

EU leaders react to Syria air strikes

Written by Martin Banks and Julie Levy-Abegnoli on 16 April 2018 in News
News

EU leaders and MEPs have given a rather positive response to the series of US-led air strikes in Syria, although some have warned the move “risks causing a wildfire.”



Azaz, Syria | *Photo credit: Christiaan Triebert*

The comments come with fresh sanctions expected to be imposed on Russia later on Monday in response to Syria’s reported use of chemical weapons. Moscow, which has itself threatened retaliatory action, is accused of propping up the Syrian regime.

Military strikes launched by the US, the UK and France on early Saturday against the Syrian regime were in response to a suspected use of chemical weapons against civilians received support from several European leaders.

As Syria enters its eighth year of conflict, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker led the

EU's tacit support for the controversial air strikes, saying, "The use of chemical weapons is unacceptable in any circumstances and must be condemned in the strongest terms. The international community has the responsibility to identify and hold accountable those responsible of any attack with chemical weapons."

He added, "This was not the first time that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons against civilians but it must be the last."

"Syria desperately needs a lasting ceasefire respected by all parties that paves the way for achieving a negotiated political solution through the United Nations-led Geneva process, to bring peace to the country once and for all. After the suffering they have endured, Syrians deserve nothing less."

European Council President Donald Tusk largely echoed Juncker's remarks saying that, "The EU will stand with our allies on the side of justice."

Meanwhile, EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini, said that the EU "is supportive of all efforts aimed at the prevention of the use of chemical weapons."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the military action "necessary and appropriate, to ensure the effectiveness of the international ban of chemical weapons use and to warn the Syrian regime of further violations."

The Lithuanian foreign affairs ministry supported the action, saying that the reported use of chemical weapons "crossed all red lines" and that those responsible "must be held accountable."

MEPs were also quick to react. EPP group leader Manfred Weber tweeted, "I fully understand the response by US, France and UK in Syria. The world community has to respond to the use of chemical weapons. The fact that this was not possible in the UN Security Council is a disgrace, especially for the Russian President. Further escalation must be prevented."

S&D group Chair Udo Bullmann said, "The use of chemical weapons is completely unacceptable. Now that we have seen military reaction from the US, France and the UK, we call for all countries and parties involved to de-escalate the situation and give the UN the opportunity to take up its role, to bring an end to the Syrian civil and proxy war and to bring those responsible for crimes against humanity to justice."

"The EU should give its full support to political dialogue within Syria in order to create the basis for peace and reconstruction."

Guy Verhofstadt, leader of Parliament's ALDE group, said, "Targeted US, France UK strikes were unavoidable. Assad must understand he cannot use chemical weapons with impunity. The international community must now lead a more systematic effort to bring peace, political transition and accountability to Syria."

However, Ska Keller and Philippe Lamberts, co-Chairs of Parliament's Greens/EFA group, were more critical of the international response.

In a statement, they said, "Single-handed action by the US, France and Great Britain will not end the civil war in Syria and is dangerous. It could bring down the shaky international legal order. The US President risks causing a wildfire and military escalation among the nuclear powers with his ill-considered statements. The European Union must develop a political strategy. The accounts of those responsible for the use of toxic gases must be frozen and further non-military coercive measures must not be taboo."

GUE/NGL group leader Gabi Zimmer said, "I urge French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Theresa May to refrain from military intervention in the Syrian conflict. Instead, both should convene a summit with President Trump and President Putin immediately to avert an escalation of the Syrian conflict."

The German deputy said, "The unspeakable Twitter diplomacy of Donald Trump has brought the world to the brink of a direct conflict between nuclear powers. The danger of further escalation is real and we cannot permit that. Since a solution from the UN Security Council is currently blocked, summit diplomacy could find a way out."

About the author

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