



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Syria is embroiled in a civil war with no end in sight. Protests against the ruler Bashar al-Assad began in March 2011 with demands for greater opportunities of political participation, civil rights and economic reforms. Demonstrations soon escalated into unrest, which then turned into a civil war that is now racking the entire country. While objectives were initially of a political and economic nature, the situation has now turned into a conflict fought out predominantly along confessional lines. The United Nations puts the number of those killed at over 100,000. This is all occurring in the European neighbourhood, yet the European Union is still working on a common approach.

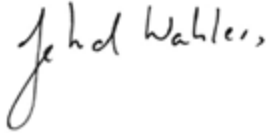
All initiatives towards a peaceful conflict resolution over the last few months have come to nothing. This is not least due to the diverging and intransigent stances taken by the regional actors and within the international community. Furthermore, the power structures are not clear, nor are the objectives of the groups involved in the civil war and the relationships between them. The opposition has become so fragmented that joint representation in any peace talks would be impossible. At an international level, taking a firm common stand would require a modicum of common interests. What is happening instead is that the cementing of ideological and interest-based lines of conflict in Syria and in the international community is resulting in a stalemate, which is becoming increasingly more difficult to resolve, and is also giving rise to blurred fronts and unlikely alliances. Syrian Christians, for example, see themselves under greater threat from Islamist rebels than from Assad's troops, although it is the latter that receive support from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Apart from the question as to whether or not there still is the need for a military intervention: The international community urgently needs to aid the growing number of Syrian refugees that is already staggering. For some time now, the conflict has also had a massive impact beyond the country's borders. The United Nations has described the developments as the worst refugee crisis since the genocide in Rwanda. In his article, Otmar Oehring describes the situation of the refugees in the region's countries, in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. He wrote the following about the enormous numbers of people fleeing their homes: "This means that approximately 27.5 per cent of the Syrian population have fled; just under 19.4 per cent as internally displaced persons and more than eight per cent as refugees – and these numbers are increasing by the day." Last month I visited the refugee camp of Zaatari in Jordan where I got an impression of the dimensions that the Syrian refugee crisis took on. The camp has grown to the size of a major city, with all the challenges involved in such a development: health care, education, crime prevention.

It is incumbent upon the international community to support the region's countries in their endeavours to improve the situation of the refugees. And this does not solely require the provision of funds. That will not be sufficient in itself. Efforts will also have to be made to strategically strengthen the structures of the state, in the health and education systems for instance, so that they will be capable of absorbing the massive streams of refugees. Interchange and cooperation between the countries also represent important elements in improving the situation.

The article written by our Resident Representative also illustrates the large conflict potential that masses of refugees in other countries hold. Different ethnic and religious groups are thrown together, local people feel they are being disadvantaged through the financial support given to the refugees or they lose their jobs because of an influx of illegal workers. It is therefore crucial to initiate a dialogue between the different groups and to encourage mutual understanding. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has

a permanent presence in the region with seven offices. Through their work, they promote development, democratic structures and the rule of law and offer a platform for interchange and dialogue at all levels.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers
Deputy Secretary General

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