appendix 1

#### **Interview with a desk officer for Syria in DG NEAR – European Commission 29/02/2024 – Webex**

ES : Est-ce que vous pourriez m'en dire un peu plus sur votre parcours dans la DGNEAR et un peu avant, si possible ?

X: Oui, brièvement. Je suis fonctionnaire de la commission depuis 25 ans. J'ai travaillé exclusivement dans le contexte des relations extérieures, mais en particulier, essentiellement, la DG NEAR. J'ai été en poste en délégation, en trois délégations. Et dans un pays africain, dans le cadre de la coopération française avant la commission.

Ma dernière expérience en délégation, c'était en Égypte. Je fais des programmes de développement humain et secteur social.

ES : Et au bureau Syrie, vous y êtes depuis combien de temps ?

X: Depuis un an. Je ne sais pas pourquoi je ne vois pas apparaître votre écran. Mais depuis un an sur la Syrie, un peu moins d'un an.

ES : D'accord. C'est tout bon pour vous, la réunion ?

X: Oui, c'est bon.

ES : Super. Et donc, en fait, c'est vous qui avez choisi d'être au bureau Syrie? Ça marche comment ? Vous êtes assigné à ce bureau ?

X: Vous savez, il y a des possibilités de mobilité interne et de changement de poste. Donc voilà, je voulais être ici. Tant que je suis à Bruxelles et que je ne repars pas en délégation, je voulais être sur un poste pour un pays dans la région Levant. Et ça m'intéressait peut-être sur les dossiers syriens.

ES : D'accord. Et donc, je vous avais parlé... Enfin, j'avais mis dans mon mail originel que je suis plutôt intéressée par la plateforme de crise. Mais après, je ne sais pas si c'est quelque chose que vous avez du tout...

X: Non, ce n'est pas quelque chose que je suis directement. Comme je vous le disais, nous, on est plus sur l'assistance financière. Sur le financement pour le développement.

ES : Oui, oui. Et justement, pour l'assistance financière, est-ce que c'est seulement la DG NEAR qui s'en occupe ? Il y a aussi, justement, la DG ECHO ou d'autres acteurs ?

X: Il y a 3 sources de financement européens essentiellement, même 4 en fait, pour la Syrie. Donc le gros de l'assistance est apporté par ECHO. Donc évidemment, c'est l'assistance humanitaire.

Et évidemment, ça suit les principes en vigueur pour toute assistance humanitaire dans un contexte évidemment en Syrie où la crise humanitaire est l'une des plus graves du monde. Donc ECHO fournit et a fourni en particulier dans le contexte du tremblement de terre l'année dernière, de l'assistance classique, c'est-à-dire *shelters*. Je cherche les mots en français.

ES: Vous pouvez les dire en anglais. Il n'y a pas de souci.

X: *Shelters, watch*, santé, protection des réfugiés. C'est évidemment sur ces 2 clés qu'ils interviennent. La DG NEAR est plus sur une optique... J'emploierai encore des mots en anglais, vous m'excuserez, Je n'ai pas forcément le réflexe en français. On est plus sur du *early recovery*.

Donc en fait, on complète ce que fait ECHO par une accroche renforcement de la résilience des populations avec des financements plus modestes que ECHO. Ensuite, il y a la FPI, l'Institut Contribuant à la Sécurité et à la Paix qui est sur des thématiques très souvent centrées sur résolution de conflits et justice à comptabilité.

ES : Donc ça, c'est dans la DG NEAR aussi ?

X: Non, la FPI n'est pas la DGNEAR. C'est une direction qui est rattachée au service extérieur.

ES : OK, d'accord.

X: Et il y a ensuite, de la part de l'INTPA, des lignes thématiques régionales avec des fenêtres par pays, et c'est sur démocratie et droit humain. Moi, je peux développer plus sur notre assistance, si vous voulez.

ES : Oui, oui, je veux bien, s'il vous plaît. Ça m'intéresse.

X: Grosso modo, le contexte dans lequel on est en Syrie est un contexte extrêmement dur, évidemment, puisqu'on parle à la fois de violences, d'abus des droits humains, de manifestations en cours dans le pays, de présence de forces hostiles dans le pays. On parle d'une crise socio-économique très profonde, d'une dépréciation très forte de la monnaie, d'une inflation très importante, d'un accès aux services de base très limité, des déplacements de populations considérables et, en particulier, des réfugiés internes en Europe. On parle d'un pays aussi qui a été impacté par le tremblement de terre de l'année dernière, il y a un an. On parle d'un pays qui est assujéti aux changements climatiques, et donc il y a des phénomènes de sécheresse ou, à l'inverse, d'inondations qui sont récurrentes. C'est un pays aussi qui est traversé par une épidémie de choléra. Grosso modo c'est deux tiers de la population dont nous avons besoin d'assistance humanitaire et de protection contre toute forme de violence exercée. C'est une société qui est extrêmement fragile.

L'assistance que nous octroyons est délimitée par la résolution auprès des Nations Unies de 2015, si mes souvenirs sont bons. Nos trois lignes principales sont la non-normalisation des relations avec les autorités, la position d'un régime de sanction sur un certain nombre de Syriens, et pas de reconstruction. Dans ce cadre, nos marges de manœuvre sont effectivement très spécifiques.

C'est un pays pour lequel nous n'avons pas une programmation pluriannuelle, contrairement aux autres pays de la région. C'est un pays pour lequel nous avançons par le biais d'une mesure spéciale annuelle, dans ce contexte, avec des financements qui grossissent entre 30 et 50 millions en fonction des disponibilités budgétaires chaque année. Chaque année, nous adoptons des programmes dont les agrégats sont souvent les mêmes.

Grosso modo, nous sommes présents sur la santé, sur l'éducation, sur l'agriculture, sur l'appui à la société civile, sur la justice et la comptabilité. Nous complétons ces financements sectoriels par un système *fair-party*

money, où on traite des contractants pour s'assurer que nos lignes rouges ne sont pas franchies et que nous travaillons correctement avec nos partenaires. Nous travaillons essentiellement avec les Nations Unies, avec des ONG et avec des organisations internationales, qui ont souvent des bureaux sur place ou, à défaut, travaillent à partir d'Amann ou de Gazantep.

Et nous avons une délégation qui, par ailleurs, est limitée en nombres, mais qui est rattachée à Beyrouth, qui n'est pas à Damas, évidemment, et qui fait tant bien que mal à des missions sur le terrain quand les autorisations sont octroyées, les conditions le permettent, mais c'est un contexte, évidemment, un peu compliqué pour la mise en œuvre de l'assistance.

ES: Il n'y a pas d'agent de DGNEAR sur le terrain ?

X: Si.

ES : Ah, OK.

X: Il y a des fonctionnaires. Enfin, il y avait un chef de coopération fonctionnaire, que j'ai remplacé sans doute, et puis il y a des agents contractuels qui sont sur le budget de la DG NEAR, qui chapeautent la coopération dans les différentes branches que celle-ci couvre.

C'est une équipe de 6 à 8 personnes pour la coopération. Il y a un chef de délégation par fonction, par intérim. Il y a une section politique, je crois qu'il y a deux personnes. Et une section finance. Tout cela, tous ces gens sont à Beyrouth. Il y a une section finance, la délégation à Beyrouth. Dans le cas de sa section finance pour le Liban, il y a un ou deux agents qui suivent les dossiers. D'accord.

Grosso modo, c'est comme ça que ça marche. Qu'est-ce qu'on fait ? Grosso modo, on essaie de répondre aux besoins. Dans le domaine de l'éducation, on est très centrés sur l'accès à l'éducation primaire et secondaire, puisqu'il y a un drop-out, un phénomène de désengagement de la scolarité, très important.

On appuie la formation technique aussi. On est présent au travers des curricula, au travers de la formation des professeurs, au travers des procédures d'accès à l'éducation. Il y a une composante aussi d'appui psychologique, puisqu'évidemment il y a énormément d'enfants qui sont extrêmement fragiles psychologiquement.

C'est un appui aussi qui est important dans le domaine de la coopération. Dans le domaine de la santé, c'est l'accès aux besoins primaires, c'est l'accès aux médicaments, c'est la formation du personnel médical, qui sont la clé et l'appui aux structures existantes, qui sont les clés de nos interventions. Dans le domaine de la justice et de la comptabilité, c'est l'appui aux réfugiés, l'obtention de papiers, le droit de propriétés foncières, puisque la guerre a fait disparaître un certain nombre de registres, la Commission a besoin d'être au couvert et blindée par les documents. Ils doivent maintenir pour accéder à leurs propriétés. Dans le domaine de l'appui à la société civile, on a une roadmap d'engagement avec la société civile. C'est quelque chose qui est maintenu de façon très précautionneuse, puisqu'il ne s'agit pas qu'il y ait des interférences ou des menaces exercées contre elles du fait de leur engagement dans un dialogue important avec les instances européennes.

On travaille discrètement, mais on travaille avec eux. Ça, c'est pour l'accompagnement du dialogue avec la société civile pour le devenir du pays, mais plus opérationnellement en appuyant sur les projets. Donc là, la société civile a un rôle charnière pour le montage de projets qui bénéficie directement aux communautés locales.

On essaie d'avoir une approche que l'on nomme «whole of Syria » pour ne pas être discriminant sur le plan des répartitions géographiques. On est à la fois dans le nord-ouest et le nord-est, et on essaie aussi d'être dans les zones contrôlées par le gouvernement. Voilà, grosso modo, ce que je peux dire.

C'est un cycle annuel de programmes, c'est un cycle annuel qui se traduit par des contrats, des *grants*, qui généralement durent 4-5 ans. Chaque année, on rajoute des fonds et on réévalue les priorités en fonction des besoins.

J'ai oublié de mentionner l'agriculture. L'agriculture, c'est évidemment toute la problématique de la sécurité alimentaire, des chaînes de valeurs.

ES : Donc voilà, les priorités changent en fonction des besoins chaque année, c'est ça? Et c'est comme ça que vous décidez les allocations de ressources ?

X: Grosso modo, les priorités sont clairement établies. Les éléments qui sont toujours les mêmes, mais les éléments qui impactent sur les décisions de financement annuels, c'est la capacité d'absorption, combien on a

mis, combien il reste à mettre. Est-ce que la situation a évolué ? Est-ce qu'il y a des phases intérieures de projet qui nécessitent d'être prolongées par des phases intérieures de projet qui viennent, donc sous un nouveau financement ? Enfin, c'est ce genre de considérant qui rentre en considération. Donc il n'y a pas, si vous voulez, des priorités que j'ai mentionnées. Ce qu'il faut retenir, c'est qu'elles sont toutes sensibles. Aucune ne doit être ignorée. Les financements évoluent chaque année en fonction d'un certain nombre de critères.

ES: J'ai vu qu'il y avait des cycles de projets différents, comme il y a eu l'EU Trust Fund.

X: Oui, oui. Ça, c'est une autre thématique. Effectivement, c'est l'EU Trust Fund que je ne couvre pas, moi.

ES : En fait, ça change quelque chose, le fait de passer d'un programme à un autre ? Parce que j'avais vu que, par exemple, l'EU Trust Fund, les financements se terminent en 2025, je crois.

X: Oui, mais il y a eu des transferts de ressources au travers des programmations nationales, puisque de toute façon, on touche à toute la région, pour la problématique des réfugiés syriens. Donc les fonds ont basculé sur des mesures spéciales qui ont été adoptées pour les différents pays, pour les réfugiés syriens. Donc dans la Jordanie, on a des mesures spéciales. Donc le Liban et la Jordanie ont une programmation typique au cadre de la coopération à travers les programmes annuels, complétée par des mesures spéciales, qui, elles, couvrent la problématique spécifique des réfugiés syriens.

ES: D'accord.

X: Et la Turquie, évidemment. Et puisque, comme vous le savez certainement, les trois pays qui accueillent le plus de réfugiés syriens sont la Turquie, le Liban et la Jordanie. Donc ces pays ont deux blocs d'intervention. Un bloc multisectoriel dans le cadre d'une approche coopération-développement, ce qu'on appelle les programmes annuels, et une approche spécifique sur la thématique des réfugiés syriens à travers des mesures spéciales. Et nous, nous n'avons qu'une mesure spéciale par an pour la Syrie.

ES: D'accord. Merci beaucoup. Vous avez dit qu'il y avait différentes sources de financement. Les ressources totales, par exemple, pour la Syrie, elles sont divisées dans différents services, vous devez vous dire que vous en voulez plus, par exemple, que l'année dernière par rapport à la DG ECHO ou quelque chose comme ça.

X: Non, mais ça c'est... Non, ça c'est une thématique interne à la Commission qui est une thématique non exclusive à la Syrie. C'est-à-dire qu'on a un cadre financier pluriannuel qui s'applique à la Commission, qui est pour la période 2021-2027, avec une révision à mi-parcours qui vient d'être faite. Et ces ressources sont ensuite déclinées dans toutes les priorités que la Commission a, dont le domaine extérieur, ensuite le travail de fonds qui est fait pour l'analyse des financements est fait par toutes les directions géographiques et par tous les DG concernés. Et donc il y a un budget auquel on est assujéti, qui est révisé à mi-parcours. Donc cette révision vient d'avoir lieu. Je n'ai plus les chiffres en tête, mais je crois que ça s'est traduit par un renforcement des budgets pour les réfugiés syriens. Mais nous sommes, nous, Commission, un maillon de la chaîne des donateurs qui est bien plus large, puisqu'il y a les États membres qui fournissent l'assistance et au-delà il y a les États non-membres et donc il y a des financements qui viennent du Golfe, qui viennent des États-Unis, qui viennent de différentes sources. Donc grosso modo, nos budgets ne sont qu'une goutte dans l'océan des financements qui sont octroyés. Donc globalement, la Commission plus les États membres restent la donateur principale d'aide à la Syrie. 30 milliards depuis 2011 de financements intégrés par la Commission européenne et États membres dont la Syrie a disposé et ECHO a une flexibilité dans ces financements qui est due à la nature spécifique de ces interventions, c'est-à-dire qui peuvent jongler avec les budgets pour mettre plus sur un pays.

Une crise se pose et évidemment, par exemple, le tremblement de terre de l'année dernière a impacté sur les financements pour la Syrie que ECHO octroyait.

ES : D'accord. Et donc en fait, la collaboration entre DG, comment est-elle mise en place ? Est-ce que vous consultez pour les différents projets ou est-ce que c'est...

X: On est en contact. On est en contact. Dans le domaine des relations extérieures, les DG impactant sur les projets, donc FPI, ECHO, INTPA, qui est un autre monde puisque ce n'est pas dans les zones géographiques, NEAR, travaillent ensemble. Et de surcroît, travaillent très étroitement avec le service extérieur.

Je ne vais pas vous faire l'énumération de tous les... C'est à la fois formel, très informel, c'est par échange d'email, c'est par réunion, c'est par mission, c'est par... On ne travaille pas du tout en silo, on est extrêmement coordonnés. Que ce soit sur les thématiques politiques où le service extérieur a le lead on est consultés.



Que ce soit sur la coopération, nous avons le lead, le EEAS est consulté. Et ensuite, sur un pays comme la Syrie, le niveau d'intégration des échanges avec le FPI, avec l'ECHO. Je parlais de nos échanges avec l'FBI, l'ECHO est très important.

ES : D'accord, super, merci.

X: Les commissaires... Je ne sais pas, quand Borrell fait un speech, il vient d'en faire un au Parlement, sur la Syrie, il y a deux jours. Quand Borrell fait un speech, les éléments de langage qu'il emploie sont étroitement coordonnés par le service extérieur, avec nous, avec le FPI et avec ECHO.

ES : Ok, super. C'est aussi un des aspects qui m'intéresse.

X: Cette intégration des services à la commission n'est pas propre aux relations extérieures. C'est le travail à la commission. Et nous, la particularité, c'est qu'effectivement, il y a, grosso modo, pour faire simple, il y a une double casquette, la casquette du service extérieur pour le dialogue politique, et les services en charge de la mise en oeuvre de l'assistance.

ES: Oui, ok, super, merci. Est-ce que vous auriez des collègues que je pourrais contacter, peut-être dans le FBI ou dans ECHO, que je pourrais peut-être envoyer un mail ? Je peux vous donner un nom d'un collègue à ECHO. Je pense que c'est plus intéressant que l'FBI pour avoir une vue plus complète sur la Syrie. Il faudrait que vous soyez en contact avec le service extérieur, mais je ne sais pas si vous avez prévu de l'être.

ES: Si, en fait, j'avais déjà envoyé plusieurs mails, mais plutôt dirigés aux services qui s'occupent des crises, qui m'avaient en fait redirigé vers ECHO, puis vers INTPA, puis vers vous.

X: D'accord.

ES : Mais en fait, s'il y a un service du SEAE spécifique avec lequel je pourrais rentrer en contact, comme par exemple...

X: Il y a la division du SEAE, du service extérieur, qui s'occupe du MENA, et oui, je peux vous donner un nom là aussi.

ES : Ah, ça serait super utile, merci beaucoup.

X: D'accord. Je vous enverrai ces deux noms.

ES : Super, merci. Je pense que j'ai posé un peu toutes mes questions. Ah, une question en plus, mais je pense que vous aviez répondu un peu.

Si, par exemple, dans le tremblement de terre, donc les cas d'urgence, c'est pas la DG NEAR qui aura des financements en plus, ça sera plus ECHO ?

X: Oui, on a réussi à débloquer des financements supplémentaires, c'est-à-dire de faire ce qu'on appelle la top-up du financement de 2023, donc on a eu une mesure spéciale de 2023 avec un budget renforcé, pour justement répondre au mieux au tremblement de terre, mais tous nos financements sont marginaux par rapport à ECHO, donc c'est évidemment ECHO qui a mobilisé le plus de fonds pour le tremblement de terre, et du côté des services de la Commission pour le suivi du tremblement de terre.

ES: Ok, d'accord. Eh bien, super.

X: Ça, c'est tout à fait logique, c'est leur mandat, et comme je vous le disais, ils ont une flexibilité dans leurs financements et une flexibilité aussi dans les procédures pour les adoptions de programmes spéciaux, qui leur permettent d'être très réactifs, c'est leur ADN.

ES : Merci pour toutes ces renseignements, toutes ces informations.

X: Je vous en prie, je vais vous envoyer de noms.

ES : Merci beaucoup.

X: Bonne chance pour votre mémoire.

ES : Merci bien et bonne journée à vous, au revoir.

Appendix 2

**Interview with a member of the Mashreq/Maghreb Working Party in the General Council Secretariat – Council of the EU**

18/04/2024 – Call

ES: So originally, the sort of work I'm doing was supposed to be on the use of the crisis platform in Syria, so the crisis management mechanism. And I don't know if you know anything about that, if you can help me with that. But if not, that's also really fine, because I've got other questions on the relation with the council, like how the council manages the Syrian portfolio.

I'm interested in the coordination between the different institutions as relates to Syria, and sort of the struggles in coordination.

X: Which is your field of study, so that I understand, to what extent you're familiar with our roles within the institution?

ES: So I'm doing my master's degree in European public affairs.

X: Okay, so you're very familiar with that, okay. This is a good starting point, okay. Because the thing is that we as a general secretary of the council, we don't deal directly with the crisis platform. So that's the EEAS. So my first question is, have you been in touch already with the colleagues from the EEAS?

ES: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I have. It's been quite hard to get hold of them. I'm talking actually to a colleague in there, well not a colleague of mine, but indirectly of yours, in the EEAS this afternoon, who works in crisis preparedness and response.

X: Okay, excellent. Because they will be definitely able to tell you exactly how the mechanism is activated. What I can tell you about that belongs to my previous experience, because now I work for the general secretary of the council, but before I was working for DG ECHO in a crisis centre, in the crisis centre of DG ECHO called ERCC. Are you familiar with this?

ES: The ERCC is the European response for...

X: Response, yeah, exactly. The European response, I don't remember now the acronym exactly, but it's just the response to crisis. And that is something it might be worth exploring, because the coordination of EU action passes through the ERCC, but that belongs to DG ECHO. So if you haven't done it yet, I think it will be worth it to write an email to the head of unit in charge of the ERCC. Back then, when I was there, it was Antoine Lemasson, I don't know if that's still the case, but it could be useful to drop a line, also maybe to the general email of the ERCC and ask to have an interview with them, because they can really tell you how the mechanism works concretely, like the request comes in the form of an email, and then they convey a meeting with the EEAS, the meeting is chaired by generally, back then it was the director for crisis management at the EEAS. So I think that's the way it works in practice is interesting, and this is something they can tell you.

ES: Great, thank you. I'll do that. I'll definitely contact them.

X: Yeah, I think the ERCC is a good entry point. Then, of course, the EEAS, because they are the master of ceremony when it comes to crisis management, but what we do, our role is, and this is a bit limited, but I think that our assistant already pointed out in the reply she sent to you that we are not directly responsible for the crisis management, right? Yeah, you're in touch with Mihaela, if I'm not mistaken. So basically our role is that we deal with member states.

So the idea is that member states, through the council, so they come and sit in the working group that is called MaMa, and that's the working group that I follow, and during the meetings of the working group, member states express their positions, mainly on Syria, but on specific topics. So we can have general meetings on Syria, when we have, for example, briefers who come and explain the latest situation on the ground, or we can have meetings on topics, and for example, the last we had was about sanctions, and that's a big thing in Syria. So member states, they go through their own positions on the various sanctions that concern, in this case, Syria, but also Russia, Iran, and all this. So that's part of our mandate.

ES: And so when the member states come, which ones come? Is it all of them? Is it general meetings? Who would you say has those opinions, for example, on sanctions? Is that something you can tell me?

X: Well, actually, I mean, I cannot disclose which are the national positions on the sanctions, but what I can tell you is definitely our procedure. So the procedure wants that all member states need to be present. So at every meeting, in order for a decision to be taken, for example, are we adopting this sanction regime or not, then all member states, they need to be there. And they are there at the level of political counsellor for the Middle East and North Africa. So member states, at my level, they're not ambassadors, they are just experts on that area.

And they come and take decision on behalf of the MS, they receive instruction, basically, from the capitals, and they basically put forward their position. And according to their national interest, they can be in favour or against something. And it's interesting because we have regular meetings. So every week we meet twice with all member states. So there is a real group dynamic. I mean, people start to know each other after a few months.

And it's also interesting for me. I'm also relatively new in the Council, but it's just interesting for me to see how the positions are now known. So in a way, member states know what others will say, and they're prepared for the criticism.

For example, there are some member states who are more sensitive on issues related to gender. You can guess who these are, but they are more like concerned when we talk, I mean, they want to have a more conservative way to address, for example, gender. Or there are some member states who are more concerned about energy. And they really want to have the energy element being strongly underlined in the discussion. So it really depends. They defend their own interests.

But when it comes to Syria, I would say that member states basically do two things. On one hand, they are fed by the discussions, because sometimes we have briefers who come from the field. So the head of delegation, or also we have an organisation, ICRC, for example, can come and brief the member states.

So they get information from the briefers. And on the other hand, they take decisions when it comes, for example, to sanction regimes.

ES: Okay, great. And compared to your work in DG ECHO, what exactly were you focusing on there? In DG ECHO, it was crisis, but more natural disasters. So the thing was that in the case of Syria, I remember that we still put in place some emergency intervention, but related to refugees. So these are not completely natural disasters, but are still human disasters. And so DG ECHO was involved, but in the setting up of the refugee camps. So this is also something that might be interesting, because also for that, you need a close coordination with the EEAS.

But for that, there is not the activation of the so-called crisis platform, back then it was called a crisis platform. But if you're interested in that specifically, another interesting thing that you might explore is our exercises. Are you familiar with those?

ES: No.

X: Because the EEAS run exercises, they can be physical or tabletop exercises, which are basically, they test the crisis management procedures via exercises. So they really do as if it was real. So they try to, they send real messages, they really convey the crisis platform, but it's on a fake scenario.

So there's a major attack to Europe, what do we do? Or there is a major natural disaster, how do we react? And I think that's interesting, maybe to talk also with the exercise section of the EEAS, because I don't know how confidential that is, but they could possibly also share some old exercises so that you see what they look like.

ES: I'm assuming you took part in some while you were in DG ECHO? And how many do they do? Is it quite often to make sure that everything's working? Or is it a very large thing to organize? So it's quite rare?

X: No, it's not very often, because they involve, once again, they involve member states, so it's a complicated process. And generally, they have to be agreed at a high level.

But there are different types of exercise. So there are internal EU exercises, where you test your procedures. And there are also exercises with other entities, for example, notably with NATO. And so I think that overall, there is an exercise per year. But the big EU exercise, I know that it takes place every two years, because it's too big, too complicated. But on the other hand, there is the NATO exercise. So I think that every year, there is at least one thing going on. And what I liked about exercises is that you really test the way of communicating between different actors. For example, the communication between the EU military staff and NGOs, which are not two entities that would normally speak. So it's an interesting exercise to see how they communicate. They sit in the same room, they try to exchange the situation, information on the situation on

the ground. And it's good, because you do it in a safe environment. So you know that if you make mistakes, nobody's going to die. This is just an exercise. But it's good because people start knowing each other. So the day it happens for real, you already have the phone numbers of the right person in the EEAS, and so on and so forth. I believe deeply in the value of exercises. But there again, I think the ERCC could be a good entry point, because the exercise is played by the duty officers in the ERCC. So they will definitely know what to do.

ES: Great, thank you so much. I was also wondering, do you think your work in the GSC changes with the presidency rotations, or does that have no impact at all?

X: That's a very good question, because there are some working groups that are chaired by the rotating presidency. For example, the Working Group on Development Cooperation. So everything that has to do with development, that is chaired at the moment by Belgium. And this means that different presidency, different priorities, different styles. So yes, it has a link. But the answer is not for me, because my working group is not a rotating presidency. My working group is a fixed presidency, and it's permanent for four years. Now the presidency just changed, and the person who was appointed was appointed by the EEAS. So it's an EEAS staff member. They basically chair the meeting on behalf of HRVP. So on behalf of Borell. And so for me, the presidency doesn't really impact my daily work so much, but there are colleagues for which it can be a major change. Having said that, having Belgium or having Hungary, it will be different, because the two countries will have different priorities and different approaches. So I don't say that it doesn't count. It's just that on my daily work, it won't impact me, because our chair is permanent.

ES: Can you just maybe talk me through what your daily work is? Is it, so you've got the meetings twice a week, and then I assume you're in contact with, I don't know, the briefers who come in. How is that organized sort of on a day-to-day basis?

X: Well, on a day-to-day basis, I would say that there is a lot of preparation, because before the meeting, you tend to speak with the various member state delegations to understand what their positions are on the topic on the table of that day, so that nothing explodes during the meeting. So the idea is to have things more or less prepared, so that you know more or less what to expect. And of course, there are things that can always go wrong. But my day-to-day activity, I think it would be, first of all, coordination before the meeting, and then the meeting itself, and then acting upon the decisions that are made, which can be, for example, do we want to organize what we call an association council, meaning a high-level meeting with X country.

For example, recently, we organized an association council with Egypt. Many of our meetings were dedicated to the discussions around Egypt, and also who are we inviting at the Egyptian level, what do we want to agree, which kind of agreement do we want to sign, and then the member states can really express their opinions on the basis of their priorities. For example, in Italy, it could be migration, so they want to have a strong accent on migration.

There are countries for which it should be, once again, the environment. So basically, it's discussions on the text to be approved, then at the association council. But then, yeah, I invite you maybe to check this on the EEAS website, the recent association council that was held with Egypt, because there you see, for example, the common EU position, which was agreed during the association council, and that's the kind of text that we negotiated in my working group.

ES: Okay, great, thanks.

X: And then, I wanted also to add this element of the Syria conference. So basically, the EEAS is organizing this conference, which is a pledging conference, so the aim is to raise funds for Syria, for Syrian refugees, and it will be held in two parts. There is one part, which is the ministerial part, on the 27th of May, and that's probably less interesting for you, because that's only for ministers, access is very complicated. But before that, there is what is called the Day of Dialogue, which is the same format, but with the civil society organizations, NGOs, and there, there is a strong accent on crisis management, and it's led by the EEAS, with the presence of Commissioner Janez Lenarčič, you probably are familiar with him, if you deal with the crisis management. So, I definitely advise you to check the program of the Day of Dialogue, because many activities are online.

ES: Yes, I can follow them online.

X: And yeah, and I'm sure you will find it interesting, and maybe, I don't know, if you happen to be in Brussels, you can always attend in person and ask people for interviews, once you're there, that's also, or ask for contacts.

ES: So, for example, if I were to come to Brussels to the conference, how would I attend? X: I don't know, because I'm not the one who's doing it.

ES: No, I contacted the person who organized it.

X: Yeah, but you definitely, I think, if you go on the website of the Day of Dialogue, there you will find the information about the accreditation, and it's a very simple procedure, you just need to have a pass to enter the European Parliament, because this is held in the European Parliament. But I would definitely give it a try, because it will be a kind of a place where you will meet many key interlocutors for your thesis.

So, I think that if you look at the program and see who are the panellists that interest you, okay, maybe the commissioner will be hard to meet, but there will be other speakers, also desk officers, like people like me from DG ECHO, people like me from DG NEAR, who will be there. So, you can always meet them at the end of the panel.

ES: Definitely, thank you.

X: It could be a good idea if you, I don't know, if you plan to be in Brussels, but it will be the 20th, sorry, the 30th of April.

ES: Thank you. I just had a few more questions, but I don't know if you, this is something you can tell me, or not, when you're having the meetings, do you know if the priorities of the council have evolved throughout dealing with the Syrian crisis? Because when I was, looking through archives, I felt there was a switch between different priorities, maybe at one point it was more, sort of, terrorism, which is obviously, they're all still massive issues, but terrorism, and then the chemical weapons, and also humanitarian aid throughout all of that, and also drugs, sort of, later on. Do you know if the council has switched priorities, or it still keeps up to date with everything?

X: Okay, the thing is that one point of clarification is that we don't have an agenda, in the sense that I don't set the agenda, that's set by the EEAS. So, my prerogative is not to impose a certain agenda, but it's rather to follow the discussion, and to make sure that all positions are taken on board, and that an agreement is found. So, that's my aim, and I personally, so the council doesn't have a goal, so we don't have to, we are not instructed, so I don't, member states are, so member states, they have instructions, and they know that they cannot accept a certain language on gender, and that's their instruction, that's their red line, I don't have that. So, I can accept whatever is acceptable for member states, so I don't have priorities myself, so I don't choose to focus on migration, rather than on chemical weapons, that's not for me, that's for the EEAS, so I think the way the agenda is organized is a very good question to ask to the EEAS colleagues.

ES: Yeah, okay, I will do that.

X: Because they are the ones setting the agenda, so you can, you can ask her, sorry, I revealed that it's a she, but you can ask the chair, what, why, how she sets the priorities, so on which basis she decides to discuss one element rather than another, so that's something that comes from the EEAS, and then we, as our role is, basically, we are the institutional, we protect the institution and the procedures, so we need to make sure that the procedures are respected, that all the positions of member states are taken on board, and that an agreement is found, which is not always easy, but we cannot tell them what the agreement should be. That's not for us.

ES: So, for example, your meeting on the sanctions, that was sort of set on the agenda by the EEAS, and then you sort of, your role is to coordinate between the member states.

X: Exactly, and then they can decide whatever they see fit, but it's for them. So, we don't decide what should be the final decision.

ES: Yeah, no, of course.

X: There will be a negotiation among all member states.

ES: And so, for example, when sort of the sanctions are updated, who does, so you said it comes from the EEAS, but the sort of technical knowledge, for example, if they want to add a name to the annex list, like who would suggest that name? Is it within the EEAS, like the delegation?

ES: That's a joint work between the delegation and member states. Okay. Basically, the delegation on the ground, but helped by the member states.

X: So, it's really a joint work, but once again, that's not, we are not an initiator. We don't initiate the procedure and we don't have an opinion on the procedure. We just implement whatever is decided. Yeah.

What we have is we have a sanction team. So, the GSC has a sanction team and they follow all the sanctions, but from a legal point of view. So, in order to make sure that everything is as it should be in terms of appropriateness or legal appropriateness.

ES: Okay. Okay, great. Thank you. Could you sort of tell me what, for DG ECHO and then also for the council, from your experience, what is considered a crisis? And if you think that the Syrian case could still be considered as a crisis and it's dealt with maybe differently or not, depending on if it is a crisis or not.

X: Well, for DG ECHO, yes. I mean, I haven't been working there for a long time, but my recollection is that yes, I mean, it's definitely considered a crisis still. I mean, it's a major humanitarian crisis. It's not considered a crisis in the sense of, for example, the crisis platform we were discussing before that's activated for an onset event or something that happens like an immediate attack or something unexpected.

And that's where the crisis platform is set up. So that's not maybe the kind of mechanism that would be used now for the Syria crisis, because that's a protection crisis. But definitely the DG ECHO is still very active in Syria.

So for them, it's still a priority. So it's not maybe a priority in terms of immediate crisis response, because that's really a response to one incident. That's not the case.

But yes, in terms of priority, I'm sure DG ECHO considers it still as an important priority.

ES: Okay, thanks. And for the Council, do you think that it's still a priority? And obviously, you're in the working group that deals with it. But I mean, it's still not highest priority decisions need to be taken like ASAP. Because, I mean, the situation has been going on for so long.

X: No, that's not the case. Because once again, the Council, you can think about it as we call it the House of Member States. So the Council's main interest is the well-being of Member States, if we can put it that way.

So if there was something, for example, the COVID crisis, that is something that the Council considers as a crisis for European Member States. The severe crisis, of course, it's a very important and dramatic situation. But in a way, it's not immediately related to our work in the Council.

Because, yeah, once again, if you consider the Council as the House of Member States, that's really Europe. But on the other hand, this is definitely for the EEAS. I mean, the EEAS has a different focus.

ES: Yeah. And I don't know if you're the right person to talk about this. But you were talking about NATO earlier with the exercises. And I was wondering, when you, for example, have the briefers, do you have people from the UN? Like does the Council interact with sort of the UN Special Envoy to Syria or not at all? Is there a relationship?

X: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We do that. Yes, the Special Envoy, absolutely.

Yes, the UN, absolutely. Yes, as well. So we have, it's mainly information sharing.

So they come and brief Member States. But there are also ad-hoc meetings that are organized mainly by the presidency. And in this case, we'll go back to your question about the presidency.

So the can have a pivotal role in promoting specific discussion with, for example, with the Special Envoy. And there we, yes, we interact with the different actors and mainly the UN. Then I'm thinking, yeah, and another interesting element, maybe it could be for you to know that there are some briefers that are considered as part of, okay, they're not formally part of the Council, but they participate regularly to our meetings.

And for them, it's easier to come and brief Member States. For example, for NGOs, it's much more complicated to have the permission to come and brief Member States. So if you're an NGO, and you want to brief Member States, rather than coming to working groups, because as I said, it's complicated unless you are an already registered Member, like the UN, it's easier to go by the rotating presidency.

Because as I said, the rotating presidency, they can organize ad-hoc discussion in their premises. So the Belgian presidency can organize a meeting in the Belgian PermRep, with Member States, but in their premises. And this makes things easier.

ES: Okay, does that happen relatively regularly for the Syrian case?

X: Yes, often. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Okay.

Yeah, absolutely. We regularly, I would say at least once a month, I have been to meetings in Member States, permanent representations, where different issues were related, issues related to our line of work, meaning Syria or different countries covered by our working group were discussed.

ES: Okay, wow, that's really interesting.

X: Thank you. Yeah, so maybe another idea, apart from the Day of dialogue could be also to check the programme of the presidency and see if there are, I mean, once you're in Brussels, maybe they have some activities, they organize something. So that could also be of interest for you.

ES: Yeah, definitely. Thank you. This is great. You're giving me loads of different options to explore.

X: Yeah, but I think it's important to talk to as many people as you can. Because by talking, you get ideas on more people to interview. And the more you interview, the more you also you will see where you want to go with your research.

ES: Definitely. Yeah, thank you. And just also, we've talked a lot about the EEAS, but I was wondering if the Commission also, so you're saying the agenda is led by the EEAS. But does the Commission sort of like DG NEAR and DG ECHO, do they have an impact on the agenda? And so the discussions that the Council has, or is that something the Council's not really involved in? It's just the Council and the member states taking those decisions amongst themselves with the input from the EEAS?

X: No, absolutely. The Commission has an important role because they can put forward proposals. Yeah. For example, if the Commission wants to strengthen the dialogue with a certain third country, they can put forward a proposal, but then they negotiate with the EEAS. Because let's say that the EEAS has the authority over the working group. So it's our chair who decides what needs to be discussed. But it can absolutely be that the Commission goes to the EEAS and asks, we would like to propose this item. And would you mind putting it on the agenda? So yes, it can go through the Commission in that sense. That's absolutely something that often is done. But let's say that the door to the working party is the chair, is the EEAS. In my case, it is the EEAS. In the case of development, for example, it is the presidency. So there are different working parties with different arrangements.

ES: Okay, cool. Great. Thank you so much. And I'm just sort of going through to see if I've had any further questions. When you can't sort of get the member states to agree on, I don't know if it happens on sanctions or something or sort of language relating to gender, is it escalated up or do you really try to avoid that and really focus on it in the working party?

X: No, I have to say that when we're really stuck, we escalate things up. Yes. When it's really not going anywhere, then you threaten member states and you say, if we don't find agreement, we will have to escalate it up to ambassadors. And then they try to make it work. If it really doesn't work, then yes, you escalate it up to the ambassador level.

And that's discussed in what is called COREPER, the Comité des représentants permanents, and there they have to find a solution. But the problem is that if there is a problem of working level, it might be that also the ambassadors will not manage to find a solution. But they will have to. So we have an escape route. Our escape route is to elevate it to the next level and they have to find a solution.

ES: Okay. And could you, I don't know if you're allowed at all, to tell me, for example, in what case in the past that might have happened, for or what topic, broadly speaking?

X: For example, I cannot tell you about a specific topic, but what I can tell you is that it could be also a matter of urgency. If there is something major that happened or a major agreement that needs to be signed immediately for X reasons, then you can possibly skip the our part and go directly to the ambassadors. This is really not advisable because they have to deal with many, many topics. So they can be lost if you go too much in detail on one specific topic. But I've seen it happen. In case of urgency, yes, you go directly at ambassador level and discuss it there. But once again, this should not be the way it's done. But yeah, I've seen it. Okay, great.

ES: Thanks. And I was wondering, for example, the earthquake in Syria last year, there was the IPCR that was activated. Does the council, do you know anything about that? Or is that more sort of something the EEAS and for example, DG ECHO managed?

X: I personally don't, because this is dealt with by our colleagues in RELEX 5. So you might possibly want to check with them because they are actually the owners of the IPCR. So the IPCR is dealt with by the council. So we activate the platform, we chair the meetings, but it's not me. It's not my directorate. My directorate is a

Middle Eastern and North African, so I don't have a geographic scope, but they absolutely know everything about the IPCR. Exactly. So yeah, it might be worth checking with RELEX 5.

ES: Okay, I will do that. Thank you so much. And just a sort of last question. I know you told me you don't have the specifics. But for the crisis platform, do you have any sort of idea of how many times it could possibly have been used in Syria? Like how many times sort of the meetings were called up? Or do you have no clue? It's fine.

--> *The call was cut off*

X: I'm so sorry. It cut short. I don't know why.

ES: There must have been a technical issue. Yeah. Okay.

X: Yeah. Sorry. That was a bit abrupt as a conclusion. I'm sorry. I don't know what happened. I just I stopped hearing you.

ES: Yeah, no, I think it just it just cut off.

X: But what I was saying is that the RELEX 5 colleagues will definitely be knowledgeable.

ES: Okay. Great. Yes. Thank you. Okay. I think I think that was all my questions. And thank you so much for taking the time.

X: Yeah, I wish you all the best for your thesis. And it's a very interesting topic. I'm sure you will have a lot of fun talking to all these people. Yeah, definitely. And thank you.

ES: Thank you so, so much. It was it was lovely speaking to you. Lovely hearing from you. And really helpful. All the best. Thank you so much.

X: You too. Bye. Have a lovely day.



### Appendix 3

#### **Interview with an ex-desk officer for Syria in the EEAS – currently working in the Crisis Response Centre of the EEAS**

18/04/2024 – Webex

X: Well, I said to you that I could give my informal impressions. I mean, this is a little bit of a coincidence that you should be asking about Syria and about crisis response, because I just started working in crisis response. But before that, I was working on Syria.

ES: Yeah, I saw that you did some work on Syria. At the start, you did some work on Gaza. I've sort of tried to figure out what you've done before.

X: You've been stalking me.

ES: I've been stalking you since you've accepted the interview.

X: No, no, no, that's perfectly all right. The thing is, I can give you my informal views on Syria, because I no longer work on Syria. Although I now work on crisis response, I'm very new to it. So I think you should take my reflections as impressions rather than necessarily the truth. By all means, start asking me some questions.

ES: What sort of work did you do on Syria? Where did you work on Syria from? Was it in the EEAS?

X: Yes, yes, yes. I was a policy officer on Syria from 2018 to 2023. Essentially, I was one of the desk officers formulating and proposing policy to the management. And now I'm working in the crisis response center, which is itself a new setup within the external action service. And this crisis response center brings together a watch capability. So essentially, we're following crises as they emerge across the globe. And we're taking care of safety and security of EU staff in the delegation, in, you know, in the delegations in country. And we are also working on consular, in other words, where we work on consular preparedness and response.

In other words, if there's a serious crisis in a country, we bring together the member states and we formulate preparedness plans with the member states for what to do, how to, you know, how to protect and how to evacuate in the final analysis, EU citizens, including, you know, in a crisis country, there may be only, let's say, four or five member states, perhaps actually represented in that country. But they could be EU citizens from any number of countries. And in the end citizens who do not have an embassy in that country are unrepresented. And as the EU, we have a special responsibility for making sure that they are protected and evacuated in a crisis situation.

ES: What sort of crisis situations count as crises in that case?

X: Well, it's difficult to predict. Yeah, because crises, every single crisis is different.

ES: Yeah, of course.

X: But you can take a lot of examples. I mean, there was, there was COVID, massive, you know, worldwide, there was a worldwide pandemic, and therefore crisis, and citizens had to be evacuated.

Then there was there was the, the fighting in Sudan, between government forces and the, and the Russian, Russian sponsored RSF, and which broke out, which meant that had to be evacuated as well, there was an evacuation, due to political unrest in Niger in July or August of last year. Then there's the crisis in Israel and Gaza. After the events of October the 7th last year, the EU evacuated tens of thousands of its citizens, including a number of dual citizens from Israel.

And then, ever since we've been evacuating handfuls of Palestinian, or now we've evacuated more than 3300 EU citizens, most of whom are Palestinians as well, out of Gaza through Egypt. The EU, right now, there's this heavy rainfall in the Great Lakes region. And in Bujumbura, which is the capital of Burundi, the waters are rising ineluctably. And this creates all sorts of health and hygiene, sanitation problems.

Most of the people who are affected are Burundians. But there are, you know, we're looking out for EU citizens at a certain point, it may be necessary to advise, we don't want to advise them too soon, we don't want to cause panic, or you may need to advise them or the EU member states may need to advise them to evacuate. At the very least, we have to, we have to advise them to be careful and to watch, you know, watch their drinking water and stuff like that. That's a sort of a crisis. It's not an evacuation yet. It probably won't become one, but it could do.

So there's, there's all sorts of different scenarios.

ES: Okay. Could you talk me through how, how sort of you, how something like a crisis response is activated, like how the sort of process of, for example, evacuation is going to be? What the different steps that lead to it are?

X: Yes, well, I mean, clearly, this is an interlinked world. And so we are from the crisis response centre, we're following events as they unfold in real time from, from open sources and from the media. We get wind of this and then our field security people talk to the, when it comes to the security of EU delegation staff, the field security people here will be talking to the regional security officers and saying, look, what's going on? Are the staff safe? Have you, have you gated them? Have you told them, you know, to stay at home or have you told them to evacuate wives and children or dependents and children? You know, what's your advice from the field? What should we do? Should we evacuate you all? And then, and then on the consular side of things, we make sure that the EU delegation has called a meeting or either virtually or a real meeting, a meeting of all the represented embassy consuls said, okay, what do we do? What do we do about, what do we do about EU citizens? Again, should we be advising them? Because, you know, there's no point the Italian saying one thing and the German saying another thing. This just causes all sorts of confusion.

So they agree. What do we say? How do we communicate with the citizens? What do we communicate with the citizens? Then they, if it's a question of political unrest, the coup d'état and the law and order breaks down completely, like in Haiti recently, then we might be saying, you know, to evacuate. And then there are plans in place in every single country.

There are plans in place for this sort of, this sort of eventuality, which is why we call it consular preparedness. And the local consuls led, coordinated by the EU delegation will put their evacuation plans into practice. You know, each member state will have assembly points.

And it may be that if it, let's say it's a country in the Sahel or in, or at least until recently, anyway, the French had a big military presence and very often the evacuation will kind of go through the French or, or what is called a lead state. But, you know, but although everyone knows these, what the details of these plans, they're not necessarily put down on paper because they're very sensitive, they're secret, but there are plans in place. You see. so in an ordinary crisis, let's say an ordinary evacuation, the airspace is still open and commercial flights can come in and out. So it will be sending their, this is what happened in Israel. People will be sending their citizens out by commercial flights, but sometimes this breaks down and there are only military planes available. And then in this case, in this case, we have a mechanism which is run by the European commission.

It's not run by us. The mechanism called the European union Civil Protection Mechanism. And the, let's say the Italians, for example, say that we're going to send in four military planes that are, there are 400 places all together. We'll take a number of EU citizens who are not Italians. And we'll also send in medical evacuation facilities as well. But because we are taking some French and some Austrians and some Latvians, we expect, or we will get 75% reimbursement from the European union.

This will encourage, I hope the idea is to encourage member states to say, okay, let's carry the cost. Let's send in 17 military planes so we can get everybody out. So that's what the commission, the civil protection mechanism aims to do.

ES: So obviously the EEAS in this case has to work very closely with the European commission. And so do you find that the EEAS, when you were, for example, a desk officer, did you work very closely with specific DGs or were you sort of working more with the delegation? Who were you working with?

X: Well, when I was working, when I was working on Syria, I was not working on the crisis response.

ES: No, no, no. I know. Yeah.

X: I mean, in fact, in Syria though, it sounds funny to say it, but in Syria, there was no such thing as a crisis with the EU. I mean, because there was this, we have no delegation staff in Syria because they're all, because all the delegate, the delegation has been moved out to Beirut. There are no citizens.

Well, there are very, very, there are relatively few EU citizens in Syria. We made it, you know, it's quite clear that if they're in Syria, they're probably in Syria at their own risk and perils. They should probably realize by now that there's been a civil war going on since 2011.

ES: You don't say.

X: That's it. I mean, they may be, and there are one or two, there are, there is minimal member state diplomatic presence in Syria, in Damascus. Some countries are more representative, if you see what I mean, than others. And they, presumably they, they can apply to, they can apply to the, the, the Romanian embassy or the Czech Republic, for example, they can apply there for help. But the EU has nothing to do with it because we're out of it.

ES: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. For example, you were talking about sort of flying back delegations. And I was wondering with the staff of a delegation. Yeah. But like the Iranian attacks on Israel, was there sort of, like, not a response sort of, oh, do we, bring back the delegations in, I don't know, Lebanon, because if they close the airspace or, or is it just...

X: Yes, yes. We're following this the whole time. This is, these, these sorts of questions are, are in our minds the whole time. And, you know, last weekend, you know, I was at home, I mean, in Brussels, and I was told that very clearly that, you know, I couldn't spend the weekend at the beach, you know, I had to be, I had to be following events just in case. It certainly became clear that the, the Iranian attack was going to be catastrophic, and it would impact on EU civilians, and we had to be ready for it, I mean, in as much as we can be.

ES: Yeah, yeah. No, thank you. Now, if I ask you a few questions on Syria, I was wondering if, when, when you were working on it, if it was still sort of considered a crisis, if it was dealt with as a crisis situation, or because it's been going on so long, that sort of crisis situation has become normalised, and in how you dealt with it there wasn't that sense of urgency.

X: Well, yeah, I mean, it's a different, it's not a security crisis or a consular crisis, for the reasons I just explained. I mean, no, no, no, no it wasn't an acute crisis, because it had been going on for very long, for a very, very long time, but at the same time, we are very mindful of the refugee issues, which have caused the EU no end of problems, at least since 2015, and we're mindful of the effect that the Syrian conflict could have, and is having, in an almost permanent basis on Lebanon, in particular.

But to a certain extent, Syria has been stable since, perhaps, I mean, the front lines, the military front lines have been stable, arguably, since 2020, 2021, for both the North East and the North West. And the nearest thing we've come to a crisis since then is the Americans threatening to pull out of the North East, or Trump threatening to pull out to the North East, because this would have, this would have made the situation, there would have been the threat of Turkish incursions from the North, the Russians taking over in one shape or form, the regime going back in, and, you know, further, even worse, civil and military disturbances than there have been, even up to now. But I mean, the thing is that if you take the definition of a crisis in another way, which is the lack of normal relations with Syria, and it's, yes, it's been a permanent crisis, because we don't have any political relations with the Syrian regime, and part of the Syrian regime are under sanctions.

ES: Yes, thanks. So do you know anything about the crisis platform mechanism, and how and if it, if it was used for the, to deal with Syria, or not at all?

X: The last time the crisis platform was used for Syria was, was, was, if my memory serves me correctly, for, on Idlib. In, in... you have to look back in history as to when the last really serious incursion, by the Russian and Syrian regime incurs, the last large-scale attempts by the Russians and the Syrian regime to take territory in, which I, so I think it's in about 2020.

ES: Okay.

X: And then the crisis platform was used, but I have to say that, although I was involved, I had to, I have to say it was all a bit useless. As I was saying, nothing, I mean, apart from, apart from flying in, trying to get in humanitarian assistance, there's not much we could do apart from watch, and there are no citizens there, there are no, there are no vital interests, if you see what Russia and the regime took, take a few hundred square kilometres of more territory or less, what difference does it make? I'm sorry to say.

ES: Yeah. And so. There was, there was, there was the, there was the earthquake.

X: Yeah. Earthquake. But, you know, I think that was humanitarian and ECHO undoubtedly did something about that.

ES: And there were ramifications in, in Syria and in Lebanon as well, weren't there?

X: But we didn't have a special crisis platform for that.

ES: Because I know that for that, the, the IPCR was the sort of integrated political crisis response was activated by, I think, was it DG ECHO?

X: That's a very general thing.

ES: For the, for the crisis platform, do you know how many times it was used for Syria?

X: No. No, I don't know.

ES: Okay. And for when it was used in 2020, could you, I don't know how classified it is, how sort of closed off the information is, but could you tell me who the actors were that were involved, even though, as you said, it didn't really do much.

X: Yeah, there would have been people from the external action service and people from the commission, both the geographical people and also the, the DG ECHO people.

ES: Okay. Does the UN have any role to play in it or not at all?

X: No. Not in any EU crisis platform.

ES: Yeah. Okay. And, and so does the crisis platform change how the commission and the EEAS coordinate, or is it just an occasion to bring them even closer together, even though, you know, it doesn't always produce the results that are desired in terms of coordination.

X: Producing, producing results is, apart from humanitarian, I think it's a bit beyond us because we don't have, forces.

ES: Yeah. Yes.

X: The other people involved in the crisis platform, I should tell you are communications people, strategic communications. And this is important because, okay, so it's important for the EU to show we're on top of things, at least in terms of communications, which is no bad, it's not necessarily a bad thing.

It shows that we are at least attempting to work together and to be coherent. That's important for us and it's important for third actors as well. And at least makes, it at least makes us at least avoid duplications and, and contradictory responses, public or otherwise.

And it does, it does have a way, I think of bringing people together, certainly at working level, which can make for more efficient responses. I mean, the, EU, as you probably know, definitely know, is, a project which is constantly under construction, permanently in construction. The EU doesn't necessarily work very well together, but the council, the European external action service, the European commission, the humanitarian people, there are turf wars and there are, it is a, there are bureaucracies involved and it's sometimes very, very scratchy. But one day in about 200 years, there may be an entirely coherent and effective response to, response to crises.

X: What did you say you were studying at Cambridge, Eloise?

ES: I did politics and anthropology.

X: Okay. Well, bureaucratic and anthropology is one of my favourite subjects.

ES: Oh really?

X: Well, I mean, I find it very amusing, yes.

ES: I feel like I haven't read a lot on bureaucratic anthropology, but I know there's a lot on the EU.

X: It's a phrase I've made up, but I'm sure it exists somewhere.

ES: There's a lot of anthropological studies of bureaucracy in the EU, which I should maybe read up on.

X: Yes, and I, I, I liked, I liked David Graeber very much. Before he met his untimely demise. Sorry, you had a follow-up question, Eloise.

ES: Oh, yeah. It was just about do you think the creation of the crisis response centre is going to help with the, the bureaucratic turf wars, in that sense, the coordination between sort of the commission and the EEAS and even the Council?

X: Well, I mean, it depends on the leadership, Eloise. It depends on the leadership. We have a new high representative. We will have a new high representative in November. The crisis response centre is a very new entity. And we are between directors at the moment, and there'll be a new representative in the future. At the moment, there's an open secret that the high representative and the President of the European Commission do not get on with each other. Which makes things very difficult across the board. But with any luck, that will change from November.

ES: Yes. Do you think that will have a large impact to help, sort of, that coordination between the commission's objectives and the EEAS's objectives?

X: It's incremental. It's an incremental project. One step forward, two steps back. Two steps forward, one step back, one step, one step back. It's all about building. I think it goes back to anthropology. It's all about building bridges, building relationships and, and these becoming settled in time.

I don't mind the working level. We have a great relationship with the Emergency Response Coordination Centre. It's absolutely excellent. It's very pragmatic. We get on with this together, each other, and we make sure that we complement each other.

I'm not sure, I'm not so sure that that's the, the case higher up. The European Commission doesn't like the External Action Service because the External Action Service is a creature of the member states and the European Commission would like to absorb the External Action Service.

ES: Okay. So I talked with someone who works in the General Secretary of the Council on the working party on Syria, on the Mashreq/Maghreb group this morning, and she was telling me it's the EEAS that really pushes, that, sets the agenda for Council discussions, and I was wondering if it's the desk officers who, decide, well, who figure out which are the priorities that need to be addressed, and then the Council talks about it. As a desk

officer, obviously not anymore, was it you who had to figure out what are the priorities that need to be addressed, or is that higher up?

X: Yeah, but, yeah, yeah, well, no, the desk officers certainly have an input, but it depends, depends to a great extent on how strong EU positions are, or Member States positions are on that particular country. Now, I'm afraid to say that in the case of Syria, the French, to a less, certainly, a slightly lesser extent, the Germans and the Danish, the Netherlands, Sweden, they drove a very, very hard, had a very hard line on Syria. And, and there was nothing much that the EU, either a desk officer or even higher up could do about that, and I'm afraid, I think they were the ones that were setting the agenda. So, in other words, to give you, to put it really simply, their agenda was sanctions, sanctions, sanctions, whereas our agenda might have been, okay, sanctions is fine, but what about developing relationships with Syria? Not, not the regime, but Syrian people with, with opposition groups from within. We might have had a slightly different agenda, but we have very little room for manoeuvre, very little room.

On another country where there are fewer vital Member States interests involved, then the EU can very well suggest ways of setting the agenda, suggest agenda points, suggest directions. And then the desk officer or the geographical people in the External Action Service will have a lot more say.

ES: And so were there any groups that the EU might have wanted to specifically support, sort of opposition groups or was it all sort of no normalization of any relations or was there actually some sort of...

X: Well, the thing is in the case of Syria, if you look at the UN resolution from 2015, the international community, rightly or wrongly, I think it was very short-sighted, but that's a personal view, said that there is an official Syrian opposition based in Geneva. It's called the SNC, I think. It's called the SNC. And we've stuck with the SNC ever since, even though they have no constituency left in Syria, arguably no constituency left in Syria, whereas the EEAS could have in this situation said, look, you know, let's just drop these guys and try to talk with people inside Syria. But if you say that now, people say, oh, no, no, no. If you talk to people inside Syria, they're all connected to the regime and we can't go anywhere near them. And which, again, is probably very short-sighted. Again, I'm speaking informally and it's a personal view.

ES: With the UN. Do you think that the EEAS's position is therefore very sort of led by the UN and sort of the EU strategy for Syria?

X: No, on the contrary. The UN is desperately trying to get out of the straitjacket of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. And it really wants to talk to the Syrian regime.

It's not that it wants to talk to the Syrian regime. It's just that the Syrian regime is there and has stabilised and it's not going to go away. And Syria and Russia and other countries are members of the UN. And the UN's constituency is those countries as well as the EU and the US and the UK.

And whereas we are, we are, we the EU, the US, the UK are driving a much harder bargain. And every time, every time the UN special envoy for Syria tries to, tries to move in the direction of talking to the Syrian regime, getting them involved in negotiation, or I should say trying to build bridges, trying to build diplomatic constructs, which would, you know, which would sort of debate in discussions, we say to him, no, you can't do that. No, we're not doing, you know, very bad idea. And we put spokes in his, we constantly. I think it's very poor. It's very, very poor. Yeah, very frustrating. Syrian regime is not a nice regime, I'm afraid to say, but well, it's not a nice regime, but it's there.

ES: Yeah. Yeah. No, thank you. Thank you so much. I, yeah, I had one last question, but it might, I think the meeting might just cut off. But for the, do you think the priorities of the, of the EEAS concerning Syria have sort of shifted? Like, do you think there was at one point a big focus on maybe like terrorism and then migration and then humanitarian aid, or has it sort of been, and then even, even drugs? So do you think it might have been all of it at the same time, or was there sort of really a shift in priorities?

X: No, that's the trouble. There hasn't been a shift in priorities. There should be a shift in priorities to keep up with reality. But the position we have now is a position which is appropriate in 2015. We're hoping that by

sanctioning the regime, we'll destabilize the regime, and that it will be elections and peace and love forever after. And unfortunately our position has remained, and it's not the EEAS's fault, it's the member state's fault. Yeah.

X: Okay, thank you so much.

*Meeting was cut off and we said goodbyes via email.*

Appendix 4

**Interview with the political officer in the Delegation of the EU to Syria**

18/04/2024 – Webex

X: My first posting was Jerusalem, so EU delegation to West bank and Gaza. And then since 2018, I'm in this job with Delegation Syria. Yeah.

ES: Okay, how long has the delegation been operating out of Beirut?

X: Yeah, well, so the delegation was evacuated in 2012 because of the crisis. We still have an office in Damascus and some local staff. And so ever since, we have been going in and out to Damascus on missions. So we still have some local staff in Damascus. And there's also two DG ECHO people, expats, who are now based in Damascus, working from the office since, I think, two years. So now the office is open on a daily basis. Before that, it only opened when anyone from us was visiting on mission. So in terms of – yeah, there are some member states who are permanently based in Damascus and then others who are based in Beirut and like us, go on mission. And then others who don't go to Syria. So we're basically somewhere in the middle of this wide spectrum.

ES: Okay, which ones are the ones that don't go to Syria at all?

X: So it's France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, of those based in Beirut. Yeah, the Baltics, Luxembourg, they don't have a representation in Beirut, so they – yeah. But then those – there's two countries who stayed on at the level of ambassador, the Czech Republic and Romania. Okay. Romania, the ambassador was based in Beirut with a chargé in Damascus. And then the only member states who remained at the level of ambassador in Damascus was the Czech Republic. But it was basically the ambassador at the time who convinced Prague that it was important to stay for historical reasons, also because Czechs look after the American interests in Damascus. But then she became basically the victim of her own success because she – because it's one thing to remain as an ambassador. It's another thing to appoint a new one who would then have to present credentials to Bashar.

If you're a chargé, you present your credentials to the MFA, so that's different. So she stayed until the ripe age of 78, I believe, until October last year. Wow.

And now they will see if they should – the Romanian also left in October last year, and he was replaced by a chargé. And now the Czechs are expected to do the same, still to be confirmed. And then – yeah, so other member states are there at the chargé level, such as Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Hungary.

And then there are those who divide their time between Beirut and Damascus, like the Italian and the Spanish colleagues, they spend most of their time, I think, in Damascus. Okay. And we go there once or twice a month.

ES: How many of you are there in the delegation who go to Syria sort of regularly?

X: Well, our head of delegation goes once or twice a month, then either with his deputy or with his political officer, that would be me.

And then our operational colleagues also go occasionally if they – so people from the DG NEAR to follow up on projects or liaison with the UN, because we do quite a bit of our projects with the UN. Yeah. But they don't go that frequently, I would say.

And then we also go on missions to Gaziantep, Istanbul, to talk to interlocutors from north-west Syria. So we have this – what we call an all-of-Syria approach.

ES: Yes. So how – so what would you say your role is on a daily basis? Do you, like, talk with sort of interlocutors for putting projects in place? Is it a sort of diplomatic approach?

X: Well, I'm in the political section, so in that sense we don't do projects. But my primary task is to follow what's going on in Syria.



And then – so, yeah, there's a whole range of open sources, but the added value of being in a delegation is that you can talk to people who know more about the situation than you do. And then, yeah. Because otherwise, if you base yourself only on open sources, then there's no added value of being in the region.

So, yeah, we're informing headquarters, and we also do coordination with member states. So we organize once a month a heads-of-mission meeting. Sometimes we – it's just internal, so we discuss recent evolution among us. And then sometimes we invite a guest speaker from a think tank or a UN agency. Yeah. Yeah, that's about it.

ES: Okay. And so how sort of closely do you cooperate? For what sort of projects and what information do you cooperate with? Did you DG NEAR, DG ECHO, or the Council?

X: Well, of course the Bible is the Council conclusions. So they have a number of red lines. So basically the policy is no reconstruction, no normalization, and no lifting of sanctions until a credible political process is firmly on the way. Because, yeah, after all that happened, we can't just turn the page and pretend it didn't, and then go back to 2011. But, yeah, basically since the office in Damascus is basically a time capsule. You have the waiting room with all the promotional material from before 2011, and that was, like, well, explaining to people all the wonderful work that the EU was doing in cooperation with the Syrian government. So also, like, from the DG NEAR side, normally with a normal country, they have, like, a multi-year program, but for Syria it's called a special measure. It's year by year that they see what the budget is and what they can do.

So of course we want to support the Syrian people, but without supporting the Syrian regime or legitimizing the Syrian regime. Yeah. Doing stuff in different sectors, in agriculture, livelihoods, education, health.

Yeah. And then there's ECHO, of course. They provide humanitarian aid, and that's purely needs-based.

So, as you know, it's regardless from political considerations. But, yeah, and then there's this grey zone between humanitarian and longer-term, early recovery. It's like nobody has a clear definition of what it is, and there's this whole constructive ambiguity around the term.

So, for example, if there's a community that has no water, water trucking is very expensive, so it would make more sense to install pipes, which is then not considered strictly as reconstruction, but more rehabilitation, that kind of thing. But, yeah, we have our red lines, and of course there are sometimes discussions about the grey zone around the red lines. Yeah.

ES: Of course. Is sort of this grey zone a matter of, does it allow DG ECHO to take advantage of it, for example, to sort of install these pipes instead of only water?

X: But, yeah, these pipes make perfect sense, even if they are not logistical and cost-effective.

ES; Yeah. So, I mean, would you be supporting DG ECHO in these actions, even though...

**X: Yeah. Yeah. But, yeah, so the idea is that both the political development and the humanitarian is basically aligned. Work together. Work together, but at least... And then, yeah, I think in general it's...**

ES: Does it, I mean, do you think that you have the same goals as the humanitarian and development side?

X: Well, conflict is a bit where there may be occasional discussions, but I wouldn't say that there's, like, a huge bubble around it. Yeah.

ES: Okay, okay. Yeah. Do you ever get sort of some backlash from member states if you're sort of taking advantage of this grey zone? Are there member states who might be against that and make that heard in the council at all?

X: Well, member states, there's a wide spectrum between those based in Damascus, where they may occasionally be inflicted by some kind of Stockholm syndrome, and then they say, yeah, but the others don't visit at all, and then they're more hardline, and those in Damascus say, yeah, but you don't understand.

We understand because we are there, but there's a kind of discussions that happen here, but then the same member states in Brussels are, yeah, they, because policy is made in Brussels, and then this kind of discussions, when they happen in MaMa or in the PSC, the same member states are not so, they stick to their agreed policy, and, yeah, so we have to tell our colleagues, and we can say sometimes, okay, but tell your people to debate in Brussels rather than here.

ES: And so in terms of policy, because you're saying the council conclusions are sort of your Bible, when they add people to the annex, where does that information come from? Is it the delegation who's suggesting that these people should be added? Where is the information coming from?

X: Mostly it's the sanctions division in Brussels, basing itself on sources. We're not that involved. I mean, if we, I can't, from the top of my head, I can't think of one example where somebody was added or subtracted from the list, removed from the list on the basis of our inputs. Sometimes we are asked to provide extra inputs or, yeah. Okay. But the initiative is mostly from the sanctions division, and they, base themselves on open sources, and sometimes we are asked for confirmation. But it's mostly their initiative or the member states, I don't know how exactly it works in Brussels.

ES: But, yeah. Okay, great, thanks. And in sort of terms of crisis management, do you, so I think I mentioned the crisis platform, and do you know when that was used and sort of who was involved? Can you tell me a bit more about that or not at all?

X: Well, it's not really my remit, so I would suggest you talk to ECHO. But this, so yeah, after the earthquake, we had this mechanism that was activated and allowing member states and also non-member states to pool resources, and then we were taking care of the logistics. But, yeah, it's not really my remit, so, yeah.

ES: Yeah, of course. And so you just mentioned the earthquake. After that, was your work centred on sort of the coordination of bringing that aid to civil society, or was it still, that's not your remit, and so you were still focused on the sort of political situation?

X: Yeah, more on the political side, because the earthquake, diplomatically, politically, the earthquake was basically an excuse for all those who were inclined to normalise, to rush to Damascus and to renew ties. So there was this type of honeymoon, also mostly, for example, the Emirates, they sent loads of Plato's— plain clothes??, the minister visited, but also some member states, so it was the first time that planes from Europe were landing in Damascus, but this, yeah, it was like, I think from the regime's perspective, they basically failed to build on that momentum, because the regime, they think that time is on their side, and that the international fatigue will ultimately lead to the international community turning the page, and that was basically, and, yeah, whatever diplomatic game they score, they just put it in their pocket and they don't feel the need to reciprocate. So, yeah, it's in some way a break, I think. So this whole post-earthquake honeymoon was not really followed up on. I think Damascus didn't really seize that point.

ES: Yeah, and so, earlier you were talking about relations with the UN, how closely do you work, which actors in the UN do you work with, is it the special envoy, sort of how closely do you work with them?

X: Yeah, we, well, the UN is implementing quite a few projects of both ECHO and DG NEAR, and politically we support the efforts of Pedersen. So we basically, yeah, we always say we support the efforts of special envoy Pedersen to the point, frankly, that it becomes a bit embarrassing, because he has very little to show for it. But, yeah, for example, when he is visiting Damascus one day, it happens like two, three times a year, not more, he passes by Beirut, last time even when he came back from Damascus, other times when he was on his way into Damascus, and then we organized a meeting for him with member states and like-minded, so we, if we host a UN speaker, we also invite like-minded here, which are US, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, and that's about it.

Okay. And when we're in Damascus, we either meet his office, so he has an office in Damascus, the special envoy, or the humanitarian coordinator, HTRC, that is the UN, basically, the person coordinating all the agencies active in Damascus. So we regularly meet with him.

Yeah, so what I forgot to say, so we meet with Syrian officials, but only with Ministry of Foreign Affairs up to the level of their number three, so not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, not the vice minister, but what they call the assistant minister, so basically number three. And then they have this sort of protocol that's mostly to talk about visa issues, the head of the Europe Department and the head of the Department for International Organizations.

So we don't meet with any live ministries. And then some member states do, so the favourite sport of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Damascus is to tell us how naughty our member states have been behind our backs and then we meet with some ministers or with some people that we don't meet. So sometimes now my boss, his job is like herding cats. But yeah, it's all part of the game.

ES: Yeah, but yeah, just to bounce back on that, do you think, does, for example, the special envoy also talk only with that level of people, like the number three?

X: No, no, no, the special envoy meets the foreign minister and occasionally Assad, so the UN, they, for them, Syria is a member state like any other, so they don't have any, it's just a different animal.

ES: Do you think the EU strategy for Syria, the whole of Syria approach, is very constrained by UN goals, the UN resolutions, or not at all?

X: Well, the UN resolution 2254 is very much the cornerstone of what we also want. Yeah, the political process.

ES: Yeah, so very much aligned with the UN.

X: Yeah, yeah.

ES: Do you ever coordinate with, or just talk to the Arab League in terms of its normalisation of relations with Syria, or not at all?

X: Yeah. Yeah? Yeah, well, we, when we are in Damascus, we talk to diplomats from the Arab world.

The Jordanians, I think they're quite frustrated at the lack of, they were one of the first to push for normalisation, so they had this phone call between the king and Assad some years ago, but then they are frustrated at the fact that they keep being flooded by captagon. That's, the Syrians are unwilling or unable to do anything about it. Yeah. But we are, of course, we follow closely what's going on in the Arab normalisation.

ES: Do you think in your work there's been a sort of shift in different focuses from sort of humanitarian aid to terrorism? Well, you arrived in 2018, but terrorism and Captagon and the sanctions, do you think there's been a shift or it's still sort of all been on the table simultaneously?

X: Well, yeah, I don't, a shift is a big word, maybe now, but I don't feel that much has changed since the time I started on the file.

ES: Okay, because I was also wondering, you're saying not much has changed, and so do you think that the EU still considers the situation in Syria as a crisis? Or, for example, DG ECHO would consider it still a massive humanitarian crisis, but does the delegation consider it that way?

X: That would be, well, the humanitarian needs are now bigger than during the worst years of the conflict. The conflict is largely frozen, the front lines have not shifted in years. But because of the economic situation, yeah, and we see people, states, during all these years are now leaving because of, for economic reasons, there are still more people leaving Syria than returning. So we see some IDPs returning, but refugees are very few.

And what's even more worrying is that basically there's hardly any middle class left, and even the entrepreneurs, the business community is being squeezed for their money by the regime, and so they also leave to Dubai or to Egypt. Basically, the people who should be the driver for economic recovery are being chased out of the country. So, you're basically left with either regime cronies or zombies, who basically do their best to survive and don't have the energy to do anything for you beyond that. So, yeah, it's all very sad. Nothing has improved,

let's say. Even though the conflict is less hot than it used to be, the general picture is even more bleak than it was when I started.

ES: And so in that sense would you still consider it a crisis?

X: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, definitely.

ES: In that sense is the way that you deal with it influenced by the crisis response centre in the commission, or do you work with them, or is it just the way that the delegation deals with it, as a crisis, but without communicating that to the commission or using the commission's instruments. I don't know if that was clear?

X: Not really, but I don't know much about the commission, I must say. I've never worked in Brussels, I've only worked in the delegation. I'm not the best person to tell you about that.

ES: Just asking.

X: Yeah, of course. Yeah.

ES: Okay. Thanks, I appreciate that. And also, because you're following the situation every day in Syria, what does it take for the delegation to put out a statement addressing a situation? What sort of situation does it address?

X: We, contrary to where I was before in Jerusalem, we don't do local statements. While we are de-localised, it's just too complicated. So, statements are all hard. Of course, they coordinate the language with us, but we don't put out statements. It's one of the peculiarities of the issue, I think.

ES: Okay. Is there any other peculiarity you can think of that you might not have mentioned already?

X: Well, we are de-localised. Our delegation is called Chargé because we don't seek the agreement of the Syrian authorities. We just send them a note saying, this is the new person for your information. For example, in Afghanistan, it's the same. It's the delegation. So, before the Taliban took over, I think it was the EU ambassador. Since we considered them de facto authorities rather than legitimate authorities/

ES: Okay. Thank you. And this is a question that's got nothing to do with what we've just been talking about: the team in the delegation, what sort of nationalities do you have in the team?

X: It's a mix. The head of the delegation is Romanian, the deputy is Lithuanian. And I am Belgian, and we have some local Lebanese staff. Operational colleagues are mostly Italian.

ES: Okay.

X: Also, one Belgian, well a German colleague just left. Actually, it's a regional phenomenon that a lot of, also in Jerusalem, a lot of Italian colleagues.

ES: How come?

X: Yeah, I don't know. Yeah. And it's, apparently Italians like to apply for delegations in the region. Okay.

ES: And I think there's one last question because the meeting might cut off soon. But are there sort of any, politically speaking, any opposition groups that the EU wanted or have supported more than others? Or does it stay completely out of it?

X: Well, we are in touch with the official opposition based in Istanbul. So we also do missions to Turkey. Whenever we're in Istanbul, we meet with them. We, for example, the EU is paying for the office of the Syria Negotiations Commission in Geneva. So it's the main negotiating body for the opposition. So it's an FPI project, so we pay for their offices. And then we also support civil society in all areas of Syria, even in other areas. Of course, there are certain constraints, but yeah.

ES: Okay, great. Thank you. Okay. I think that was all from me. Thank you so much.

X: I hope this was useful.

ES: Yeah, it really was. Thank you so, so much for your help and for agreeing to meet with me. Yeah, I really appreciate it.

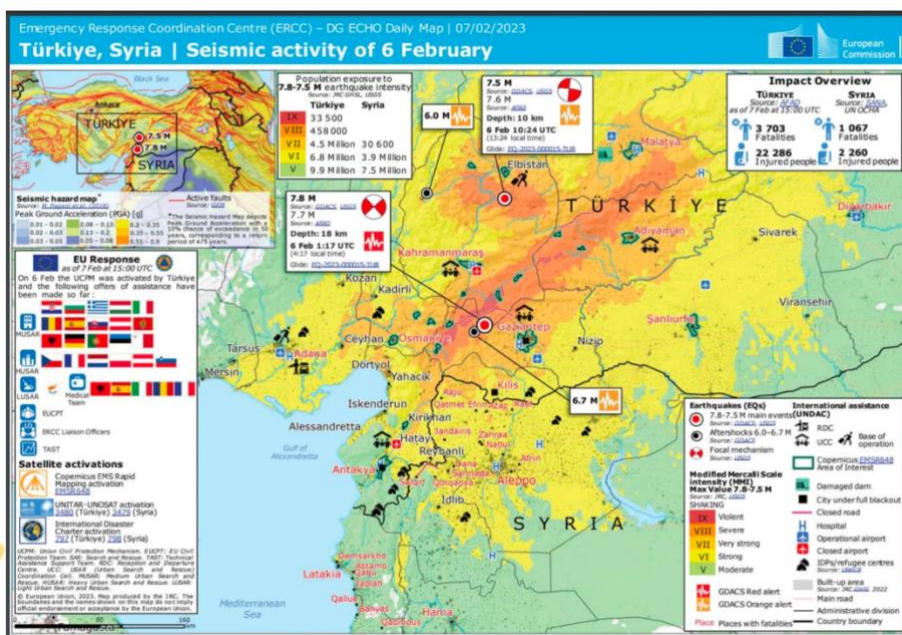
X: All right. Good luck with your paper.

ES: Thank you so much. Goodbye.

X: Cheers. Bye.

### Table of Figures

Figure 1. Copernicus-produced DG ECHO Daily Map (7 February 2023)  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crisis/>. Accessed 29 April 2024... 14



# Comprehensive table of contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.    SETTING THE STAGE .....	2
2.    LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
3.    METHODOLOGY.....	9
4.    PLAN.....	10
<b>I.    INTRA-SECTORIAL COORDINATION IN THE HUMANITARIAN AID SECTOR AS A SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF AGENDA PRIORITISATION BY EU BODIES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.    INTRA-SECTORIAL COORDINATION THROUGH FURTHER INTEGRATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE FEBRUARY 2023 EARTHQUAKE.....	11
2.    THE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE AS A YEARLY INTRA-SECTORIAL FUNDRAISER EVENT FOR HUMANITARIAN AID .....	15
3.    THE WORKING LEVEL; A BUREAUCRATIC SCALE FACILITATING INTRA-SECTORIAL COORDINATION.....	17
<b>II.    THE CHALLENGES, RISKS, AND INCOHERENCE OF INTER-SECTORIAL COORDINATION .....</b>	<b>20</b>
1.    THE CRISIS PLATFORM, COORDINATING TO WHAT END? .....	20
2.    THE BUREAUCRATIC WORKINGS OF THE EEAS AS AN INTRINSIC OBSTACLE TO INTER-SECTORIAL COORDINATION.....	23
<b>III.    ENGAGING IN ‘DECONFLICT’: A SOLUTION FOR EU BODIES TO CIRCUMVENT INTRA- OR INTER-SECTORIAL COORDINATION .....</b>	<b>27</b>
1.    DECONFLICTION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION.....	27
2.    DECONFLICTION WITH EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS.....	28
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>36</b>
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS .....	36
APPENDIX 1.....	36
APPENDIX 2.....	41
APPENDIX 3.....	48
APPENDIX 4.....	55
TABLE OF FIGURES .....	60
<b>COMPREHENSIVE TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>61</b>