

Situation in north-east Syria

Joint statement by France, Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Poland and the UK

10 October 2019

I would like to make the following statement today on behalf of the five EU Member States on the Security Council (Belgium, France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom), joined today by Estonia as incoming EU Member State on the Security Council:

“We are deeply concerned by the Turkish military operation in north-east Syria. We call upon Turkey to cease the unilateral military action as we do not believe it will address Turkey’s underlying security concerns. Renewed armed hostilities in the north-east will further undermine the stability of the whole region, exacerbate civilian suffering and provoke further displacements, which will further increase the number of refugees and IDPs in Syria and in the region.

Unilateral military action on Turkey’s part threatens the progress achieved by the Global Coalition against Da’esh. It will undermine the security of the Coalition’s local partners, including the Syrian Democratic Forces, and risks protracted instability in north-east Syria, providing fertile ground for the resurgence of Da’esh, which remains a significant threat to regional, international and European security.

It is unlikely that a so-called ‘safe zone’ in north-east Syria, as envisaged by Turkey, would satisfy international criteria for refugee return as laid down by UNHCR. We maintain our position that refugee and IDP returns to their places of origin must be safe, voluntary and dignified when conditions allow. Any attempt at demographic change would be unacceptable. We want to be clear that the EU will not provide stabilization or development assistance in areas where the rights of local populations are ignored.

Turkey is a key partner of the European Union, a NATO ally and a member in the Global Coalition against Da’esh. It is a critically important actor in the Syrian crisis and the region, and we recognize Turkey’s important role as a host country of Syrian refugees.

We continue to urge all parties to ensure the protection of civilians and unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access throughout Syria.

We remain committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We reaffirm that a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict cannot be achieved militarily but only through a genuine political transition in line with UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communique, negotiated by the

Syrian parties within the UN-led Geneva process. This process should not be undermined by any party.”