

Situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries (debate)

European Parliament, Strasbourg - 22 May 2013

Geoffrey Van Orden MEP (ECR). - Mr President, I agree with the remarks made by Mr Salafranca and one or two other speakers to the effect that we need more practical support for the national coalition and other well-intentioned elements. This may mean that we will have to reconsider the EU arms embargo in the region.

Very regrettably, however, while what we saw originally was a struggle between a majority population trying to retain or regain freedom from an oppressive minority, what we have now seen is the increasing involvement of extremist and terrorist groups, not least the Iranian-backed Hezbollah on the one side, helping to prop up the Assad regime, but also elements such as the Al-Qaida-affiliated Al-Nusra on the other. Tragically and inevitably, as we have heard from so many, it is the civilian population that bears the brunt of this struggle. There have been massive civilian casualties, and now something like a third of Syria's population are either internally displaced or are refugees, mainly in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Turkey, of course, is a long-standing NATO ally and EU candidate and therefore deserves particular support. It has set up some 17 camps holding nearly 200 000 refugees. International aid is far below the level needed by Turkey and other friendly countries such as Jordan to meet the heavy burden they are carrying. I wonder what steps the Commission is taking to provide more aid through organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, which seem to be most active in the field. Clearly these difficulties need to be dealt with locally, and I very much hope that we shall see many of the richer Arab countries making major financial and humanitarian contributions, as Ms Neyts-Uyttebroeck has also suggested.

In conclusion, I want to return to the Hezbollah question. It will be recalled that I wrote to Baroness Ashton on 7 February 2013 calling for the armed wing of Hezbollah to be placed on the EU list of proscribed terrorist organisations. Bearing in mind recent developments, are we any closer now to facing reality and listing the armed wing of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation?

[Video of the speech can be accessed here:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getVod.do?mode=chapter&language=EN&vodDateId=20130522-15:11:46-192>

[Full minutes of the debate can be found here:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20130522+ITEM-012+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>