

## **Dilemmas of reconstruction:**

European Union's approach to the reconstruction of Syria

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract			
<p>This thesis studies the European Union's approach to the reconstruction of Syria. It focuses on the years 2016-2019, when the discussion on the reconstruction has been the most prominent. The official European Union stance on the reconstruction is that the EU will participate in the reconstruction of Syria only when a credible and meaningful political process, based on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué, and negotiated by the Syrian parties, is firmly underway. The thesis analyses this stance in-depth defines the key elements of the approach and explores dilemmas that arise from the clash between the approach and conflict context.</p> <p>Post-conflict reconstruction is linked to the post-conflict peacebuilding framework. It can encompass political, social and economic aspects of rebuilding states after wars. When external, mainly western and international, actors participate in reconstruction, they have often promoted liberal peace, including democracy, market economy and modern state institutions. This has led to so called statebuilding approach, which focuses on strengthening state institutions and promoting good governance. The EU's approach is analysed in this framework, with a focus on normative power. The EU has been described as a normative power, which has been constructed on a normative basis and promotes normative principles in its international relations.</p> <p>To analyse the reconstruction approach, this thesis uses publicly available documents from relevant EU bodies as a source for the analysis. Main focus is with the European External Action Service documents, with inputs from relevant documents from other bodies. The source materials are analysed and categorised using Qualitative Content Analysis method.</p> <p>The key findings of the research are that the EU's approach is based on strong economic power leverage and promotion of normative principles with a focus on reforming the political system and facilitating reconciliation. The reconstruction assistance is used as a leverage to push Syrian parties and their allies to the peace negotiations in Geneva under the UN auspices. The EU legitimates its role through emphasising its neutral longer-term approach that is based on humanitarian principles and support for Syrian voices and ownership. It also externalises its normative identity as a peace project as the source of credibility in promoting peace. The approach has had little effect on the Assad government, which has strengthened its grip on state structures. This poses a dilemma to the EU and other international actors: how to fulfil humanitarian objectives without legitimating the government? The concept of reconstruction with its flexibility has shown that many activities can and are done under other terms such as early recovery and stabilisation. However, operating like this can undermine the official political stance.</p>			
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## **Abbreviations**

<b>CFSP</b>	Common Foreign and Security Policy
<b>CSDP</b>	Common Security and Defence Policy
<b>DCI</b>	Development Cooperation Instrument
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration
<b>EaP</b>	Eastern Partnership
<b>EAR</b>	European Agency for Reconstruction
<b>EDF</b>	European Development Fund
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EIDHR</b>	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
<b>EMP</b>	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
<b>ENI</b>	European Neighbourhood Instrument
<b>ENP</b>	European Neighbourhood Policy
<b>EOM</b>	Election Observation Mission
<b>EPLO</b>	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
<b>ESDP</b>	European Security and Defense Policy
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUPOL</b>	European Union Police Mission
<b>EUSR</b>	EU Special Representative
<b>FPI</b>	Foreign Policy Instruments
<b>HR/VP</b>	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission
<b>IcSP</b>	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person/people
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria / Islamic State
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PDNA</b>	Post-Disaster Needs Assessments
<b>PI</b>	Partnership Instrument
<b>QCA</b>	Qualitative Content Analysis
<b>RPBA</b>	Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments
<b>TEU</b>	Treaty on European Union
<b>UfM</b>	Union for the Mediterranean
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution

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## 1. Introduction

The conflict in Syria has left the country in ruins physically, socially and economically since 2011. The estimates for rebuilding the physical damage vary from 250 billion USD to 400 billion USD (Daher 2019), and it is inevitable that the reconstruction will need international effort. However, as the conflict context evolves, who can and is willing to reconstruct after years of conflict, humanitarian crisis and refuge? This thesis studies the European Union's approach towards the reconstruction of Syria and the dilemmas that it faces in building its stance.

The European Union's official stance has been since adopting the EU Strategy on Syria in 2017, that it will participate in the reconstruction of Syria only when a political process, based on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva Communiqué (2012) is firmly underway. Thus it sets very tight conditionalities to the reconstruction assistance by linking it to the political process in Geneva under UN auspices. The message is firm:

*“--- what is clear is that the European money will come for reconstruction only once a political agreement is reached in Geneva under UN auspices and with the right guarantees of credibility.” (EEAS 2017a.)*

However, it is clear that the political agreement is not in near sight, as the political process has been more or less stalled since 2017. Regardless of that, the European Union has kept on repeating its stance until 2019. This thesis will analyse the stance in-depth: how does the EU define reconstruction, and what are the conditionalities for the participation? What kind of political agreement is needed? What kind of Syria does the EU agree to reconstruct?

Exploration of these questions happens in a complex conflict context, which poses challenges for peacebuilders and reconstructors. The context challenges presumptions about a “post” conflict state, where some agreement or victory has been achieved and approved and legitimised by external actors so that the reconstruction as a whole state can begin with the support of international community. Often the reconstruction approaches are focusing on rebuilding the state institutions, which in the case of Syria proves a problematic approach: supporting the reconstruction without transition would

legitimate the Assad government and strengthen its grip on the state institutions, making transition and democratic aspirations nigh impossible. This research can give insights on how external actors' visions for post-conflict state and their approach to post-conflict reconstruction can clash with the realities of conflict. In addition to the conflict realities, the actors need to tackle both domestic and foreign policy challenges, which affect their approach to peacebuilding and reconstruction and can cause contradictions or dilemmas between their objectives, principles and interests. How do actors navigate within these kinds of dilemmas?

To deepen the understanding of these dynamics, the main research question in this thesis is: *What is the European Union's approach towards the reconstruction of Syria?*

The question is answered through analysis of what principles and features does the EU promote in the reconstruction of Syria, and how does it present itself in the conflict context. Reconstruction is framed under the EU's approach to peacebuilding. The analysis is based on publicly available documents from relevant EU bodies, such as the External Action Service (EEAS) and the remarks from the High Representative Federica Mogherini. Thus this thesis studies how the EU's approach is presented in these sources as linked to the image that the EU presents of itself as an actor in the conflict. The thesis does not aim to explain the EU actions in the conflict so far but to focus on the reconstruction discussion and how the EU presents itself and its policy in it. After analysing the EU's approach to the reconstruction, the thesis will explore the dilemmas related to the EU's participation in the reconstruction. Participation of external actors in reconstruction processes in third countries is linked to multiple contradictions and dilemmas, such as questions of legitimacy, local ownership, and war-time state structures, as the peacebuilding theory presents. These will be explored in the second chapter of this thesis. Dilemmas arise especially when the reconstruction approach clashes with the conflict realities on the ground. This introductory chapter outlines the reconstruction context in Syria and the Assad government's approach to the reconstruction of the country.

The research interest for this thesis rose from the researcher's previous work in a Syria peacebuilding project in an NGO. The reconstruction issue became a prominent topic in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding community during 2017-2018, but the research

into the topic did not emerge as fast as different policy analyses. Thus the topic was seen to need more in-depth analysis, especially from academic point of view.

Current research on the case of reconstruction of Syria can be divided into two strands: 1) the physical reconstruction needs of the country, especially its cultural heritage sites<sup>1</sup>, and 2) think-tank policy analysis of the political context of the conflict. It is difficult to find academic research on the topic beyond these two strands of analysis at the moment. Some of the think tank policy analysis will be used to illustrate the conflict context in the next chapter, as well as in the conclusions.

There are some studies that focus on some specific challenges relates to post-conflict Syria. For example, Berti (2018) studies the challenges related to stability. According to her, the most significant challenges lay in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes of former combatants, as the proliferation of non-state armed groups was a trend in the conflict. Another strand of research is related to the public health questions and militarisation of medical care. For example, Meininghaus (2016) studies the relationship between health system recovery and emergency aid in the context of post-conflict reconstruction.

Given the lack of academic research, this Master's thesis can provide systematic insights into reconstruction from the perspective of the European Union's peacebuilding approach, as well as to the challenges that external actors face in their participation to the reconstruction of conflict countries. These challenges are many, and the next part of this chapter will introduce the complexities related to the case of Syria.

## **1.1 Syria and reconstruction: complex context**

What are the physical, social and economic reconstruction needs of Syria? This part includes a brief analysis of Assad's approach to reconstruction of the country and the challenges that this poses to the external actors who wish to be part of the reconstruction process.

The widespread destruction in Syria since March 2011 has left many parts of the country in ruins. The estimates of the rebuilding range from \$250 billion to \$400

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<sup>1</sup> The research on destruction of cultural heritage often includes the reconstruction of communities, identities and memory. See for example Harrowell (2016). One very common case study is Aleppo and its heritage sites. See for example Munawar (2018), Grussenmeyer & al Khalil (2017).

billion. In 2017, around 7% of the housing stock was estimated having being destroyed, with 20% partially destroyed. This destruction varies territorially, and besides private properties, also medical facilities (16%) and education sector facilities (10%) having been fully destroyed. Besides economic crisis, the effects on human lives and demographic displacement have been dramatic. While over 5 million Syrian refugees are outside of the country, 12 million people inside the country need humanitarian assistance, with poverty rate over 90%. In 2017, estimated 400,000 to 470,000 people have died. (Daher 2019; Syrian Center for Policy Research 2019; World Bank 2017, ii-viii.)

The Syrian government cannot afford the reconstruction by itself. Syria's GDP declined from \$61.1 billion in 2010 to \$17.1 billion in 2017, with estimated cumulative losses at \$226 billion. There have also been drops in the purchasing power of Syrian's, massive inflation, a fuel crisis, and a banking crisis. (World Bank 2017, ii; Daher 2019.) Also, government allies Russia and Iran are facing economic problems of their own, which makes it harder for them to maintain the level of financial and material support to the Syrian government. Both countries have acquired business deals over key sectors of Syrian economy, such as mining and infrastructure, but many of these are projects are frozen. (Daher 2019.) This had lead to a situation where Russia has repeatedly requested the European Union to support the reconstruction process, in return for the return of refugees to Syria (e.g. Vohra 2019; Ramani 2019).

How does the Assad government plan to revitalise the country after such destruction? Many researchers suggest that Assad's model of economic reconstruction defies the traditional approaches to post-conflict reconstruction that aims to reconstruct dysfunctional and collapsed state institutions. Instead, Assad's grip on these institutions has stayed firm, and the government is using this to ensure its position. According to Daher (2019), the Assad government has been looking to consolidate its power and security objectives instead of aiming to tackle the country's economic and social challenges. On the contrary, the strategies are aimed at sanctioning government's perceived enemies within the state. Heydemann (2018) describes this process as authoritarian stabilisation, where the government uses reconstruction to reimpose its authority and control over the Syrian society and economy, as well as altering Syria's demography. The 11.11.11 (2018) report divides the goals into three: two internal dimensions are the restoration of the political economy to pre-war state and

reconfiguring the social and demographic landscape of the country; the third external dimension is the attempt to attract foreign funding from the government's allies.

The laws and decrees on housing, land and property issues are central ways in which the Assad government has sought to gain politically and economically from the reconstruction. The foundation for these is the Decree Number 66 in 2012, which allows the Damascus Governorate to expel inhabitants from two areas in the capital. In 2018, the government passed Decree Number 10<sup>2</sup>, which expanded the implementation of similar policies nationally, thus allowing high-end real estate ventures to emerge on the expropriated land. These lands often were formerly held by the opposition. Thus the laws that allow for the destruction and expropriation of the property also give way to replacing unwanted populations with groups that are more favourable towards the government. This is what Daher (2019) calls political retaliation: government's reconstruction and rehabilitation programs are designed to keep unwanted populations out of the key areas, and many areas that the government has retaken from the opposition have still not been developed. Many of these areas also faced more destruction during the conflict than the areas inhabited by people that favoured the government. Thus both the destruction during the conflict and the reconstruction after it are strategic tools for the government. (Daher 2019; Heydemann 2018b, 3; 11.11.11 2018, 12-13.)

In the same time, as many internally displaced persons are prevented from returning to their properties, government-allied private sector has been given a leading role in the reconstruction through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Thus public assets are largely in the hands of the government and its allies. Daher (2019) notes that these policies existed before 2011 and emphasised private capital accumulation and liberalised economic policies. This neoliberalisation opened the state-managed sectors to government-affiliated private economic actors. Government strongholds, such as Tartous and Latakia, are also allocated more funds than other parts of the country. (ibid.)

Based on this analysis, the stakes for participating in the reconstruction for any external actor are high. The economic structure of the country, based on the centrality of the

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<sup>2</sup> The Law Number 10 has been under scrutiny ever since it was adopted. For the discussion, see for example Syrian Law Journal (2018) for the content of the Law 10, and Syrbanism Project (2018) for the perspective of citizens to the new law.

government and its network of cronies, would make it hard to prevent the assistance being exploited by the cronies to tighten their hold over Syria. Heydemann was not, however, hopeful for the leverage the EU was hoping to use to incentivise political transition. The penetration of Assad government networks in state institutions would mean that even if the political transition starts, official channels will still be under control of these actors, which will ensure continuation of corruption. Additionally, Assad government has repeatedly rejected European participation in reconstruction under other terms than ones set by the government. The legal framework described earlier also safeguards government's connections to any projects carried out under reconstruction. (Heydemann 2017.)

In this context, what is the space for external actors, especially the European Union, to participate in or support the reconstruction of Syria? What kind of Syria do they want to build? What kind of approach does the EU have? This is the focus of the analysis of the EU approach to the reconstruction of Syria.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis identifies the particularities of the European Union's approach to Syria's reconstruction and explores the dilemmas related to that approach. Firstly, the reconstruction will be defined conceptually in the framework of peacebuilding. In the second part, the European Union's peacebuilding approach will be studied from theoretical perspective. Also, brief description on the EU-Syria relations will be done to give the analysis more background, before moving into the fourth part of the thesis, the research framework, which defines the sources and methods of the analysis. The fifth part of the thesis will consist of the analysis of the source materials and their description. It will describe the EU's approach to the reconstruction, and reflect it in the theoretical framework presented in the chapters before. Lastly, conclusions will reflect upon the whole research questions, the possibilities of future research, and the latest developments in the conflict.

## 2. Post-conflict reconstruction: conceptual background

This section aims at constructing a view on how post-conflict reconstruction is treated in research and practice. Reconstruction as a concept is seen in the framework of peacebuilding, being part of post-conflict activities contributing to building peace and sustainable development of a state and society emerging from conflict. Rambostham, Woodhouse & Miall (2009, 263-264), as well as Mac Ginty and Williams (2009, 93), note that reconstruction efforts should be judged against conflict resolution and conflict transformation principles. The chapter first studies the concept of peacebuilding and the debate on liberal peace that forms the mainstream approach to peacebuilding in the international community. After this, reconstruction will be looked at conceptually as well as from the perspective of the external actors' participation.

### 2.1 Peacebuilding as a framework for reconstruction

This thesis will use peacebuilding as the framework under which post-conflict reconstruction will be defined and analysed. This section outlines the framework and defines post-conflict reconstruction, traces the history of post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and analyses the role of external actors in reconstruction, especially the so-called 'liberal peace' or 'liberal interventionism' features of post-conflict reconstruction.

'Peacebuilding' as a concept has many different definitions. One of the earliest definitions was the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's (1992) definition of post-conflict peacebuilding as "*action to identify and support structures, which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.*" More recently, peacebuilding has widened to encompass activities that occur during and even before the conflict. One example of these broader definitions of peacebuilding is from Newman, Paris and Richmond (2009, 8):

*"preventing the resumption or escalation of violent conflict in conflict-prone societies and establishing a durable and self-sustaining peace; addressing the underlying sources of conflict; building or rebuilding peaceful social institutions and values, including respect for human rights; building or rebuilding institutions of governance and the rule of law."*

In these more extensive definitions, peace is not only the absence of violence, a negative peace as defined by Galtung (1969), but a more substantial part of social welfare, a positive peace, in addition to the negative peace. Peacebuilding supposes that it is possible to build peace in the first place.

Peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction has emerged as a field of research, mainly after the Cold War. The change in the way the international community builds peace has gone hand in hand with how the academic community has studied, analysed and criticised it. After the Cold War, the peace operations of the United Nations widened their scope from peacekeeping to wider operations aiming to create political, economic and social change in post-conflict societies. These operations aimed at supporting the transition of conflict-ridden countries from fragile ceasefire into a stable peace. In addition to the proliferation of operations, also more and more actors joined them, including regional organisations such as the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and non-governmental organisations. However, after the mid-90s, these operations were seen too short and limited, and the political and social changes they promoted to be too fast. Instead of consolidating the peace, economic reforms and organisation of elections on a short notice seemed to cause more instability. As an answer to these challenges, it was suggested that by focusing more on strengthening the institutions of the states, peacebuilding could become more sustainable. This focus on so-called 'statebuilding', process of enhancing the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state, has become one of the main features of peacebuilding today. (Paris 2018, 3-6; Paris 2010, 340-342; Paris & Sisk 2007, 2-3.)

These changes in the focus of peacebuilding can be seen in the different 'generations' of research on peacebuilding. Paris and Sisk (2009) identify three generations: the first generation in the 1990s consists of descriptive case studies of peacebuilding missions. The second generation appeared in the turn of 1990s and 2000s and consists of more theoretical and systematic comparative analyses, critical theories including neo-Marxist approaches, securitisation theory, cosmopolitanism, post-structuralism and gender theory. The third generation of research can be seen as an emerging emphasis on governance, also through the focus on the concept of statebuilding. (Paris & Sisk 2009: 6-7, 15.)

In the same time as the focus of peacebuilding turned into statebuilding, there was also a change in the historical context. Paris (2018,4) notes that even though in the modern form of peacebuilding in the 1990s, the operations were multilateral, happened with the consent of the conflict states, and aimed at accomplishing full autonomy, there was a significant change in peacebuilding after the events of 11 September 2001. After the events, fragile and failed states became the most prominent international security threat. Fragile and failed states did no longer form a threat to themselves only but to the whole region and the international community. According to Paris, this change in policy originated in the USA, pinpointed terrorism as the new enemy, and weak states as potential places of birth and operations for terrorism. Thus the failed states were securitised, and the multilateral peacebuilding operations were not sufficient in answering to the security threats. In addition to this, many features linked to failed states, such as migration, refugees, war economies, illegal arms trade, lack of health care, environmental effects caused by conflicts, potential of aggressive governments rising to power, and different environments that allow terrorism, became problems of international community, not only these states themselves. As a result, also peacebuilding and its adjacent fields such as development and humanitarian work became securitised. Peacebuilding could be thus motivated through both humanitarian and strategic reasons: in addition to the suffering and human rights violations caused by violence, also international stability and security became reasons to build peace in third countries. (Paris 2018, 4-5; Newman, Paris & Richmond 2009, 3-4, 9-10.)

According to Paris, after these developments and especially after the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, peacebuilding got a new form that was not so much post-conflict, but post-invasion, where the main responsibility was in the hands of the invader. This US-led peacebuilding was coexisting with the different type of peacebuilding led by the regional organisations and the UN. The latter form was based more on the consent of local parties and happened after an agreement had been made. (Paris 2018, 483-484.) Thus we can see different forms of peacebuilding emerging, with different roles for local and international actors.

## 2.2 Liberal peace and democratic peace theory

As can be seen from the analysis above, peacebuilding is deeply linked to the perceptions of what kinds of structures make not only countries but also the international system, peaceful. The dominant approach, so-called liberal peace, concludes that democracy, liberal market economy and modern state institutions make peace (Newman, Paris & Richmond 2009, 3). This definition is based on a loose shared understanding of what 'democracy', 'liberal market economy' and 'liberal' mean, and it could be said that liberal peacebuilding is an umbrella of concepts and consists of many different understandings of what it means. Paris (2018, 492) explains the prefix 'liberal' to consist of the attempt to promote democratic governance which includes the constitution, elections, political and civil rights, and the rule of law guaranteed by independent judiciary, and market-oriented economic reforms, which aim to create conditions for long-term economic growth.

As democracy is one of the key elements of liberal peace, Democratic Peace Theory is connecting democracy and peace. According to the Democratic Peace Theory, mature democracies do not go to war against each other, because the democratic system limits the possibilities of leaders to initiate conflict. The economic interdependency between the countries raises the costs of heading into conflict for fear of losing economic and trade relations (Newman, Paris & Richmond 2009, 11.) Democracies also have a unique inner peace feature, which means that they can solve their domestic conflicts peacefully. Thus the liberal system gets its legitimacy from the respect of human rights: the leaders can be changed, which means that they cannot pursue any kind of policies. (Burnell 2006, 4.) These features explaining the peacefulness of democratic societies can be divided into two models: 1) cultural or normative model, in which shared norms and cultural features are the base for both peaceful conflict resolution through democratic institutions, and reciprocity in peaceful relations; and 2) the structural or institutional model, in which the democratic state structures, such as the division of power, limit the use of power. (Russett 1995, 35-40.) However, the Democratic Peace Theory does not necessarily apply to emerging democracies, or in the relations between democracies and non-democracies. For example Burnell (2006, 2-4) states that fragile new democracies are often not able to control the violence of political extremist groups, and the unsettled partially democratic government might use violence to answer the demands of the people.

Regardless of these concerns over the transitional phase of democratisation, democratic peace has been used in policy levels to promote democracy to build peace in systemic levels. When combined with the changes in the international security context, we can see that it has also been used to legitimate interventions. This has also been called as the hijacking of the liberal peace by neoliberalism and neo-conservatism, which replaces the liberal peacebuilding by security-based international intervention, which does not keep human rights or democracy as its priorities. (Oxford Research Group 2.7.2019; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2016, 262.)

Academics have classified this and other types of criticisms in different ways. For example, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2016, 262) use three groups: *conservatives or rejectionists*, *criticals*, and *revisionists*. The first group of criticism rises from the point of view that failed states should not be saved because this keeps up the insecurity. Instead of spreading the threat globally, it should be contained and allowed to ‘play out’ by itself within the state in question. The criticals see that liberal interventionism is a veiled form of neo-colonialism and creates dependency enforced by international institutions. Moreover, finally, the revisionists want to keep the liberal peace principles and efforts, claiming that it is irresponsible not to do it. Instead of condemning the whole system, there is a need to do it better. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2016, 262.)

The critique can also be seen from the point of view of the division between critical and problem-solving theories, as introduced by Robert Cox (1981). According to Cox, problem-solving theories aim to solve issues within their perspectives, whereas the critical theories are questioning the whole perspective in the first place. In the liberal peace, the problem-solving approaches look at its problems from the point of view how to make peacebuilding better and more efficient. Critical approaches, on the other hand, question the normative base of liberal peacebuilding and the universality and promotion of liberal political and economic values. Problem-solving approaches can also be critical towards the practice of liberal peacebuilding, but their focus is more on enhancing effectiveness in achieving liberal peace. (Newman, Paris & Richmond 2009, 23; Newman 2009, 38; Pugh, Cooper & Turner 2008, 391-393.)

Thus there can be different perspectives on the roles of external actors in peacebuilding and reconstruction. What kind of values and norms are they promoting in their approaches?

Are they focusing on efficiency and technical tasks, are they promoting universal values, or are they focusing on local legitimacy? What kind of states and societies do they want to build after conflict? Who are legitimate partners? In other words, peacebuilding and reconstruction are never value-free. The next chapter focuses on exploring these dynamics more by firstly defining reconstruction, and secondly, analysing the role of external actors in it.

### **2.3 Reconstruction and the role of external actors**

The role of external actors is embedded in the concept of reconstruction. It can be taken as a given that after a conflict, the devastation in both physical and human domains is so great, that external support for states and governments emerging from wars for reconstruction is needed (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2016, 240; Ball 2001, 719). However, external actors can have different reasons for their participation in reconstruction efforts. Kahler (2009, 287-288, 294) divides these into three different logics: *human security*, which aim to end conflict and suffering; *economic development*, which focuses on developing good governance; and *national security*, which focuses on mitigating national security threats caused by instability by failed states and terrorism. As mentioned above, also Newman, Paris & Richmond (2009, 9-10) give both humanitarian and strategic reasons for the participation of external actors.

Like its umbrella term peacebuilding, also reconstruction can be said to be a somewhat ambiguous concept. According to Jabareen (2012, 108-109), post-conflict reconstruction theory lacks both theoretical and practical features: it does not have a comprehensive theory and definition of the term itself, nor theoretical or practical knowledge on planning and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction efforts in the contemporary complex conflicts. Thus we can see that reconstruction is a broad concept, as it incorporates the whole spectrum of revitalising states after conflict. It includes reconstructing physical, economic and social structures of the state.

Reconstruction should not be seen only as rebuilding damaged infrastructure, but as a concept that encompasses questions of war and peace, economic features of conflict and conflict resolution, the role of local, regional and international actors and civil society, dealing with psychological trauma, reforming governance structures, and repairing and rebuilding social relationships (Ferguson 2010, 2; Mac Ginty & Williams 2009, 134-137). In its basic definition, reconstruction aims to end continuous violence and prevent

relapse into war, while constructing self-sustaining peace and removing structural violence. Thus, reconstruction can be seen as building both negative and positive peace in Galtungian way. Whereas negative peace is the absence of violence, positive peace also encompasses the absence of structural violence and thus could be defined as ‘social justice’ (Galtung 1969, 183). It also encompasses both short-term relief and long-term development. Reconstruction should also be seen as a highly political phenomenon, as it brings about social, cultural, political and economic changes. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 248; Ferguson 2010, 2; Mac Ginty & Williams 2009, 130-131.)

As can be seen from its broad definition, post-conflict reconstruction includes various efforts that are targeting different fields of society and state structures. A prominent approach has been to divide activities in a sectorised and sequential manner. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall (2016, 252-261) have organised the main features of postwar operations into a schema of main sectors and phases from the perspective of a reconstruction intervention. Key sectors are security, law and order, government, economy, society, and international intervention transitions. The last one addresses the relationship between the intervener and the local population and the integration of the state into international structures. The temporal phases are 1) *intervention*, in which security is the most critical part, and where the interveners have to deal with the immediate trade-offs between short-term and long-term priorities; 2) *stabilization*, which focuses on political stability and governance; and 3) *normalization*, which focuses on economic and socio-cultural sectors, aiming to move the conflict from the sphere of violence into a sphere of nonviolent decision-making and (re)integration into the international system. (ibid., 252-261.)

The sequencing approach has been criticised in making reconstruction a “one-size-fits-all” enterprise, which does not take into account the complexities of local conflict settings. Some writers have proposed that instead of making reconstruction a sequence of phases in which the move to the next phase will happen after certain activities and goals have been fulfilled, we should look at the phases as interlocking and ‘nested’, starting and operating side by side (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2016: 249).

A challenge related to conceptualising post-conflict reconstruction is its focus on the “post” conflict state. The preposition “post-conflict” refers to a situation, where the conflict has been somewhat resolved either through a military victory or a peace

agreement, even though the literature acknowledges that post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction usually start during the conflict. This is why some authors prefer to use the term “postwar” reconstruction, while some do not use any definitions relating reconstruction to conflict. As Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall (2016, 245) note, the nature of conflicts in the late 20th and 21st century has changed and become more complex.

When does the state of conflict turn into a post-conflict state? This is a crucial challenge for reconstruction according to Mac Ginty and Williams, especially in the context of spoiler violence and organised crime that often flourishes in the liminal space between war and peace (2009, 137-138). One of the critical challenges in the case of reconstruction of Syria is that we cannot define the current state of affairs as post-conflict or even post-war. When the reconstruction is discussed in the international community, it is tied to the political process that will end the conflict and start a new phase of reconstructing the country physically, socially, and economically.

This is linked to the other conceptual issue in the term of “post-conflict reconstruction”, which is that sometimes there is more need to construct something than to reconstruct it. Thus the prefix ”re“ already suggests that some structures have been destroyed or damaged during the conflict and they need to be rebuilt. Sometimes this is not the case, but the real need is to build new institutions and structures that answer better to the needs of the people. How these needs are defined, is another question, which is linked to the question of statebuilding, which is a subconcept of reconstruction.

In Mac Ginty and Williams’ (2009, 130) reading, statebuilding refers to contemporary efforts to reconstruct governance structures in the context of wars that have disintegrated the state. Thus statebuilding focuses on governance and economic capabilities of the state via reconstructing state structures (Sisk & Paris 2009, 14-15). Statebuilding, thus understood as strengthening or constructing legitimate government institutions, is one of the major shifts in peacebuilding strategy in the turn of the 21st century. According to Sisk & Paris (ibid, 1-2), its basic premise is that to achieve security and development, there need to be capable, autonomous and legitimate governmental institutions. Without institutional strength, other goals such as reducing poverty and improving health and livelihoods, are challenging to achieve. Thus with the turn of peacebuilding to focusing more in statebuilding, the aim was to develop

peacebuilding operations to have longer, broader and deeper scope than before. Sustainable peace was seen to be possible through strong governance institutions. In the same time, statebuilding became the core of peacebuilding agenda of central international organisations such as the UN, World Bank, IMF and the OECD. (Paris & Sisk 2007, 2-3.)

Post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding focus combined with the centrality of the concept of fragility as a cause for state failure forms what Heydemann (2018, 6) calls the reconstruction orthodoxy. This approach holds that dysfunctional and fragile pre-war institutions cause violent conflict, which in turn breaks the institutions down and creates opportunities for post-conflict governance frameworks that are more effective, inclusive and accountable. In this setting, the aim of post-conflict reconstruction is to make use of the space that the conflict has created to address the causes of violence through institutions, norms and practices. Reconstruction thus transforms the post-conflict countries into functioning states whose economic features do not stem from war. (Heydemann 2018, 6-7.)

Girod (2016, 1) links the concepts of statebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction to the 1990s when the aid donors used reconstruction to describe the statebuilding and development efforts that happened in the context of transitioning from civil conflict. The key events that made the term central in the field were the international statebuilding efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Girod says that the aim reconstruction was to transform the post-conflict countries into functioning states that have governments capable of offering essential public services to their citizens. However, as the progress has been very slow or there has not been any progress, some have questioned the possibility or desirability of external actors' participation in post-conflict reconstruction (Girod 2016, 1-2). Also Mac Ginty and Williams (2009: 126-127) conclude that reconstruction cannot be defined outside of the international system and the interests of key power holders, which define what needs to be reconstructed and in which way.

Focus on statebuilding opened a way to a new kind of critique, which questions the normative and ethical base of liberal peacebuilding. A key aspect of statebuilding is the question of what kind of state is being built. What functions does a state need, and by which standards is it judged to be working or failing? This brings us to the core of the 'liberal peace' thesis, and the dilemmas related to externally assisted statebuilding. Sisk

and Paris (2009, 11-12) regard statebuilding's links to neo-colonialism and culture of dependency as key questions of its future. We can see that the role of external intervention and the historical connotations have a significant impact on how actors see reconstruction. The western secular and liberal state might not be legitimate or appropriate in all contexts. For example, Paris and Sisk (2007, 4-5) raise five central tensions and contradictions of statebuilding: 1) external intervention is used to create self-governance; 2) external actors define local leaders' legitimacy; 3) 'universal' values are promoted as solutions to local problems; 4) statebuilding requires both reforming and validating the history; and 5) the short-term imperatives are often contradictory to the long-term objectives.

Central challenges are thus revolving around local ownership or the lack of it, promotion of external values, and the conflict between the immediate security environment and the needs of long-term development and peace. In other words, the critiques of statebuilding approach suggest that it can operate as a Trojan horse to a realist, hegemonic agenda that aims to control conflict to stabilize the system, or that it is based on a colonialist narrative of modernizing and civilizing third world countries that cannot do it themselves (Newman 2009, 30).

However, for Sisk & Paris (2009, 14-15), statebuilding does not necessarily require Western-style democracy or neo-liberal market ideologies. It can also incorporate both top-down and bottom-up approaches, as it is, or should be, focused on building legitimate institutions. Legitimacy for the government thus stems from both domestic and international sources. (ibid., 14-15.) Also, other classifications exist: for example, Newman (2009) divides peacebuilding into transformative, realist and liberal forms. Of these, the first is based on bottom-up conflict resolution, whereas the second focuses on upholding international security and creation of strong states through top-down processes. The last one is divided into two forms: Wilsonian peacebuilding is based on promoting democracy and market economies in building peace and stability, but the choice is still with the people themselves; and hegemonic neo-liberal peacebuilding, in which the political and economic norms of international actors are promoted at the expense of local actors, who might be included only to legitimize the externally-placed structures. (Newman 2009, 47-51.)

Paris and Sisk (2009, 3) suggest that instead of looking at statebuilding as a sequence of actions, dilemma analysis can be used as a way to analyse statebuilding as an event full of contradictions that actors must solve. They also suggest that in most cases, the challenge is to find a way to balance different imperatives and finding a solution that is closest acceptable for them. These contradictions include the use of outside intervention to foster self-government; using international control to establish local ownership; promoting universal values as remedies for local problems; dealing with the past; and the conflict between short-term imperatives and longer-term objectives. (Paris & Sisk 2009, 13-14, 305-306, 311.) Also, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall (2016) raise contradictions as a good lens to use in analysing postwar peace interventions. They note that a dilemma consists of mutually exclusive options, which is not often the case in peacebuilding, and thus prefer to use the word contradiction instead. For them, peacebuilding situations consist of contradictions, tensions and tradeoffs that are unavoidable and uncomfortable. Analysing them can be useful in capturing complexity of conflict and challenges that the reconstruction process faces. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2016, 247-248.)

It is in the aim of this thesis to explore these dilemmas and contradictions of the European Union's approach to the reconstruction of Syria. This will be done through analysing the approach that the European Union has towards Syria's reconstruction based on the publicly available foreign policy documents, and how the EU presents itself in the conflict. Before this analysis, a brief analysis of three issues will follow.

Firstly, what is the EU's approach to peacebuilding and through which institutions it operates. Secondly, what kind of actor is the EU in its foreign relations and its peacebuilding? What kind of roles does it take and present of itself? Moreover, thirdly, what has been the EU's policy towards Syria in the framework of the EU neighbourhood policy and how has the reconstruction emerged as a topic in the conflict context? These questions will be tackled in the following chapters.

### **3 European Union, reconstruction and Syria**

This chapter analyses the European Union's approach to peacebuilding and reconstruction. Firstly, it will define the key EU institutions, their roles and responsibilities that are related to the EU foreign policy in conflicts and peacebuilding. Secondly, it will analyse the approach that the EU has for peacebuilding through identifying key approaches to conflict and the measures that are taken to prevent, resolve and manage conflicts. Small cases of EU participation in reconstruction processes will be presented. After this, what kind of norms does the EU promote in its peacebuilding approach and how does it present itself as an actor will be analysed through the framework of normative power. Next, the analysis will focus on what has been the EU's policy towards Syria in the foreign policy framework. Lastly, a brief timeline of the EU in the Syrian conflict will be drawn with a focus on the years when the reconstruction has been a prominent topic, 2016-2019. Through these subchapters, a comprehensive picture of the EU's peacebuilding approach will be presented as a background for the upcoming analysis on the case of reconstruction of Syria.

It should be noted, that the aim of this thesis is not to study the dynamics of how the EU peacebuilding approach or the reconstruction stance towards the reconstruction of Syria has been formulated through the institutions and the Member states, but to describe the main institutions that guide, operate and implement peacebuilding, and to introduce the elements of the approach and their normative dimensions. Later in the analysis, the approach towards Syria will be analysed through the publicly available documents more in-depth and reflected on the perspectives presented in this chapter.

#### **3.1 EU Foreign Policy and peacebuilding**

Blockmans, Wouters and Ruys (2010, 2) trace the beginning of the EU's contribution to peacebuilding being fairly recent, but the development has been rapid in developing Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which was established by the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1993. The Treaty created the European Union composed of three pillars: the European Community, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and Justice and Home Affairs. The emergence of the Lisbon Treaty (signed 13 December 2007, entered into force on 1 December 2009) gave the Union a legal

personality and an institutional structure for its external service, as well as eliminated the pillar structure. It also created new actors within the CFSP, such as the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and permanent President of the European Council. (European parliament 2019b.) It also created the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic service, which aim was to *“promote peace, security and progress in Europe and the world, contributing to peace, security and the sustainable development of the Earth, to preserve peace, prevent conflict and to strengthen international security”*. This expanded the scope of tasks related to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, crisis management and post-conflict stabilisation, under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). (Duke & Courtier 2010, 48.) The EEAS consists of officials in Brussels, as well as the EU delegations to third countries and international organisations. It is led by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). The EEAS has a role in designing and implementing the EU foreign policy, and contributes to the programming and management of different instruments, such as the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), European Development Fund (EDF), European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). (EPLO 2019, 13-14.)

The European Council, consisting of the heads of governments or states, the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council, identifies the EU's strategic interests and determines the objectives of the CFSP. The Council of the European Union, on the other hand, is the institution that represents Member States in the EU, is a legislative body and shares the budgetary authority with the European Parliament. It is the controlling body of the EU foreign policy, consisting of Member States ministers and European Commissioners. The Foreign Affairs Council has the most responsibility for the EU's response to conflict, including areas of humanitarian assistance, development, neighbourhood and enlargement negotiations, trade and defence policy, and CFSP. (EPLO 2019, 3, 6.) The European Parliament, the only directly elected body of the EU, shares the decision-making power with the Council of the European Union in most areas under the Community competence, but in the areas under CFSP, it has no legislative power. In CFSP, the Council is the main decision-maker, whereas the parliament is being informed or gives its consent to the decisions.

Thus the parliament can make decisions related to development policy and the political framework for common commercial policy, as well as in the context of the long-term budget, and it can affect the external funding instruments, including those that fund peacebuilding and conflict prevention. (EPLO 2019, 38-40.)

The European Commission, which has administrative, executive, legislative and representative responsibilities, consists of the College of Commissioners and the administrative body. It is comprised of 31 directorate generals (DGs), which deal with various topics. Of these, five deal with external relations: Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement negotiations (DG NEAR), International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO), Trade, and the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). (EPLO 2019, 22.)

The service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) was created at the same time as the EEAS and is reporting to the HR/VP. Instruments under it relevant to peacebuilding include for example the Partnership Instrument (PI), Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), sanctions policy, and Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments (RPBA) and Post-Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNA). The PI, adopted in 2014, is an instrument that promotes EU's strategic interests through financing key areas such as competitiveness, research and innovation and migration, as well as deals with EU's economic diplomacy (European Commission 2019b). The IcSP, which succeeded the Instrument for Stability in 2014, supports stabilisation initiatives and peacebuilding activities in the areas of crisis response, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness, as well as responses to global, transregional and emerging threats (European Commission 2019d). The RPBA and PDNA are guided by joint declaration signed by the EU, UN and World Bank since 2008, to mobilize the institutions and coordinate post-crisis recovery frameworks to enhance resilience, answer recovery needs and strengthen capacities of national institutions for effective prevention, response and recovery, in countries recovering from natural disasters or conflict-related crises (European Commission 2019a). Sanctions, or restrictive measures, can be prepared by the EEAS and agreed by the Council of the European Union. They can include arms embargoes, trade restrictions, financial restrictions, and restricting movement targeting third countries or non-state entities and individuals, for example terrorist groups and terrorists (European Commission 2019c).

Lastly, one of the key areas in the EU foreign and security policy is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which emerged in 2004. The ENP now targets all immediate neighbours to the EU: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. The relations are built through bilateral relationship through individualised Action Plans. (Björkdahl, Richmond & Kappler 2009, 10.) In addition to the differentiated bilateralism, other key mechanisms for the cooperation are conditionality and socialisation. Since 2008, the ENP also consists of two sub-regional components, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative. The prime objective of the ENP was to strengthen stability, security and well-being in the neighbourhood, but also to contribute to the resolution of protracted crises. (Schumacher 2017, 3.)

The motivations for the EU's promotion of regional cooperation vary from ad hoc responses to long-term strategic objectives. One of the reasons is the belief that regional cooperation will foster and consolidate peace and economic growth. This is a mixture of multilateralism and regionalism, as the regional integration would lead to integrating developing countries to world economy as well. We can also see the objectives of strengthening human rights and democracy. (Björkdahl, Richmond & Kappler 2009, 84.) Tocci (2007, 8) notes that while the EU's self-image as a normative power would promote values as ends in themselves, there are other interests as well to promote peace, democracy, rights and law in its neighbourhood. Due to the proximity of the region and potential spillover effects, the stability and security of the EU can be threatened in the absence of mutually agreed settlements between the EU and neighbouring countries. These threats can include political violence, radicalism, uncontrolled asylum and refugee flows, accelerated migration, disrupted commercial flows and damaged energy security. Tensions within Europe can also be fuelled, especially regarding the Muslim communities in member states. (ibid., 8.)

Schumacher (2017) argues that after 2015 the ENP's ambitious policies on promotion of democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights have been turned down, partially due to the developments in the southern region, but also due to the failures in empowering civil society, inconsistent use of conditionality, as well as inability to "offer attractive and effective substitutes for political accession conditionality". The ENP has become more technocratic and de-politicised, especially

in its Mediterranean neighbourhood. (Schumacher 2017, 3-5.) Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler (2011, 460) express concerns that if the neighbourhood policy does not take into account the differences in the local context, it will only replicate the standard liberal peace prescriptions, which raises questions whether the EU should be doing statebuilding and security-oriented operations in the first place.

Smith (2003, 86) divides the main instruments that the EU uses for the regional cooperation into economic assistance, cooperation agreements, group-to-group political dialogue, and conditionality. Conditionality means the linking between the perceived benefit to the fulfilment of conditions, often relating to the protection of human rights and advancing democratic principles. This conditionality can be both positive and negative. Tocci (2010) defines positive conditionality as a promise of a benefit that will be given when a predetermined condition is fulfilled. This fulfilment must happen either before the benefit is granted, or during the granting, when the benefit may be withdrawn or suspended if the conditions are not respected. Negative conditionality, on the other hand, means inflicting a punishment in the event of violating some specific conditions. This can include diplomatic and economic sanctions. Tocci also notes that the EU has a preference over positive conditionality and the need to fulfil the requirements before the benefit is granted (*ex-ante* conditionality). Reasons for this include the preference to keep political channels open and imposing less challenge to the sovereignty to a third country, as well as the actual amount of shortcomings in the field of conflict, democracy and human rights, which, in case of taken strictly, could lead to suspension of many agreements. (Tocci 2010, 66-68.) Interestingly, as Smith (2003, 84) notes, in the same time as democracy, regional peace and security, economic stability and political commitment are the objectives for regional cooperation, they are the conditions for the cooperation in the first place. Whitman and Wolff (2012, 215) note that the EU has not been using conditionality in its grants in many cases, for example in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Moldova, Arab-Israeli conflict and Cyprus. This would also indicate about the EU's reluctance to impose strong conditionalities, which contrasts with the case of Syria.

These foreign policy structures, instruments and principles form the basis through which the EU approaches peacebuilding and its external relations. How are these present in the case of Syria? As will be seen in the later analysis, the EU has used remarkable conditionality in its approach to the reconstruction of Syria. How has it been

operationalised? What preconditions exist that need to be fulfilled? The later analysis will answer these questions, as well as reflect on the EU's approach to Syria in the context of its European Neighbourhood Policy. Before that, the EU's more specific approach to peacebuilding is analysed.

### **3.1.1 EU and peacebuilding**

What is the EU's approach to peacebuilding? What concepts and tools does it include? In which context does the case of Syria fit in? In the following section the EU approach to peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation and dialogue, which are interlinked in the EU approach, are analysed. The EU's approach has been divided into three features: its lack of coherent conceptualization, its wide range of policy instruments, and its rootedness in the history of the EU itself as a peace project.

In the analyses of the EU's peacebuilding approach, one kind of consensus is that there is no one coherently conceptualised approach to peacebuilding that can be translated into practice (Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler 2011, 450). On the other hand, the analysis of the EU peacebuilding practice had been, according to Visoka & Doyle (2016, 862), *“placed within traditional instruments of security governance, such as conflict prevention and mediation, crisis management, post-conflict stabilization and normative frameworks, such as human rights, human security and civilian protection.”* Developing coherent approach to peacebuilding and conflict prevention is a slow process according to Smith (2003, 155), who argued in pre-Lisbon Treaty era, that the slowness reflects partly the weaknesses in the EU's foreign policy system. After her writing, the EU's foreign policy institutions have been strengthened, most notably through the EEAS and the HR/VP. Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler (2011, 451) emphasise that the Lisbon Treaty itself states the connection between the EU and peace, as well as the role of the EU in peace promotion, conflict prevention and security. The new emerging peacebuilding framework is based on sustainable peace, human security, responsibility to protect, effective multilateralism, partnership and local ownership and national capacity. Promotion of democracy and human rights and strengthening civil society are also crucial issues. (ibid., 451.)

Duke and Courtier (2012, 22) argue that the EU's understanding of peacebuilding is multifaceted, especially when it is linked to the general debate about security, which includes debates about human security, environmental security, energy security, conflict

prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation, as well as sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding is thus a part of the EU conflict prevention strategy and the activities aiming to create conditions for sustainable peace. The EU engages in peacebuilding both within its region, as well as in the connected regions and other regions linking with the member state interests or where conflict issues are urgent or called for by other international peacebuilding actors such as the UN. (Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler 2011, 455.) Smith (2003, 145) notes that the EU's preference for conflict prevention arises partly from the lack of military options for managing conflicts. However, after the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the EU has a military wing to deal with crisis management and security issues.

Peacebuilding is centrally linked to medium and long-term approaches aiming to address the root causes of violent conflicts and creating conditions for peace within states and contributing to inter-state peace (Smith 2003, 145). These root causes can include

*”an imbalance of political, socio-economic or cultural opportunities among different identity groups (ethnic, religious, regional, social, etc.); a lack of democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of governance; the absence of effective mechanisms for the peaceful conciliation of group interests (including democratic structures) and for bridging dividing lines between different interest groups; and the lack of a vibrant civil society”*  
(Duke & Courtier 2010, 24)

The root causes can be clustered into the legitimacy of the state, the rule of law, respect for fundamental rights, civil society and media, relations between communities and dispute-solving mechanisms, sound economic management, social and regional inequalities, and the geopolitical situation. (Duke & Courtier 2010, 24.) They also note that peacebuilding is increasingly seen as part of the post-conflict transition phase and building reconciliation and peace. This means that it can include various features such as peacekeeping operations, capacity building, planning and training of peace support operations, DDR, fighting illegal arms and organised crime, governance reforms, human rights and democracy, police missions, and parliamentary oversight. (ibid., 29.) For Duke and Courtier (2010, 26) the distinctive feature of the EU's approach is the capability of tackling various issues on the full spectrum of societies

before, during and after conflict. The EU has a wide range of policy instruments it can wield in its peacebuilding operations, which stems from the combined efforts of the member states (Smith 2003, 154).

As an example of an instrument targeting post-conflict reconstruction, the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) operated in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia between the years 2000 and 2008. It was an independent agency of the EU, accountable to the Council and the Parliament. Its programmes targeted supporting good governance, institution building, the rule of law, as well as the development of a market economy. Even though its main focus was strengthening the state institutions and capacities, it also invested in physical infrastructure, environmental protection, social development and strengthening of civil society. (Voorhoeve 2007, 156-157.)

Another example that can illustrate how the EU uses its wide array of tools from crisis management, to political and developmental tools, is the case of EU peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Many challenges in the conflict setting, such as the war-like environment, overwhelming political and military lead by other actors, as well as centralised structure of governance which alienates majority of the population and forms a legitimacy gap between the population and the formal government institutions, are relevant in other contexts as well (Gross 2010, 308). In the case of Syria, we can see that the continuing conflict state and the changing domestic, regional and international power balance affects the EU's peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts.

In Afghanistan, the EU was engaged in multiple fronts: the Commission oversaw programmes focusing on economic development, governance and the rule of law; the EU Special Representative (EUSR) filled a more political role of coordinating and shaping the EU's political position, as well as being the visible political actor on the ground; the EUPOL Afghanistan, the ESDP police mission launched in 2007, was led initially by Italy but later by the Council; and finally, the Election Observation Mission (EOM) in 2009. (Gross 2010, 302.) Gross (*ibid.*, 309) notes that the EU was able to deliver a comprehensive set of political, economic and civilian crisis management tools in Afghanistan, but the inter-institutional divides have made the coherence and coordination of EU efforts difficult.

Also Richmond, Björkdahl and Kappler (2011, 457) note that this wide range of tools and instruments can contribute to the lack of coherence in the EU's peacebuilding approach, where for example security, policing and promotion of the rule of law is under ESDP, democratisation and human rights promotion under the Commission, the diplomatic role under CSFP, and the donor role of the EU varies. (ibid., 457)

The broad scope of peacebuilding activities is thus in the same time an opportunity for the EU to engage in many aspects of peacebuilding, but in the same time having a coordinated and coherent peacebuilding approach seems to be complicated. This is one of the key features of the EU's peacebuilding approach.

Another distinctive feature of the approach is the added value that the idea of European integration as a peacebuilding project brings to the EU. The EU sees itself as an exemplar, and this has implications to its external peacebuilding efforts. Also Smith (2003) notes that the EU approach's uniqueness has been on exporting its model of conflict prevention: the emphasis on multilateralism and regional cooperation. The legitimacy and authority of the EU in conflict prevention has been stemming from its role as a model for other regions. This she calls the civilian method of preventing conflict. (Smith 2003, 170.)

Similarly, Tocci (2010) frames the EU's role in conflict settings in two ways. The first is that the framework of governance, law and policy can offer a conducive context for peacebuilding. The second is that through its policy instruments, the EU can create incentives for peacebuilding. Thus the first role is the role of a framework, whereas the second role is more of an actor itself. (Tocci 2010, 60.) Visoka & Doyle (2016) argue that the EU's peacebuilding approach should not be studied only through the lens of liberal peacebuilding, but rather as "self-mirroring of its internal dynamics of neo-functional integration and consolidation". This means that the EU's external actions are based on the externalisation of its self-perception of the formation of peace in Europe to other parts of the world. (Visoka & Doyle 2016, 863.) This experience also affects how the EU would prefer conflicts to be solved. Tocci (2007, 8) lists the EU's preferred solutions as 1) federal and power-sharing solutions to secessionist conflicts; 2) integration of the minority communities through the extension of individual and collective rights within multicultural unitary states; and 3) secession. These vary

depending on the conflict context, but the first option being the most popular and the last one the least.

This so-called 'European experience' as a legitimator and motivator for the EU peacebuilding is an essential part of the EU's identity as a peacebuilder. We will get back to this in later chapter. Before that one more question should be answered: is the EU's approach to peacebuilding similar to the mainstream liberal peacebuilding?

Through the lens of liberal peacebuilding, the EU's peacebuilding approach seems to have many similarities. The basic assumptions of the root causes of conflict as well as the appropriate measures to address them, such as democratisation, respect for human and minority rights, sustainable economic development and regional cooperation, shape the EU's policies on conflict prevention. These measures fit well into the framework of liberal peacebuilding and liberal peace, as can be seen from the above chapters. Also, as presented above, these measures do not come without challenges related to the destabilising effects of democratisation, the possibility of creating more inequalities through development or economic assistance. However, how similar is the EU's approach similar to the liberal peacebuilding consensus which was presented above?

Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler (2011, 452) note that the emerging EU peacebuilding framework has complied with the liberal peace and its key components, including needs for stable states, security, rights, institutions, the rule of law, civil society and development. They say that while the peacebuilding framework is framed by the aims of liberal peacebuilding, it also has more emancipatory aims of transcending the state via regional integration. (ibid. 455.) While the EU's normative and ideal version of peace that includes a just and durable peace based on civil rights and society, and an ambition for more complex engagement, can be seen in the light of normative power, the EU seems to equate building this kind of peace with building liberal or neoliberal states. This approach when transferred to post-conflict zones, has not been able to make significant impact in creating more emancipator version of peace. Even though the EU is utilising statebuilding elements, Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler (2011) note that the EU's approach diverges significantly from the general statebuilding praxis with its emphasis on rights and needs of the people in social and cultural contexts. This approach, however, is less able to respond to 'hard power' issues. (ibid., 458-459, 464.)

These steps outside of the mainstream peacebuilding approaches would suggest, in the eyes of Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler (2011, 460), extending the liberal peacebuilding into social justice, human security and welfare and more sensitive engagements with other actors in the contextual dynamics of conflict areas. This would require normative legitimacy from the EU. The EU has been described as a civil power and lately as a normative power, based on the measures in its use and how it represents itself. The constitution of the identity of the EU and the principles it promotes in its international relations are interlinked, the two sides of the same coin. Thus the following section will give background to the later analysis of the EU approach towards the reconstruction of Syria.

### **3.1.2 Normative and civil power: EU as a peacebuilder**

This chapter outlines the role of the European Union in its international relations through the concepts of civil and normative power. The EU has been presented as a different kind of international actor, and that represents a new kind of power in world politics. In defining what that means, the first definition was that the EU is a civil power, based on its preference of using diplomatic and economical means instead of military ones. However, later in the 2000s, Ian Manners' (2000) notion of 'Normative Power Europe' has become a stable part of the analyses of the EU and its international relations.

Manners' notion of the EU as a normative power is an answer to the debate whether the EU is or should be a civilian power or a military power. He defines the features of civilian power as 1) primacy of diplomatic cooperation to solve international conflicts; 2) the centrality of economic power to achieve national objectives; 3) the willingness to use legally-binding supranational institutions in achieving international progress. The debate about what kind of an actor the EU is and what is its relation to being a state-like actor forms the context for Manners' argument, that the EU is not a civilian power that focuses on utilising economic tools, nor military power, but a normative power that is characterised by shared principles. He defines normative power as the "*ability to shape or change what passes for normal in international relations*" (Manners 2000, 26-32.)

The concept of normative power Europe, for Manners (2000, 31), means that the EU is both constructed on a normative basis, but also acts in a normative way in international

relations. This normative basis consists of founding principles, such as liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law; of tasks and objectives, such as social progress, discrimination and sustainable development; of stable institutions, through guarantee of democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and protection of minorities; and of fundamental rights, such as dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizenship and justice. This basis represents the constitutive features of the EU, whose identity is being more than a state. (ibid., 33.) Then, what normative principles does the EU promote in its international policies? Manners (2007, 68-74) lists these as sustainable peace, social freedom, consensual democracy, associative human rights (both individual and collective), supranational rule of law, inclusive equality, social solidarity, sustainable development, good governance. Finally, these principles are promoted through diffusion, strategic and declaratory communications, the institutionalisation of relationship, exchange of benefits, physical presence of EU in third states and organisations, and cultural diffusion and political learning. This forms the normative power of Europe. (Manners 2000, 35.)

Whitman (2013, 182) notes that the normative power in the context of peace and conflict resolution emphasises non-military, economic, social and humanitarian instruments, addressing structural causes and violent symptoms, can combine short- and long-term goals and instruments, and develop local capacity ownership. According to Lucarelli and Menotti (2006, quoted in Whitman 2013, 182) normative power can form interventions into political and economical construction and legal frameworks with acceptable terms by the parties.

The normative power has also faced criticism. Whitman (2013, 177) identifies the critique coming especially from structuralist-realist and rationalist scholars: they reject the possibility of the EU having separate actorness to its member states, instead serving as an instrument for its most influential member states, and the role and importance of values and principles in the world politics in the first place. The actorness of the EU is noted by the scholars of normative power as well. In the words of Diez & Manners (2007, 186):

*“--- there is no one EU identity – the EU cannot be considered a ‘difference engine’ in the multiplication of a separate, single, essential, categorical, supranational EU self. It is the fluid, complex, multiple and relational aspects of the self–other contestations which define the EU as a normative power, rather than the other way round.”*

In this thesis, the self-description is necessarily focused on the way the EEAS and particularly the HR/VP presents the EU approach and identity concerning the reconstruction of Syria. The study does not aim to claim to gain insights into a single EU ‘self’ that can be analysed through the source documents. Instead, it rather aims to analyse the image or the description that the EU presents of itself in the case.

Additionally, in this thesis, the aim is not to analyse the normative power of the EU in the context of Syria per se, but to use the concept as support in analysing what is the approach of the EU towards the reconstruction of Syria. The normativity would be seen in the principles that the EU promotes in reconstruction, as well as in how it presents itself as an actor in the conflict. Does its credibility as an actor rise from its values or from its actions? Additionally, can we find other than normative motivations? Would this be a continuation of the EU’s foreign and peacebuilding policy, or would it contrast with it? To support this analysis, the following chapter focuses on the relations between the EU and Syria.

### **3.2 EU and Syria**

In this research, the aim is to look at the norms and values that are linked to the vision of future post-conflict Syria. What kind of Syria is the European Union willing to build, and what not? What kind of elements is the EU willing to accept, and what elements prevent it from participating? This will be done through looking at the vision the EU presents for future Syria, and the preconditions it sets for its participation, support and financing of reconstruction. Before going to the case study, the relationship between the EU and Syria in the institutional framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy is analysed. After this, a brief timeline of the EU in the Syrian conflict will be drawn. It encompasses the years under analysis, 2016-2019, when the reconstruction discussion has been most prominent.

### 3.2.1 European Neighbourhood Policy and Syria

From the European Union's perspective, Syria can be seen through the lens of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, but also through the European Neighbourhood Policy and as a part of the EU's southern neighbourhood. On the other hand, since the conflict, it can also be seen through the EU's relations with its southern neighbourhood of the Middle East and North Africa have been formalised since mid-1990s in several ways. One of the key aims has been to consolidate prosperity, stability and security in the neighbourhood. Through Euro-Mediterranean partnerships and financial assistance instruments, the EU has supported economic development, readdressing socioeconomic imbalances, good governance, and human rights reforms. In 2003, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) emerged to cover both eastern and southern neighbourhoods with aim to strengthen the EU's contribution to conflict resolution at the regional level. (Duke & Courtier 2010, 36; Tocci 2010, 59.) Smith (2003, 76-77) notes that the EU was trying to construct a Mediterranean identity based on the European Community model of functional cooperation, but with little success as the internal and external conflicts are damaging the region and the European agricultural protectionism and tough anti-immigration policies are not encouraging closer cooperation. In 2015, the ENP was reviewed, and it was seen that its security dimension needed to be strengthened due to the rising number of conflicts and destabilisation in the neighbourhood, which had caused unprecedented migratory flows towards Europe (Koenig 2017, 358).

Like its peacebuilding approach, also the ENP has been criticised of the lack of coherence. As the ENP is a policy that encompasses multiple objectives, such as security, economic prosperity and democracy, and cuts across different functional areas and governance levels, it raises coherence challenges that are horizontal, institutional and vertical. Especially horizontal coherence is essential in the context of Syria: between CFSP, CSDP, humanitarian aid and crisis management fields such as migration management and counter-terrorism. Institutional coherence refers to collaborative interaction between EU-level institutional actors, whereas the vertical coherence refers to the coherence between the neighbourhood and crisis management policies are coherent on the national member state levels and the EU-level. (Koenig 2017, 358-359.)

Koenig (2017) evaluates the coherence challenges in the case of Syria during the years 2011-2015. Before the conflict, Syria was a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and a founding member of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). At the beginning of the conflict, the EU response was coherent: it used diplomatic declarations, froze the draft Association Agreement and suspended all bilateral cooperation programmes, as well as imposed autonomous sanctions and restrictive measures. The sanctions regime became to include an arms embargo, an oil import embargo, asset freezes and travel bans. (Koenig 2017, 362-363.)

According to Koenig (2017) that the EU's initial unity crumbled in 2013 when the conflict turned more deadly and caused a severe humanitarian disaster. In March, France and the UK started pushing for lifting the arms embargo to arm moderate rebel groups whereas other member states were sceptical. Eventually the situation was ended in compromise, which eased the arms embargo without immediate weapon delivery but maintained other sanctions. This was seen as a serious blow to the EU's foreign policy and its approach to the Syrian conflict, and soon after the EU institutions attempted to increase the coherence through a joint communication on bringing the EU and member states policies and instruments together to a more coherence approach. In August, the chemical weapons attack in Ghouta divided member states again: The UK and France were signalling support for a US-led air campaign against the Assad government, but others focused on condemning the attacks. (Koenig 2017, 363-364.)

The years 2014-2015 brought three interlinked developments that made the Syrian crisis even more linked to Europe. First one was the expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, later also known as Islamic State, IS). The second one was the ISIS-linked terrorist attack in neighbouring and European countries. Moreover, the third one was the unprecedented increase of Syrian refugees heading towards Europe. As an answer to these developments, the European Commission and the HR/VP published an 'EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat'. In addition, funds for regional response, strengthening the moderate opposition and humanitarian assistance were allocated through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the 'Madad' Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis. (Koenig 2017, 364-365.)

Koenig (2017, 365) notes that the vertical coherence was challenged the most by the migration, as the distribution of refugees within the EU was uneven, and measure to

solve it faced resistance. The EU could not provide the necessary financial bridge between emergency and longer-term aid, and the member states could not agree on coordinated political strategy, a collective military contribution or sustainable ways to support and manage refugees. (ibid.)

This short description of the EU response to the Syrian crisis in the early years of the conflict form the background for the emergence of the discussion on the reconstruction. In the early years, the focus was majorly on the humanitarian crisis, ISIS, and internal security and migration-related issues. However, in 2016 the focus had also turned back to the political process and the vision for the future. The next chapter will outline the EU engagement to the discussion on the reconstruction of Syria and the future of the country.

### **3.2.2 Reconstruction discussion timeline<sup>3</sup>**

In 2016, when the reconstruction stance emerged in the aftermath of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 from December 2015, the EU started to strengthen its role around the conflict and its resolution. The Geneva process and its key features become to form the pre-conditions for supporting the reconstruction of Syria. The Geneva process is led by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, guided by the Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). The resolution mandates the UN facilitation of the political process, with a focus on governance, a constitutional committee, and UN-supervised elections, as well as calls for the transition to happen within six months, and the elections within 18 months.<sup>4</sup>

The resolution emphasises an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The resolution also calls for the

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter utilises the materials from the EU sources. These materials and their use will be explained in the next chapter that introduces the research framework. However, for the structure of the thesis, this timeline description/analysis is placed before the other analysis chapters to provide sufficient background information for the the reader.

<sup>4</sup> The Geneva talks originated to the year 2012, when the first UN Special Envoy for Syria, Kofi Annan, submitted a six-point plan to the UN Security Council, which called for a Syrian-led political process. The first round of negotiations, so called Geneva I, start in 2012 and are followed by Geneva II in 2014, Geneva III in 2016, Geneva IV in 2017, and Geneva V-VIII in 2017 and onwards. Kofi Annan was followed by Lakhdar Brahimi as the UN and Arab League envoy for Syria in August 2012, who resigned May 13 2014. He was replaced by Staffan de Mistura in July. Later in January 2018, he was followed by Geir Pedersen. (see timeline of the conflict in Yacoubian 2019.)

implementation of the Geneva Communiqué from 2012. The 2012 Geneva Communiqué is the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria, which convened in Geneva on 30 June 2012.<sup>5</sup> (United Nations A/66/865-S/2012/522 2012, 2.) The Communiqué identified the Action Group’s common objectives as “*to work urgently and intensively to bring about an end to the violence and human rights abuses, and to facilitate the launch of a Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future.*”

To facilitate these objectives, the Communiqué identified steps and measures to secure implementation of UNSCR 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), agreed on principles and guidelines for a political transition “*that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people*”, and agreed on actions to support the Joint Special Envoy’s efforts to facilitate a Syrian-led political process.

Through implementing the Communiqué, the UNSCR 2254 calls for the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body, which will be formed based on mutual consent and should ensure continuity of governmental institutions. The resolution requests the UN Secretary-General, through the Special Envoy for Syria, to convene representatives of Syrian government and opposition to engage in negotiations on a political transition process. The resolution also calls for protection of ethnic and religious groups, ensuring humanitarian access, conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), and adherence to international law. (UNSCR 2254 2015.)

The EU also enhanced its role as a regional actor. In October 2016, Mogherini initiated a process of talks with the regional actors on the future of Syria and the post-conflict state, aiming to complement the official negotiation track of Geneva and to create political space for common ground. These regional actors include Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Lebanon. (EEAS 2016c.)

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<sup>5</sup> The Action Group consisted on the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of China, France, Russia, the UK, the USA, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The meeting was chaired by the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States to Syria. (Geneva Communiqué 2012.)

The next year, 2017, forms an important phase for the EU role in Syria. The EU stepped up its role through several ways: in the form of the EU Regional Initiative and the first Brussels conference to support Syria, through launching its strategy for Syria, as well as preparing for post-agreement planning on Syria, and consolidating its role among different efforts to solve the conflict, such as the Astana process and the Geneva process. However, the principal aim for all these complementary channels was to push all actors towards Geneva.

2017 was also a significant phase in the conflict itself: the Geneva negotiations became deadlocked, Russia, Turkey and Iran launched the Astana process, ISIS faces significant defeat in Syrian territory, and the Assad government starts to gain back majority of the Syrian territory. The Astana process, which operated as an alternative peace talks channel and focused on ceasefires, included the Syrian government and several rebel or opposition factions. The Astana guarantors, Russia, Iran and Turkey, signed a memorandum which established four ‘de-escalation zones’ in Syria. This memorandum is not signed by the conflict parties, but the guarantors have the responsibility to ensure and observe the ceasefire. (Yacoubian 2019.)

For the EU, 2017 consisted majorly in consolidating its approach to Syria and the reconstruction. The EU strategy for Syria was presented by the European Commission on 14 March, and it sets out “*how the EU can help to rebuild a peaceful and stable Syrian nation and a pluralistic, tolerant civil society in Syria.*” It also stresses that the EU will assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a “*comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, is firmly under way.*” The strategy also reiterates EU’s commitment to the unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Syrian state, calls for Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, reiterates EU support to civil society, and sets out the efforts to prepare for reconciliation and transitional justice. (European Parliament 2019a.) More detailed analysis of the strategy on how it presents the EU as an actor, how it defines reconstruction, and what is the EU vision for the future of Syria, will be done in later chapters of this research.

The EU’s Regional Initiative started properly during 2017, with the acknowledgement that peace in Syria will require agreement besides among the local players, also among

the regional actors and the world powers under the UN auspices (EEAS 2017m, 2017t). The talks with the different regional actors would produce the UN content that can form the basis for different issues taken into Geneva talks, including governance, transition and reconciliation. (EEAS 2017t, 2017x.) This would require serious political will of all actors (EEAS 2017m).

Besides working with the regional actors, the EU started preparing for the reconstruction of Syria. These technical level talks with the UN and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, were seen as building the peace dividend (EEAS 2017f, 2017j, 2017m, 2017o, 2017r). The preparations are started under the logic that to achieve peace, one needs to start building peace and conditions for it. The preparations also include exploration of conditions under which the international community can contribute to reconstructing the country. (EEAS 2017h.)

While exploring the reconstruction proper, the EU was widening its scope of support for early recovery, stabilisation, through the aid that goes beyond classical humanitarian aid. This included combination of humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid to sectors such as early recovery, basic services, health facilities, and helping the life start again. (EEAS 2017b, 2017c, 2017d.) Definitions of the line between humanitarian and non-humanitarian are not made clear, but a look at the EU instruments can give us some insight.

*European Neighbourhood Instrument* delivers non-humanitarian assistance, which targets sectors such as education, support to livelihoods, local governance, health and civil society support; *Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)* and *European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights* support Syrian civil society and human rights, defenders; and *Development Cooperation Instrument* supports projects related to food security inside Syria. Under the IcPS there is an EU fund for Syria, the EU Syria Peace Process Support Initiative. Regional support instruments include Facility for Refugees in Turkey, and Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, which supports the neighbouring countries in the region to support Syrian refugees. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 5-9.)

The EU organised the first Brussels conference, “*Supporting the future of Syria and the region*”, in April 2017, and launched the so-called Brussels process that aimed at gathering more support for Syrians. The conference aimed at not only gathering

humanitarian support but also political support to push Syrians and other parties towards Geneva (EEAS 2017f, 2017t). The conference explored ways to support Syrian people to find their way of future, to support the Geneva process, and also what the international community can do in the future to support reconstructing the country once the political transition is underway (EEAS 2017o). The conference resulted in adopting a joint declaration and financial pledges \$ 6 billion for 2017 (Council of the European Union 2017).

In the same time, the EU highlighted the complementary tracks as a basis for resumption of Geneva process. The different efforts, including the Astana process led by Russia, Iran and Turkey, the humanitarian work, as well as the planning of the post-conflict phase, were recognised as sequencing and coordination (EEAS 2017t). This was already recognised in 2016, as the Regional Initiative's background included the acknowledgement that the international actors are already involved in supporting different parties of conflict, both local ceasefires and international agreements are needed. (EEAS 2016f).

Coming to 2018, with the Geneva negotiations deadlocked, the EU efforts to push actors towards Geneva were amplified. The EU highlighted the limited agreements do not work, because of the lack of a broader political agreement of the future of Syria (EEAS 2018l). Particular frustration can be read from the comments about the reluctance of the Assad government and its allies to meaningfully participate in the peace process. For example, Iran and Russia were asked to push for government's participation (EEAS 2018h, 2018k), though in the same time Iran's negative role in supporting Assad was noted (EEAS 2018f), and the intensified military operations supported by both Russia and Iran were condemned (EEAS 2018j). The Astana guarantors were called to guarantee the ceasefires as their responsibility (EEAS 2018h). Thus it seems that the hope for constructive regional and international engagement in advancing peace was growing thin.

Russia also started a new political track on Syria in early 2018 by initiating the Sochi meetings. In the same time, the Astana guarantors also reaffirm their support for a political settlement based on the UNSC resolution 2254. Another interesting development during 2018 was the increasing role of France and Germany. For example,

a summit between Turkey, Russia, France and Germany was held to discuss the future of Syria. (Yacoubian 2019.)

Another topic emerged as a central issue related to the reconstruction: the return of refugees. The EU's goal of creating conditions for a safe and dignified return was highlighted, as was the importance of accountability: "*most Syrians do not want to go back to a country where there is no accountability*" (EEAS 2018c). Thus at the same time as the EU prepared the conditions of the return, it was preparing for many refugees to stay in Europe and hosting communities (EEAS 2019d). This was also reflected in the third Brussels conference, where the support for hosting communities was a key topic (EEAS 2019a, 2019c). The return of refugees continued to be an important topic in 2019 when the conditions for a safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return were called after (EEAS 2019d).

By 2019, the conflict was seen to enter a new phase, where the Assad government prevails (EEAS 2019c). Whereas in 2016, the expectations for Assad and allies' giving in eventually were still up, this is no longer the case. In 2016, the EU did not believe it to be in anyone's interest to destroy the whole country (EEAS 2016d), but after the years of the government consolidating its reach over the territory of Syria, through military advances, this belief seemed vain. In the same time, the Geneva process has not moved forward, which is credited mainly to Assad's lack of genuine participation and continued human rights and humanitarian law violations (EEAS 2019d), which, given the strengthening of Assad's grip on the country, might not be surprising.

The push for Geneva is still there, and it is presented as the "only just and realistic way of ending the conflict" (EEAS 2019c), and the only format that assures international legitimacy, the participation of both the government and the opposition and other voices from the Syrian society (EEAS 2019b). The Syrian ownership of Geneva is also highlighted, as is the EU support for civil society and women (EEAS 2019b, 2019d). The unity of the EU in the reconstruction was also mentioned, which could indicate that there were doubts about this among other actors (EEAS 2019b).

From the short timeline description of the EU in the Syrian conflict context, we can see two trends: 1) The EU stepping up its role both regionally and internationally through the discussion on Syria's future, using the reconstruction as a leverage over actors navigating towards the Geneva process; 2) The lack of progress in Geneva and the

initial engagement and cooperation with regional powers slowing down with the Assad government emerging as the prevailing actor within Syria.

The reconstruction approach will be analysed in this context of the EU engagement in the conflict. In the next chapter, the research framework and methods will be presented, and the research questions revisited.

## 4 Research framework

### 4.1 Case study of the EU approach

Gerring (2007, 20) defines case study as “*the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population).*” Simons (2014, 457) on the other hand, defines it as “*an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or system in a “real-life” context.*” This aim of both generalising and particularising allows for the use of both quantitative and qualitative techniques in collection and analysis of data or evidence. For Yin (2003, 2) the need for case studies also comes from the will to understand complex social phenomena using real-life. Thus the value of case studies comes from the in-depth knowledge it can produce from a well-defined case using various methods. Simons (2014, 465) notes that the process of making inferences with qualitative data in case studies into generalised understandings is twofold: to generalise from the case to other cases or to see what in-depth knowledge can be learned from the uniqueness of the single case itself. This is apparent, especially in case studies, that tackle subjects that are not well known or researched previously (Gerring 2007, 79).

This research aims at an in-depth look at the European Union’s approach towards the reconstruction of Syria. The research questions are:

- What is the European Union’s approach to the reconstruction of Syria?
- What are the dilemmas related to the European Union’s participation in the reconstruction of Syria?

The aim is to describe and explain the case of the reconstruction of Syria in the context of the EU’s peacebuilding approach and the EU as an actor in the peacebuilding field. It also looks at the statebuilding feature of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction and explores the dilemmas that the EU faces in the Syrian case based on both the centrality of statebuilding in its approach and its identity as a normative actor. The selection of reconstruction of Syria as a case is also a way of gaining insight on dilemmas related to peacebuilding in complex conflicts. Because of this unique nature of the case and the limited scope of a Master’s thesis, the analysis does not aim to generalise its insights but acknowledges that it can contribute in our understanding of

complexity in peacebuilding. This could be called, as Simon (2014, 459) notes, as an intrinsic case study, in which the case is studied to learn about itself.

The single case studies can often emerge out of an empirical puzzle of which the researcher may have a hunch about what is happening. The research interests for this thesis arose from the researcher's previous work in an NGO working on peacebuilding and Syria, and the prominence of the reconstruction issue among the conflict resolution and peacebuilding community during the years 2017-2018. The complexity of the case was interesting enough to take a more in-depth look at the case of the reconstruction of Syria from the point of view of one of the main actors in the conflict, the EU. The systematic analysis of the publicly available documents of the EU about the reconstruction of Syria can provide more insights on the case that has not been systematically analysed before.

An interesting broadening of the research scope could be done on both methodological and theoretical aspects. Adding interviews of EU officials and other actors linked to the reconstruction question as a source of data could widen the understanding of how the reconstruction approach has been formulated and how it is understood from within the EU. Case studies are also beneficial in that it enables combining different types of evidence, such as documents, interviews and observations. However, as the scope of this Master's thesis is limited, only documents are analysed in this study. It could be said, that the initial research interest was sparked by observations, but the observations do not form evidence in this study.

## **4.2 Research data and analysis**

The research uses publicly available documents, press releases, joint communications, and speeches from foreign policy-relevant European Union bodies: the European Council as the main decision-making body, and its diplomatic service, the External Action Service (EEAS). The EEAS assists the High Representative in executing their mandates, especially regarding conducting the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). (Council of the European Union, 2010.) Majority of the press releases and joint communications are based on the speeches and remarks of the High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini in various meetings and their sidelines. The role of the High Representative is to shape and carry out the CFSP and CSDP, as well as serve as the

Vice President of the European Commission. Thus she can coordinate and ensure coherence in EU foreign policy. (EEAS 2016p.) Her words can be thus seen as representing the EU foreign policy stance towards the issues under consideration, and thus analysing them will give insights to the EU's approach and self-representation.

The analysis will also include Syria-relevant documents, strategy papers, and resolutions from the European Parliament, European Council and the Council of the European Union, focusing specifically on those listed in the European Parliament web page on the EU Strategy on Syria (European parliament 2019a). These documents are included because they form the official framework around the strategy. Even though the European Parliament has a limited formal role in foreign policy decision-making, it has a degree of informal cooperation with the EEAS. The High Representative is required to consult Parliament regularly and inform of the policy's evolution. (European parliament 2019b.) In this analysis, Parliament's resolutions on the situation in Syria and its resolution on the EU strategy on Syria are used as well.

The publicly available documents, such as press releases and news articles about the remarks, speeches and meetings of the HR/VP, in addition to strategies and resolutions, are part of EU's strategic communication to other actors, and the general public. They can convey messages, clarify policies and stances, and give out general information. As the diplomatic arm of the EU, the EEAS is building its image and communicating its objectives and identity through publishing documents for all audiences.

The source material for this thesis is thus twofold: the communication material targeted to the broader public published in the EEAS website will provide the basis for the analysis of how the official stance towards the reconstruction of Syria, adopted in the official strategic documents, is articulated to public audiences. The official strategic documents, on the other hand, give the analysis an additional layer to the objectives of the reconstruction strategy and the EU strategy in Syria. They will also be used in the analysis of how the EU represents itself in the conflict context as well. Thus using the documents from the EEAS as a base for the analysis of the EU's stance towards the reconstruction of Syria, is useful in defining firstly, how the EU positions itself as an actor in the Syrian conflict, and secondly, how it presents itself as a peacebuilder.

The official documents were retrieved through the European Parliament website on the EU strategy for Syria. The EEAS documents were retrieved through the EEAS website

with a keyword search for both “reconstruction” and “Syria”, giving 59 relevant results<sup>6</sup>. The documents start from the year 2016 and continue till March 2019, when the third Brussels conference was organised. For analytic clarity, more recent documents were not included in the analysis. However, the latest developments in the conflict by the time of writing of this thesis (October 2019) are reflected in the conclusions section.

The documents are analysed and interpreted through qualitative content analysis (QCA). Content analysis is used when the aim is to extrapolate the message in different kinds of documentation. Any kind of means to communicate a message is usable material for content analysis. The material is seen to be relating to a specific context, and the texts are seen as communication from someone for someone for some purpose. (Mayring 2014, 39, 43.) Content analysis is not a standardised instrument but needs to be fitted to suit the particular objectives of the research or the material used. The analysis is based on systematically describing the meanings found in the qualitative material. The material is classified or categorised based on either the theoretical framework (concept-driven) or the data itself (data-driven). This classification can also be called a coding frame, which is used to structure the collected materials by focusing on key dimensions or categories. (Mayring 2014, 40-41; Schreier 2012, 89.)

The research framework of this thesis can be found in table 2 on the next page. In this research, the categories are based on the research questions and their different dimensions. In studying the EU’s approach to the reconstruction of Syria, the main question relates to the vision of post-conflict Syria. This vision covers both the approach of the EU to peacebuilding and the self-description of EU as an actor: what features or principles does the EU push to be part of Syria’s future, and how are these features related to the self-description of the EU as an actor itself?

The research framework consists of three steps. The first step was to form categories of analysis based on the theoretical framework of peacebuilding and the EU approach to peacebuilding, as well as the normative power perspective as described above. This was used to 1) explore what reconstruction means for the EU both via definitions of reconstruction, as well as through the vision for post-conflict/post-agreement Syria; 2)

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the results included indeed both keywords, but not in the same context. For example, Syria without reference to reconstruction could be included in the same document as reconstruction of Ukraine.

what are the preconditions under which it will participate, support, and finance the reconstruction of Syria; and 3) how does the EU present itself as a peacebuilder in the conflict context. The vision for post-conflict Syria is analysed from the perspective of what the EU sees as needed to be (re)constructed. Thus through analysing the vision of Syria present in the documents, we can study the EU's approach to post-conflict reconstruction.

This approach was adopted to describe the full picture of the needs and visions for post-conflict reconstruction that might not be explicitly visible as direct conceptual definitions in the sources. In addition, through studying how the EU presents itself as an actor in relation to the Syrian conflict, the research can firstly see what kind of principles the EU promotes in the reconstruction of Syria, but also what kind of principles it attaches to itself. As noted in the chapter about the normative power Europe, the normativity is linked to both what the EU is and how it acts. Thus through the analysis, both of these can be connected. Also, the objectives for the EU are explored through the framework of normative and strategic goals.

The second step was more data-driven. The research question and theory-driven categories were studied, and the findings were categorised again into subcategories based on different themes and patterns that were found in the source materials. These subcategories are on defining the reconstruction approach 1) the preconditions of reconstruction divided into the action that needs to happen, the principles that need to be fulfilled, and the process which has to move forward, so that the EU can participate in the reconstruction; and 2) the elements of the vision of Syria's future, divided into political, social and economic factions, as well as into features, issues and principles that this vision encompasses. On the EU self-description, these subcategories are 1) different roles or identities that the EU presents itself, which were identified to be humanitarian, diplomatic and solution-focused; and 2) the objectives, divided into normative and strategic.

As the last step, the findings of subcategories will be reflected in the theoretical framework to see similarities and differences. Also, the contradictions and dilemmas within the approach and the EU self-description will be explored vis-à-vis the conflict context that was presented in the introductory chapter.

**Table 1. Research framework**

Theoretical framework	Concept-driven	Data-driven	
	Research question	Categories	Subcategories
Peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction	Approach to reconstruction	Definition of reconstruction	Conceptual definition
		Preconditions for reconstruction	Principles
			Actions
			Process
Vision of post-conflict Syria	Features	Political	
	Issues	Social	
	Principles	Economic	
EU as a normative power	Self-description as a peacebuilder	EU self-description	Humanitarian
			Diplomatic
			Experienced
			Value-based
		EU objectives: normative vs strategic	Normative
			Strategic

## **5 Analysis: Defining reconstruction and post-conflict Syria**

This section defines the European Union's approach to the reconstruction of Syria as it is presented in the source documents, as well as the way it presents itself in the conflict context. It will analyse following helping questions:

- How is reconstruction defined?
- What are the preconditions for the EU's participation in the reconstruction?
- What is the EU's vision for post-conflict Syria?
- How does the EU present itself in the Syrian conflict?

Direct definitions of reconstruction are scarce throughout the source materials. To get a full picture on how the EU defines reconstruction, following steps were taken in the research: firstly, to find direct definitions of reconstruction through the adjectives and other features that are linked to it; and secondly taking a broader look on what kind of vision the EU has of a post-conflict Syria, including political, social and economic dimensions. Thirdly, the preconditions for the reconstruction assistance were analysed in-depth. Finally, the EU's self-description was analysed through categorising different descriptions of its role in Syria.

In the documents, reconstruction can be seen as a concept encompassing all aspects of rebuilding a state and a nation after a conflict: in 2016, reconstruction is described to be physical, political and social (EEAS 2016i), and economic (EEAS 2016j, 2016f), and in 2017 it is also described as social and human (EEAS 2017j). Sometimes economic recovery and reconstruction are linked together (EEAS 2017k), and other times it highlighted that reconstruction is not only material but includes rebuilding trust (EEAS 2017p). From this, we can conclude, that reconstruction is viewed through a holistic approach, which encompasses all aspects of life in a state, from the reconstruction of political and civic life to reconstructing the economic system, to reconstructing ties and relationships between individuals and communities in the state.

A core document is the EU Strategy for Syria, which consists of the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria (2017), together with the Council conclusions on an EU strategy for

Syria (2017). The European Parliament resolution (2017) welcomed the strategy. The joint communication (2017) defines the risks and threats to EU core interests, the strategic goals, the objectives for Syria, the main lines of action in Syria to implement the objectives, as well as the EU engagement in early planning for reconstruction and transition.

The EU strategic goals are said to align with its core interest and values and are built on the Global Strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy, as well as the European Neighbourhood Policy. These goals are related to the vision that the EU has for Syria: unity and integrity, democracy, diversity and inclusivity, security and good governance, stability and strong economy. To achieve these goals, the objectives are to end the war through a political transition process negotiated by the parties, promoting a meaningful and inclusive transition in Syria through strengthening the political opposition and in line with UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué, promoting democracy, human rights and freedom of speech by strengthening civil society, promoting a national reconciliation process including transitional justice and accountability for war crimes, saving lives by addressing humanitarian needs, and supporting resilience of Syrian people, institutions and society. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 7-8.)

The EU engagement in reconstruction is linked to a political solution to the conflict based on UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué. This is presented strongly: the EU *"will not be able to assist with the reconstruction of the country until a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is under way."* Thus the issue is not about will, but about ability linked to the fulfilment of certain preconditions. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 14.)

Have there been changes in the stance during the years 2016-2019? Are some elements more emphasised than others at different times? This is the focus of the next chapter, which studies the preconditions in-depth.

## 5.1 Preconditions for reconstruction

The vision of post-conflict Syria is linked to the conditionality that the EU sets for its participation. This precondition defines part of post-conflict Syria that needs to be present before the post-conflict phase and thus is elemental in creating the post-conflict Syria according to that vision.

From the EEAS documents between 2016 and 2019, it is possible to construct the following categorisation (see the table on the next page) on the preconditions for participating in, supporting or financing reconstruction. In the first column, different definitions or descriptions of the precondition are listed. In the second column, different definitions of the precondition, or the action that has to happen, are listed. In the last one, the process and the required steps are listed.

**Table 2. Preconditions for reconstruction**

Principles	Action	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• credible</li> <li>• meaningful</li> <li>• inclusive</li> <li>• negotiated between Syrian parties</li> <li>• based on UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué</li> <li>• legitimate</li> <li>• intra-Syrian</li> <li>• genuine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• political transition</li> <li>• political agreement</li> <li>• political process</li> <li>• a framework for a transitional political agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• firmly underway</li> <li>• underway</li> <li>• found to pave the way to the transition</li> <li>• will be in place</li> <li>• has been reached</li> <li>• will start</li> <li>• will be reached in Geneva</li> <li>• will be agreed in Geneva</li> <li>• is reached in Geneva under UN auspices</li> <li>• has begun</li> </ul>

‘Political transition’ is the defined action in 2016 after the emergence of the reconstruction stance. Throughout the year, the transition is the only word used to describe what needs to happen in Geneva. In 2017, however, the transition was not the only word: ‘political agreement’ (EEAS 2017a, 2017c, 2017d, 2017m, 2017o, 2017p, 2017q, 2017r) becomes more common than before, and ‘political process’ (EEAS 2017o) is also used. Coming to 2018, ‘political process’ has become the main action (EEAS 2018b, 2018d, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h, 2018k, 2018j), but the transition (EEAS 2018e, 2018i, 2018o) and the agreement (EEAS 2018l) are still existing on the side. There is also a mention of ‘political solution’ (EEAS 2018c), which was also mentioned in 2016 (EEAS 2016d). Finally, in 2019, we can see that ‘political process’ is the

dominating description (EEAS 2019a, 2019c), with mention on transition (EEAS 2019d).

Thus we can see that while in 2016 the ‘political transition’ was the primary way to describe what needs to be achieved in Geneva, it gave way to other definitions, the ‘political agreement’ and the ‘political process’. This could be read as a sign of diminishing ambition over the minimum requirement for reconstruction: from direct transition to just a process. Perhaps the requirements have stayed more or less the same, but the official language was made less confrontational.

In 2016, the political transition was to ‘have started’ (EEAS 2016b, 2016e, 2016f, 2016l, 2016m, 2016n) or ‘under way’ (EEAS 2016l), or even ‘be in place’ (EEAS 2016h). In 2017, a new expression emerges: that the transition should be ‘firmly under way’ (EEAS 2017f, 2017g, 2017j, 2017k, 2017l, 2017o, 2017w, 2017x, 2017y), or the political agreement ‘will be in place’ (EEAS 2017r) or ‘has been reached’ (EEAS 2017a, 2017c, 2017m, 2017o, 2017p). 2018 definition is quite consistent. The political process or the political agreement needs to be ‘firmly under way’ (EEAS 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h, 2018j, 2018k). ‘Reached’ (EEAS 2018l) is mentioned only once. In 2019, we can see both consistency and change. The transition should be ‘firmly under way’ (EEAS 2018d), or there should be ‘some movements in the political process’ (EEAS 2019c), or ‘fully under way’ (EEAS 2019a) or ‘will start again’ (EEAS 2019a).

Thus the demand for the political transition having begun or underway has stayed constant through the years. However, the most significant change has happened in 2017 and 2018, when the initial demand of the political agreement to be in place of reached in 2017 changes into being ‘firmly’ underway in 2018. Thus we can perhaps see the diminishing importance of ambition in the result of the Geneva process between these years. Also when coming to 2019, it seems like the last hopes of fuelling the Geneva process are gone: in order to participate in the reconstruction, the political process has to move at least some or even start again. The Geneva process has stalled, but the need for reconstruction is still there. Does this tell about loosening the preconditions for reconstruction? It is not possible to answer this based on the publicly available documents, but it is possible to see a change in rhetoric.

The last layer of the definition of the precondition is the description or definition of the action. This means what kind of transition/agreement/process is acceptable. One of the key definitions for this comes at the end of 2016: first mention of the transition under the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué (EEAS 2016f) is put out. This stays a consistent definition through the other years as well (EEAS 2017e, 2017j, 2017k, 2017m; EEAS 2018e, 2018i, 2018o), though it is not mentioned as often as maybe would be expected. These documents form the basis of the negotiations in Geneva under UN auspices.

The Geneva Communiqué includes guidelines for the political transition. These include that the vision for future Syria has to include all inhabitants; the transition has to have a clear timetable, can be implemented without causing further violence, and it is credible. It then identifies the clear steps in the transition, which include the establishment of a transitional governing body, national dialogue process, review of the constitution and legal system, and inclusion of women. The Communiqué also includes a vision for the future, based on consultations with Syrians. This includes democracy, pluralism, compliance with international standards on human rights, independence of the judiciary, accountability of government and the rule of law, and equality of sectarian, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other groups within the society. (United Nations A/66/865–S/2012/522 2012, 3-5.)

In 2017, there are also other descriptions linked to the process: credible (EEAS 2017a, 2017c, 2017d, 2017j, 2017k, 2017l, 2017w, 2017x, 2017y) and inclusive (EEAS 2017c, 2017d, 2017j, 2017l, 2017r, 2017u). Also, the adjectives meaningful and legitimate (EEAS 2017j; 2018d), and comprehensive and genuine (EEAS 2018e, 2018i, 2018o) start to emerge in 2017 and continue in 2018. Another key definition is that in 2017, the emphasis was put on that the political transition is negotiated between Syrian parties (EEAS 2017j, 2017k). This was repeated in 2018 as well (EEAS 2018i, 2018o). In 2018, also the question of legitimacy is taken up, but from the point of view of the international community: the political process needs to be ‘legitimate from the international point of view’ (EEAS 2018d), and “*only a UN-brokered process mandated by the UNSCR will be seen by the Syrian people as impartial, with the required international legitimacy*” (EEAS 2018o). In 2019, no adjectives are used to describe the qualities of the process.

Based on this, we could assume that by 2017, there started to be worries about the quality of the Geneva process and the participation or motivation of negotiating parties, which would result in the need to highlight the credibility and inclusivity. These doubts would strengthen in 2018, when even stronger words like meaningful, legitimate and genuine are emphasized: this could indicate that the EU did not trust the negotiating parties, or other actors linked to the conflict, to be pushing for the negotiations or sitting in the negotiation table, with good intentions on building peace.

The preconditions listed here form a way of using positive conditionality as introduced earlier. The positive conditionality applies to the funds and political will available for reconstruction, if the Syrian government genuinely participates in the negotiations on political transition in the country, based on the UNSRC 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué, and the transition process will be firmly underway. On the other hand, besides the positive conditionality seen here, also negative conditionality is used in the case of Syria, as there are several sanctions against the government and its affiliates imposed by the EU.

The EU restrictive measures were adopted in January 2012 onwards with the Council Regulation (EU) No 36/2012 as amended, together with the Council Decision 2013/255/CFSP. They aimed to address the “*continued brutal repression and violation of human rights by the Government of Syria*” (European Commission 2017, 2). The sanctions include “*a ban on internal repression equipment and other export and import restrictions, travel restrictions, an asset freeze, a prohibition on participation in certain infrastructure projects and investment in such projects, restrictions on the provision of financial services, and other restrictions.*” The list of persons and entities that are subject to restrictive measures includes the Syrian government and its supporters, ones that benefit from the government, have part in the chemical weapons attacks, as well as senior officers of the Syrian Armed Forces, Syrian security and intelligence services, as well as members of Syrian government-affiliated militias (EU Sanctions Map 2019).

Lifting the restrictive measures is one of the issues that the EU Strategy for Syria (2017) lists as possible actions that the EU will do if the preconditions are met. These include also resuming bilateral cooperation with the Syrian government and mobilising tools under the ENP and other programmes to boost the economy and tackle governance and accountability challenges, as well as contributing, mobilising and leveraging funding

from international donors. The sectors that can fall under this support include security, governance reforms and service delivery, social cohesion, peacebuilding and reconciliation, human capital, and economic recovery. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 15-17.)

The Strategy outlines that the EU will engage and contribute to the exercise conducted by the UN Inter-agency Task Force that details the interventions needed to support the political process and transitional government structures after a peace agreement. In addition to the task force, the EU participates in joint EU-UN damage and needs assessments, seeks to integrate parallel efforts of the World Bank, and prepare ground for a joint Recovery and Peace Building Assessment between the EU, World Bank and the UN, that will focus on longer-term recovery and reconstruction, together with transitional government structures. Also the role of the EU in coordinating key donors in Syria, including the member states Syria's neighbouring countries, Arab international financial institutions and other parties, is highlighted. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 14-15.)

What more could we know about the EU's approach to the reconstruction of Syria? What kind of political system and institutions would there be to reconstruct, and how would they look like after reconstruction? What does the reconstruction of trust and social relationships look like? In order to analyse the EU's approach to the reconstruction of Syria, an image of what reconstructed Syria will look like need to be constructed. What kind of political system will it have, what needs to be rebuilt between people, and what kind of economic system will need to be reconstructed? To answer these questions, two types of analysis was conducted: firstly, to assess the EU vision for post-conflict Syria, the political, economic and social dimensions of reconstruction were analysed in the EEAS materials; and secondly, how the EU presents itself as an actor related to the reconstruction was analysed.

## **5.2 EU vision for post-conflict Syria**

Based on the features of post-conflict reconstruction on the theoretical level, the following categorisations were formed: political, institutional, social, and economical. The political category was further divided into three subcategories: specific policy-related issues, features of the political system and institutions, and principles that are

promoted. The social category was also divided into two subcategories: principles and issues. The economic category only had one mention in the source material, so it does not give many insights.

What is significant about the EU's post-conflict vision is that in the EEAS sources, the description focuses mainly on the political aspects. Even though in the direct definitions of reconstruction, political reconstruction is not mentioned often, but when analysing the post-conflict vision of Syria, the political aspect becomes more prominent. Majority of the elements of the vision are linked to the reconstruction of political institutions and how these institutions link to the relationship between the institutions or the political system and the people. The following analysis of the categories will first focus on the political category, and then the social category with a focus on reconciliation. The categorisation can be seen in the following table format.

<b>Table 3. Features of the EU vision of future Syria</b>			
	Features	Issues	Principles
Political/ institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- constitution</li> <li>- democracy</li> <li>- the rule of law</li> <li>- power-sharing</li> <li>- justice</li> <li>- pluralistic political system</li> <li>- sovereign, independent, territorially integrated/united</li> <li>- decentralization/ devolution</li> <li>- local governance</li>   <li>- legitimacy &amp; accountability of government</li> <li>- effectiveness</li> <li>- functioning institutions</li> <li>- accepted by regional actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accountability for war crimes</li> <li>- access to documentation for housing and property</li> <li>- transitional justice</li> <li>- space for civil society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- inclusivity</li> <li>- protection of minorities</li> <li>- diversity</li> <li>- unity</li> <li>- respect for human rights</li> <li>- freedom of speech</li> <li>- Syrian-led</li> <li>- accountability</li> <li>- security and safety</li> </ul>
Social		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reconciliation</li> <li>- conditions for the return of refugees and IDPs</li> <li>- civil society role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- inclusivity</li> <li>- freedom</li> <li>- diversity</li> <li>- dignity</li> <li>- security and safety</li> <li>- human rights</li> <li>- freedom of speech</li> <li>- resilience</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strong economy</li> </ul>		

The EU vision for political institutions forms around the notion of democracy and modern state institutions. However, democracy does not appear in the sources together with reconstruction until 2017. In 2016, it was said that there is a need to focus on post-conflict system or form of governance (EEAS 2016df), the role for the president of the parliament (EEAS 2016d) and the political and institutional future of Syria (EEAS 2016g). There are also mentions of power-sharing (EEAS 2016d), local governance (EEAS 2016j) and decentralisation or devolution (EEAS 2016d, 2016e, 2016f) as features of the system. Another focus is on inclusivity and accountability of the political system and government (EEAS 2016a, 2016e, 2016f). The participation and protection of all Syrians, especially the minorities, is highlighted (EEAS 2016d, 2016e, 2016f) as well.

In addition to the government being accountable and inclusive for Syrians themselves, it is also mentioned that the post-conflict solutions need to be acceptable for all regional powers and the European Union (EEAS 2016d). This feature also appears in 2017, when it is formulated as ‘accompanied by the regional actors’ (EEAS 2017mt). This acceptability is linked to the EU effort to talk with the regional actors about the future of Syria, and to find a common way to push all actors, Syrian and regional powers alike, towards the Geneva negotiations. To fill this goal, the EU started its Regional Initiative. This topic will be analysed more in the next chapter about the role of the EU.

The vision is strengthened in 2017 when it becomes more detailed together with the EU strategy for Syria. If in 2016, it was said that the post-conflict Syria needs to define its form of government and system, now there are more defined features that are promoted. These two features are democratic political system, and justice and accountability. There are also notions about the relation of future Syria in the international context. Its statehood is highlighted as Syria should be a ‘sovereign, independent, territorially integrated and united country’ (EEAS 2017c, 2017g, 2017j, 2017k, 2017l, 2017m). This definition follows in later years (EEAS 2018b, 2018c, 2018h, 2018i, 2018o; EEAS 2019c).

Democracy is mentioned during 2017 multiple times (EEAS 2017f, 2017g, 2017j, 2017k, 2017l, 2017m, 2017r, 2017t). Other linked attributes are inclusivity (EEAS 2017f, 2017m, 2017t, 2017v) and diversity (EEAS 2017p, 2017t), Syrian leadership (EEAS 2017t), power-sharing (EEAS 2017v), constitution (EEAS 2017f), and the

crucial role of civil society (EEAS 2017f). Coming to 2018, similar features are used. Democratic system (EEAS 2018b, 2018c, 2018h, 2018i) includes a legitimate government, a pluralistic political system, the rule of law and a stable political system (EEAS 2018i). The state should also be effective with functioning institutions (EEAS 2018i), and the future of Syria should be in the hands of Syrians (EEAS 2018b, 2018h). Also, inclusivity and protection of ethnic and religious groups are mentioned (EEAS 2018b, 2018c, 2018h, 2018i). In 2019, democracy is still a feature of the system (EEAS 2019b, 2019e), as are inclusivity (EEAS 2019b, 2019e), diversity (EEAS 2019b, 2019c), and the role of civil society (EEAS 2019b). Mogherini notes that *“Peace in Syria can only be sustainable if it is just, inclusive and democratic.”* (EEAS 2019b.)

Other issues related to the political system and its principles are freedom (EEAS 2017l, 2017m, 2017t), and human rights and freedom of speech (EEAS 2017r) are mentioned as well, and they are a stable part of the vision also later (EEAS 2018i). One key feature during 2017 is the emphasis on stabilisation (EEAS 2017b, 2017d, 2017r, 2017t) and security and safety (EEAS 2017c, 2017j, 2017t). The emphasis on stabilisation could be linked to the Astana process, which was launched in 2017 as well.

Also, in 2019, the conditions for ‘safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return of refugees’ (EEAS 2019b, 2019d) is emphasised. This definition of the conditions encompasses all aspects of reconstruction: political, social and physical. All these features are coming together in the emphasis on the role of Syrians in building their future, and the effort the EU is doing to push for the progress in the Geneva negotiations.

*“This political work that the European Union has done goes together with the continuous support we are giving to the Syrian opposition, to civil society organisations – in particular women organisations – in Syria and now especially in the framework of the Geneva talks, but also looking ahead to enabling them to play a role in the transition and post-transition periods, as we believe that all Syrians deserve to take part in the definition and construction of their future, for a united, inclusive, and democratic Syria where they deserve to live in freedom, diversity, dignity, securely and safely.”* (EEAS 2017t.)

A key focus is on transitional justice and accountability for war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law or human rights (EEAS 2017f, 2017j, 2017l, 2017o, 2017p, 2017q, 2017r) and addressing Syrian's legitimate grievances (EEAS 2017k). This is linked to the reconciliation process and the need for transitional justice. In this, the social and political levels are ultimately intertwined. It also links to the ability and will of refugees to return to their homes: *"Reconciliation and transitional justice will also be an integral part of rebuilding the country on a peaceful basis."* (EEAS 2017j.) The vision of future Syria is linked strongly to this process:

*"Fifth point that is very important to us and to all Member States and that was re-stressed today: the need to promote accountability for war crimes with a view to facilitating a national reconciliation process and transitional justice. This is something on which we believe the future of Syria can be based."* (EEAS 2017r.)

In 2018 and 2019, these features keep quite constant (EEAS 2018c, 2018i; EEAS 2019b, 2019e), though there is less emphasis on them in the sense of the amounts the topic is brought up. However, accountability and justice are a crucial part of the EU strategy for Syria, and link to the social dimension of the reconstruction as well:

*"We all know that reconciliation needs justice and you can count on us to work on accountability. This is again a European experience, we know that reconciliation and peace needs justice."* (EEAS 2019c.)

Reconciliation emerges in the first source linked to reconstruction (EEAS 2016a) and stays a part of the vision consistently throughout the timeframe until 2019<sup>7</sup>. A national reconciliation process is also mentioned multiple times (EEAS 2018i, 2018o; EEAS 2017f). Reconciliation is raised as the main focus of reconstruction and building sustainable peace, as directly illustrated by Mogherini in 2019:

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<sup>7</sup> For readability I am including the long reference here: EEAS 2016d, 2016f, 2016h, 2016i; EEAS 2017k, 2017m, 2017r, 2017t, 2017w, 2017x, 2017y; EEAS 2018i, 2018; EEAS 2019b, 2019d, 2019e.

*“We know that reconciliation and sustainable peace is only possible when you rebuild not only the bridges, the highways, the hospitals and the schools, but mainly the social fabric of the country. When people look at each other not as potential enemies, but as neighbours and friends - not necessarily friends because you can live well together with someone even if it is not your friend, but you can live alongside each other out of respect and on the basis of a common identity.”* (EEAS 2019b.)

Reconciliation is said to be the hardest part of rebuilding societies: *“having people living together, after having killed each other for so long”* (EEAS 2016d).

In 2016 and 2017, reconciliation is emphasised at the local level (EEAS 2016f; EEAS 2017t), which links to the importance of the political process and the post-conflict reconstruction being Syrian-led. In highlighting the role of Syrian peacebuilders, their role is linked to reconciliation as *“building the bridges that will then be the basis for reconciliation”* (EEAS 2019b), and as *“the people who can reach across the conflict lines, talk to each other, heal the wounds over six years of war, make reconciliation truly possible on the ground, locally”* (EEAS 2017f). Reconciliation is linked to *“restoring the fabric of the Syrian society”*, and the role of women and civil society is emphasised (EEAS 2019c).

Reconciliation is linked in 2017 and 2018 to the accountability for war crimes and transitional justice (EEAS 2018i; EEAS 2017r). The European experience also serves as a base for the argument that peace and reconciliation need justice (EEAS 2019b), which makes reconciliation one of the areas where the European Union would have specific added value. (EEAS 2016k; EEAS 2017t.)

Thus in order to rebuild the social fabric of Syria, there is a need for a political process of transitional justice that will then serve as the basis for reconciliation between people. On the other hand, the reconciliation process is part of the political track, which is the precondition for reconstruction, as Mogherini noted 3.12.2016:

*“--- "In the European Union we believe that we cannot abandon the political track," she said."Only a political transition, only a political solution, only a reconciliation process, only a power-sharing mechanism will allow us to work on the reconstruction of the country.”* (EEAS 2016d.)

Reconstruction is also seen as *“a powerful tool to facilitate reconciliation”* (EEAS 2017d). Thus reconciliation is not only seen as a post-conflict event, but it is also a requirement for the political agreement: reconciling between the conflict parties in Geneva is a starting point for a society-wide reconciliation in the local level.

Given that reconciliation is the focus of rebuilding the Syrian society, also other issues and principles are part of social reconstruction. In 2016, also the issue of the return of refugees and IDPs is taken up (EEAS 2016n), but this issue drops for 2017, and becomes a topic again later in 2018 and 2019, when the discussion turns to the conditions for *“safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return of refugees”* (EEAS 2019b, 2019d).

In 2017, more principles were related to the future of Syrian society. These include an emphasis on the future and the way there belonging to the Syrians (EEAS 2017t), the need for the whole society, including minorities, being part of the future. The minorities are also seen as needing special protection within society. Thus the diversity of the Syrian population needs to be recognised in any form of future state. (EEAS 2017t, 2017m, 2017f, 2017l, 2017p.) These principles, inclusion, diversity and protection of ethnic and religious groups, are the critical elements of social reconstruction of the country also in 2018 and 2019 (EEAS 2018b, 2018c, 2018i, 2018h, 2018o; EEAS 2019b, 2019e)

There is also a need to build the resilience of the population (EEAS 2017r). Other features belonging to the people are also freedom (EEAS 2017l, 2017m, 2017t), and security and safety (EEAST 2017c, 2017j, 2017t). Respect for human rights and freedom of speech should also be significant parts of Syria’s future (EEAS 2017r). Human rights are also discussed in relation to the political reconstruction of the country and the accountability for war crimes and violations of human rights.

If these are the features that the EU sees necessary in the future of Syria, how is it ready to assist in reconstructing them? The EU Strategy for Syria (2017) defines sectors that the EU could provide support. The social cohesion, peacebuilding and reconciliation sector includes support for local-level reconciliation processes, transitional authorities, as well as preparing and supporting the return of refugees. In longer-term, a rights-based and victim-centred transitional justice mechanism, national dialogue and profound judicial reform, are part of what the EU could play a role. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 16-17.)

From the political perspective, in the governance, reforms and service delivery sector, the EU support is said to be twofold: in the immediate post-agreement phase, the EU could restore basic service delivery at the local level (education, health, water, electricity, rubble removal, waste management, etc.). In the longer-term, the EU could support the post-conflict reform of state institutions, including unifying the governance system and reinforcing coherence and support the drafting of a new constitution and the organisation of elections. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 16.) In other words, strengthening the state institutions and their ability to govern the whole of Syria. Support to state and local institutions would contribute to *”reinforcing the legitimacy of reformed and accountable state and local institutions”* (ibid.). This aspect is one of the key dilemmas in the reconstruction approach at the moment, as will be argued in the following chapters.

Lastly, the economic sector was not very detailed in the EEAS sources, but in the EU Strategy (2017), it forms one of the sectors. EU support to economic sector includes in the immediate post-agreement phase, increased livelihoods support, and in the longer-term, complete re-launch of the Syrian economy. This re-launch would need coordinated support from the international community, but the EU macro-financial assistance would be tied into the presence of an IMF programme and the preconditions such as respect for democratic mechanisms, including a multiparty parliamentary system, the rule of law and respect for human rights. (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 17.) Thus the EU economic support is tied to a major reform in the whole governance system of Syria, as well as the presence of international institutions. This does leave room for more micro-level assistance.

The overall key features of the reconstruction of Syria, based on the analysis, include a significant focus on the institutional level: constructing a democratic inclusive political system that takes into account and protects the rights of people and especially the minorities. In addition, transitional justice system needs to guarantee accountability for war crimes and violations of human rights. From the social side, reconciliation, which is linked to transitional justice, is raised as a key feature of reconstructing the social fabric of Syria. This reconciliation is dependent on inclusion and local ownership, especially of civil society and women. An interesting feature is also that the new political order or solution needs to be acceptable also for external actors, including regional and international actors.

However, how does the EU legitimate this vision and the potential actions it is willing to take if the preconditions are met? What are the EU's motivations for participating in the reconstruction? This is the topic of the next chapter.

### **5.3 EU in Syria: roles and motivations**

This section will analyse what kind of image the EU gives of itself and its role in the context of the reconstruction of Syria. The roles were classified partially based on the analysis of the source materials, and partially in the normative power Europe theoretical base presented above.

In the normative power Europe, the EU would be expected to highlight its role as a humanitarian actor (Whitman 2013, 182), the European experience as a peace project, as well as emphasise non-violent means to end conflicts. Based on the source materials, the roles the EU presents of itself were divided into five different roles: Humanitarian, Value-based, Diplomatic, Experienced, and Solution-focused. These categories were seen to encompass the image of the EU and its role in the conflict and relation to the other actors.

The *humanitarian* role is based on the role of the EU as the leading humanitarian actor in the conflict. In the same time, it highlights the non-military role the EU has in the conflict compared to other actors. It also highlights the support the EU gives to civilians in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian forms, and the importance of including them beside the military actors in the peace process. Humanitarian EU is driven by its

core values of respect for human rights and relieving suffering. It aims to bring a peaceful solution to the conflict and highlights its role as a non-military actor in Syria. However, it is emphasised that this position does not mean naïveté, as some actors have suggested.

The *diplomatic* role emphasises how the EU serves as a mediator and convening actor, that can keep good relations with all the actors around the conflict. It also includes the EU's belief in the power of multilateralism and working with states, international organisations and NGOs alike. The EU is also presented as a trusted and credible actor in the eyes of all other actors. The diplomatic role is supported by the *experienced* role, which could be its subcategory. The Experienced role is based on the 'European experience' of the integration seen as a peace project, which gives the EU credibility in proposing a peaceful solution to the conflict instead of a military one, and provides the EU with added value when it comes to rebuilding social structures of the state through reconciliation, justice and governance.

The *value-based* role could be a cross-cutting category of all the roles, since the humanitarian role is backed by values such as respect for human rights, and the diplomatic role is backed by the European experience that supports the argument that the EU knows better than others that there is no military solution. The value-based role highlight that the EU's actions are based on key values and principles. It also emphasises that even though the EU believes in hope and non-military solutions, it is not naïve. For the clarity of description, in the following analysis the diplomatic role encompasses also experienced and value-based roles.

Lastly, *the solution-focused* role paints a picture of the EU as a hands-on solution-focused actor that actively tries to find solutions, even when others might consider that there is no way forward. The EU also is prepared to take further steps when the political process moves forward, actively exploring the ways even when the situation is not in place yet. The solution-focused EU emphasises practicality and the need to move forward in principled manner. It has positive leverage over reconstruction (EEAS 2016j) and has an added value in institution building, governance, reconciliation and economic reconstruction (2016j).

### 5.3.1 Humanitarian EU

The leading humanitarian role is emphasised in many occasions (EEAS 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2016f; EEAS 2019a, 2019c), as is that the EU is not a party in the conflict or a military player on the ground (EEAS 2016d, 2016f). It is also part of the EU strategy for Syria (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 4), where the position of the EU as the largest donor is highlighted. In 2017, this position was used to backbone the political role of the EU (EEAS 2017f). Also, in 2018, the EU role of not being a military actor on the ground is important (EEAS 2018h). Contrasting this position vis-à-vis the other actors on the ground, the EU highlights its role as supporting civilians instead of bombing the country (EEAS 2017f, 2017p, 2017t). In her remarks to the European Parliament in 2016, Mogherini links the humanitarian work and creating political space:

*“I can only ask you, this Parliament, to keep supporting, as you have done constantly this year, our work on humanitarian grounds for creating the political space for peace in Syria and for all the people of Syria, to benefit from a brighter future in their country.”* (EEAS 2016f.)

The support to the civilian population is a key element in the Humanitarian role: the EU’s focus is on saving people, building civil society and supporting the political process, not military or power-related goals. Syrian ownership of the peace process is highlighted, and the EU role is to support and assist the Syrians, but not making decisions for them. (EEAS 2017a, 2017f, 2017p, 2017t.) This is also expressed as that the EU is on Syrians’ side (EEAS 2017p, 2017t), has been on the side of the civilian population throughout the war (EEAS 2017f), and supports the future of Syria, where there are Syrians left (EEAS 2017f, 2017s, 2017o). In 2019, the civil society role in the peace talks is raised: not only military actors should be present (EEAS 2019b).

The leading humanitarian role is the basis for sustained engagement with a long-term perspective, and it is presented as the priority for the EU (EEAS 2017b, 2017d, 2017f, 2017o, 2017p, 2017r, 2017s, 2017t). The humanitarian assistance is also unconditional. This support for Syrians is also targeted at supporting the resilience of Syrians, including the IDPs and refugees (EEAS 2018i). The continued humanitarian support throughout the conflict is proof of the EU’s commitment (EEAS 2019a). The EU is also

said to be clear about its positions so that people know where the EU stands (EEAS 2018h).

Long-term engagement, unconditional humanitarian support, focus on civilians, and their importance is a key element in the EU's role as a humanitarian actor. This role has an air of neutrality of sorts, being driven by the values of humanitarianism instead of will for control and power, as the other actors are sometimes presented to do. The basis for these actions is the role of EU as a defender of human rights (EEAS 2017u) and standing firmly for accountability (EEAS 2018h). The EU also believes in common humanity (EEAS 2019b).

This role as a trusted actor, that is consistent in their actions and not operating in contradictory ways, is well phrased in the following quote:

*“I would finish by saying that the European Union is perfectly positioned to play this role, as I said, not only from a humanitarian but also from a political perspective. We are, for Syrians and in the region, a credible, reliable, trusted partner, first of all able to work with all the different regional players equally, and also with a humanitarian presence on the ground that can constitute a fruitful starting point to help local reconciliation processes, being a humanitarian player who has helped and not bombed the country – if I can be a little bit blunt.”* (EEAS 2017t.)

### **5.3.2 Diplomatic EU**

The Diplomatic EU is a central actor that can work with everybody, including regional powers, international powers, NGOs and the UN (EEAS 2016d, 2016f). It can convene different actors to support the Geneva process, including actors that generally do not sit at the same table, which is one of the most essential powers the EU is said to have (EEAS 2019a; EEAS 2018e, 2018g, 2018h, 2018i; EEAS 2017c). This power also requires trust: the EU is trusted by everybody (EEAS 2016f).

This role of a trusted, credible actor stems from keeping the promises and delivering what is pledged (EEAS 2017m; EEAS 2018c, 2018h). Consistency in delivering is mentioned as the key element of its credibility: delivery is monitored, there are no hidden agendas, and the aim of supporting and pushing for the Geneva process is clear

(EEAS 2018h, 2018k, 2018j). Also, the support for Syrians and the way of supporting them and not acting instead of them is highlighted (EEAS 2018d, 2018b). Thus the EU is trusted by conflict parties (EEAS 2017f, 2017m, 2017t), by crisis countries and their neighbours (EEAS 2017u; EEAS 2019c), and can be a reliable partner for both Syrians and the region's economic development and stability (EEAS 2019a, 2019c). The EU can also work at the same level and equally with actors that are opposing each other in many ways: Tehran, Riyadh, Ankara and Beirut (EEAS 2017t). The EU has both a diplomatic and political role in the conflict, to bring together these different actors and to find common ground (EEAS 2018h; EEAS 2017t).

Besides having good relations with the conflict parties, regional actors and other linked actors, the EU relies on its critical supporting role to the Geneva process and its special relation to the UN (EEAS 2016d). The EU recognises the value of multilateralism (EEAS 2017i, 2017t; EEAS 2018g, 2018l), and is “*strong, possibly the strongest, supporter of the UN system*” (EEAS 2017i). It is said that the EU has full engagement in supporting the UN work in Geneva, (EEAS 2017p, 2017r; EEAS 2018c, 2018i), and is consistently behind the process (EEAS 2018j, 2018k).

The diplomatic role is based on the belief that diplomacy works and can deliver results (EEAS 2017w), and that disagreements can be addressed through dialogue and political talks (EEAS 2018f, 2018h). Thus engagement, cooperation, and finding common ground are the keys to a way forward (EEAS 2018h; EEAS 2019e). The EU highlights diplomatic and political level when situation gets worse (EEAS 2018h) instead of military solutions.

It is also noted, that it is a “*collective duty and responsibility as countries and regional organisations to support peace and reconciliation*” (EEAS 2019c), which suggests that the EU is doing its duty, which cannot be said of all other actors. As a response to other non-named actors, it is emphasized many times, that these beliefs in non-military solutions and the role of civil society, are not the same as being naïve or idealistic about the difficulty of ending the war and getting to a negotiated solution in Geneva (EEAS 2019b; EEAS 2018l; EEAS 2017p). This is called “*our way of foreign policy*”, which includes not fighting and bombing, but focusing on humanitarian aid, supporting the UN process, and being ready to help Syrians build the future of their country by themselves instead of external actors:

*“We Europeans are not the ones who are bombing, we are not the ones who are fighting, we are not the ones who are pushing for one side or the other – we are the ones delivering humanitarian aid, helping the UN to reach an agreement and a political solution, and we are the ones getting ready to help the Syrians build by themselves, as they would like to do, the future of their country. This is our approach; this is the way we believe foreign policy should be done, and we are consistent on that. But this does not mean that somebody breaks everything and then we pay the bill – this is simply not going to happen.”* (EEAS 2017p.)

The belief in dialogue and political talks in solving the crisis is also based on the so-called “European experience”, which has brought the EU the ability to “*understand better than others that there is no military solution*” (EEAS 2016f). The experience has led to lessons learned that while one can win the war in military means, but one can still lose the peace. Violence leads to protracted confusion, tension, insecurity and further conflict. (EEAS 2017p.) It is also said that no military strategy can substitute a true political solution (EEAS 2017j). What is needed after years of war is reconciliation and sustainable peace through rebuilding social fabric of the country, is a common identity, and ensuring justice (EEAS 2019b). This emphasis on the European experience reflects the idea mentioned in the theoretical analysis on the EU’s peacebuilding approach, that the EU sees itself as an exemplar on peacebuilding (Duke & Courtier 2010, 26).

### **5.3.3 Solution-focused EU**

In 2017, the EU’s solution-focused role was tied to “doing our part” through all possible channels, and complementary work, including engaging with all regional actors, international powers, finding common ground. The complementary channels are used to push Syrians and leading actors towards the Geneva process. (EEAS 2017m, 2017t). However, this eagerness is balanced with a strong message towards actors engaged with the conflict: the EU “*will not take the bill regardless of any kind of political dynamic --- somebody breaks everything, and we pay the bill – not going to happen*” (EEAS 2017p). EU’s constructive role vis-à-vis these actors is highlighted: “*We are the ones building solutions: humanitarian, political, economic, social solutions*” (EEAS 2017d). In the EU strategy for Syria, the responsibility of other actors, those who fuelled the conflict, is highlighted: “*special responsibility for the costs of reconstruction should be taken by*

*those external actors who have fuelled the conflict*". (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 14; Council of the European Union 2017, 7.)

In 2018, this role is not so much emphasised, but the EU's role as the solution-seeker is still there: the EU is said to bridge the gaps:

*"We always try to help, you know that the European Union always tries to bridge the gaps. We have very clear positions. People around the world know very well where we stand---"* (EEAS 2018h)

This would indicate that the EU is working on the complementary channels to fill up the gaps left by the Geneva process and other processes such as the Astana process. In 2019, EU's readiness to support the reconstruction is the only mentioned part in the solution-focused role: it is preparing for mobilising financing of reconstruction with the World Bank (EEAS 2019a). However, these funds are, of course, tied to the Geneva process.

Thus the solution-focused role emphasises the EU's role in comparison with other actors as more principled, having long-term perspective, looking to make the process go forward in a constructive way. This way, the EU is an actor that puts in efforts, but on the other hand, will not accept to do other actors' parts without its objectives being filled. Of the identified roles, this one seems to be the most confrontational with other actors.

## 6 Conclusions

### 6.1 Findings

The European Union's approach to reconstruction can be seen to consist of the following elements: strict conditionality, promotion of good governance, and emphasis on Syrian ownership and reconciliation.

The main feature is using strong conditionality to leverage reconstruction assistance in favour of the political process. The preconditions include credibility, inclusivity, legitimacy and meaningfulness of the political agreement negotiated between the Syrian parties, based on the UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué. It was found that the preconditions stay consistent during the period under analysis, but with some variation in the use of terms political transition, agreement, and process, as well as whether the process or the agreement has to be reached or be under way. The trend found in the sources is that in the early years the preconditions were presented tighter, whereas coming to 2018 and 2019, the terms became looser. This could reflect recalculating the ambitions for the process, which started to become deadlocked.

The preconditions for reconstruction, combined with the sanctions targeted at the Assad regime, represent strong conditionality for EU participation. This contrasts with the EU practices before, such as the reluctance to use conditionality in cases such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Moldova, Arab-Israeli conflict and Cyprus, as Whitman and Wolff (2012, 215) noted earlier. However, when comparing cases, the different features of targets of restrictions and the conflict context should be taken into account.

The vision for reconstruction stays the same throughout the analysis. The vision can be divided into two main focuses: a total reform of state institutions, producing a democratic, inclusive system of governance and justice; and a reconciliation that includes transitional justice. A cross-cutting issue for both of these is the respect for individual and collective rights and the inclusion of all Syrians in the future and peace of their country.

To drive these objectives, the EU legitimises its role through its humanitarian, diplomatic and solution-focused roles. The basic argument is that the EU's approach is based on valuing human life, promoting peace, and putting selfless long-term effort to

solve the conflict. The EU can serve as a trusted, legitimate and neutral partner that can bring all partners, also those who usually do not speak to each other, together to push for a peaceful solution. The EU's prestige also stems from its own experience of building peace in the European continent through the integration project, which makes the EU better positioned to understand that violence is not the solution. Thus the EU is supporting Syrians through providing humanitarian aid and pushing for the political process to move forward.

As Whitman (2013) noted, the normative power emphasises non-military, economic, social and humanitarian instruments, as well as addressing structural causes and violent symptoms of conflicts. The EU's approach fits into this quite well. Firstly, the EU's humanitarian approach is highlighted as a motivator for the EU participation and as a duty. Thus the EU is acting on the base of human security and reducing effects of violence through the aid. Secondly, the EU has a great emphasis on the social reconstruction of Syria, with a focus on supporting civil society and the role of Syrians in the political process and reconstruction. This emphasis relies largely on highlighting individual and collective rights, as well as principles such as inclusion, diversity, democracy and reconciliation. Thirdly, the EU's approach to the reconstruction of Syria relies largely on economic instruments, as the reconstruction assistance, both expertise and financial support, is tied to the precondition of the political process. Thus the positive conditionality of granting financial benefits, combined with the negative conditionalities of restrictive measures targeted at the Syrian government, push for the political process. The EU is using its economic power to push for its objectives. In the same time, it firmly declares its vision for post-conflict Syria and the issues which it is willing to contribute. Thus, on the other hand, we can see that the approach that the EU has for the reconstruction, uses economic power in promotion of normative objectives.

In the normative principles that the EU promotes in its policy on the reconstruction of Syria, we can find all the elements that Manners (2007) listed: sustainable peace, social freedom, consensual democracy, individual and collective human rights, the rule of law, inclusive equality, social solidarity and good governance. This emphasis on individual and collective rights is in the eyes Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler (2011, 464) a distinctive feature in the EU's approach compared to the general statebuilding praxis.

However, we can see many features of statebuilding in the EU's approach. The focus on political institutions, democratic system and norms, the rule of law, accountability and good governance are features of the statebuilding as well. Overall the EU's vision for political reconstruction requires a drastic change of the current political and economic system of the Syrian state. This is also reflected in the preconditions that the EU sets for the reconstruction in the first place.

In the short timeline of the EU's engagement with the conflict, two trends were found: firstly, the EU stepping up its role as a regional actor, and secondly, a change in the context which stalled the Geneva process and brought the conflict into a new phase with Assad as the prevailing in power within Syria. Regardless of these trends, the EU stays consistent with its messages about its role, the values and principles behind its action, and its objectives. The Humanitarian role seems to form the rationale of pushing for the Diplomatic role during 2017 and 2018, and when the Geneva process seems to be stalling, the Diplomatic and Solution-focused roles are emphasised, with the Humanitarian role providing background legitimation.

The roles found in the analysis reflect well the idea of the normative power Europe. Firstly, the background for the EU role is the externalisation of its self-perception and using the history of European integration as a peace project. This forms a strong legitimator and motivator for the EU approach and the role in the conflict. Secondly, the self-description of the EU is quite focused on normative elements. The EU is presented to be acting based on respect for human rights, responsibility to support peace and reconciliation, and through certain neutrality whose focus is on supporting Syrians themselves to solve the conflict, with the EU as an enabler and supporter. In the same time, in this supporter role, the EU promotes the inclusion of minorities and disadvantaged groups to the negotiations, as well emphasises the civil society role. Thus the EU is not an actor motivated by interests related to military or economic power, but the welfare and inclusion of Syrian people. Promoting these values as ends themselves is a key element in the normative power self-image, as Tocci (2007) noted in earlier analysis. However, as suggested above by Newman, Paris and Richmond (2009, 9-10), peacebuilding can be motivated by both humanitarian and strategic reasons, with the goal of alleviating human suffering, but also enhancing international stability and security.

The EU strategy for Syria (European Commission & HR/VP 2017, 2) define the following aims for the strategy: *”to define how the EU can play a bigger role in contributing to a lasting political solution in Syria under the existing UN-agreed framework and help build stability and support post-agreement reconstruction once a credible political transition is underway.”*. It also defines the alternatives for the negotiated political transition: continued conflict or continued autocratic rule, which are said to be against the interests of the EU, as well as the Syrian people and the region. (ibid., 6.) The repercussions of the continued conflict are listed as continued human suffering which would lead to further population displacement especially towards the region and Europe, spread of violent extremism, spread of criminal activities, continued economic decline, entrenchment of sectarian differences, increased instability in neighbouring countries, and further destruction of cultural heritage (ibid., 6-7.) Of these issues, many are related to the security of Europe, such as the spread of extremism and crime, increased instability in the region, as well as migration flows. More normative threats include threats to human welfare in Syria and the region, as well as threats to cultural heritage. The EU strategic goals are said to align with its core interest and values and are built on the Global Strategy for the EU’s foreign and security policy, as well as the European Neighbourhood Policy. These goals are related to the vision that the EU has for Syria: unity and integrity, democracy, diversity and inclusivity, security and good governance, stability and strong economy.

For other kinds of interests and objectives, the role of the EU as a regional power was highlighted in 2016 through geographical imperative: Europe and the Middle East share the same sea, and Europe cannot afford *“having a black hole there”* (EEAS 2016d). Syria and the neighbouring hosting countries like Lebanon and Jordan are presented on the verge of exploding and causing more problems (EEAS 2016d). Thus the objectives are linked strongly to the security context of the EU, with the aim of stabilisation of the region. The geographical connection is also present in 2019. However, instead of emphasising the threats to the shared security, the interconnectedness in peace, security and economic growth is raised as a motivator for peace. The future is also painted more optimistic: the future of power struggles or conflict is not inevitable if there is cooperation. (EEAS 2019e.) On the other hand, both political and humanitarian goals and responsibilities are highlighted (EEAS 2016d; EEAS 2018h).

Preference for some kind of power-sharing solution and possibly a decentralised system can be seen. On the other hand, the protection of minorities seems to be emphasised, as well as their role in a diverse society. These are the two main conflict resolution solutions that Tocci (2007, 8) lists, which were mentioned in chapter 3.1.1. Thus we can see that besides the normative objectives, there are also more strategic and security-linked motives for the EU role. However, in the sources, the normative objectives are more emphasised and used for legitimating and motivating the EU role.

As presented above, the strong conditionality is a step away from the EU's traditional approach to peacebuilding and reconstruction. However, emphasis on normative elements follows the general normative power model of the EU's external relations. This combination poses several challenges to the EU as it tries to push for a peacefully negotiated solution. The main challenge is the Assad government itself. If there is no political transition, the EU's main leverage for reconstruction does not work, and it will not be able to achieve its objectives. This dilemma and others will be analysed next.

## **6.2 European Union and Syria: reconstruction dilemmas**

The EU's approach reflects on the dilemmas of peacebuilding: the political solution is emphasised to be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, but in the same time in the name of sustainability of peace, it has to be acceptable for the regional powers and the international community. This is an inherent contradiction that reflects both the dilemma of long-term and short-term goals as well as the bottom-up or top-down approach of peacebuilding: sometimes long-term needs can make building peace in short-term more difficult. The short-term goal being a negotiated solution between the Syrian parties, while the long-term peace requires regional agreement as well, and the region is as divided as ever in its relationship to the Assad government, but also to the different options for the future. On the other hand, including all the levels of conflict promotes more holistic approach to the conflict and the realisation, that even though in ideal case the peace would be settled by the Syrian parties, the conflict reality is much more complex with regional and international actors present on the ground supporting different actors.

Key challenges are related to the statebuilding aspects of pushing for a full reform of the state institutions. In the following, it will be argued, that contrary to the basic statebuilding approaches which assume that the state structures collapse during the conflict, the case of Syria has proven otherwise. This forms a great contradiction between the approach and conflict reality.

The EU cannot support Assad government in reconstruction without giving it certain legitimacy, and this cannot be done. This was also illustrated in (EEAS 2019d): “*We will not grant legitimacy to the current regime or its return into the international arena without progress in Geneva and without changes on the ground in relation to respect to basic human rights and humanitarian laws*” and: “*“Even for pragmatic reasons,” she [Mogherini] added. “Who do you give the money to? Is it realistic to think that any international institution gives the money to Assad?”*” (EEAS 2018g.) A quote from Heydemann (2017) illustrates this well:

*“Western support for reconstruction will only legitimize a murderous dictatorship, deepen entrenched systems of corruption and criminality, and undermine opportunities to address the grievances that drove millions of Syrians into the streets in 2011 demanding political and economic change.”*

Thus the EU’s approach to reconstruction that focuses on statebuilding and normative issues clashes with the conflict realities of Assad prevalence and the resilience of the government’s hold over institutions and structures of the country. The features of the government’s continuing control over the Syrian economy and institutions through clientelist networks form a major challenge to the reconstruction approaches. Heydemann categorises Syria as a ‘fierce’ state instead of a fragile state, as instead of dysfunctional institutions and poor governance, the institutions are designed to support the survival of the ruling elite. These kinds of states are built on social base, a network of compliance and incentives of transactional loyalty. According to him, this has implications for the reconstruction policies and practices that are often based on fragility and state failure. Such an approach would underestimate the resilience of institutions, norms and practices of Assad’s economic governance in Syria. Thus the continuity of governance practices is for Heydemann a defining feature in the Syrian case. The persistence of pre-war norms, practices and institutions would even challenge the core

assumptions of current approaches to reconstruction based on fostering the development of post-conflict institutions. (Heydemann 2018a, 49; Heydemann 2018b, 1-2, 4-5.)

Heydemann also says that “*the continuity of prewar practices affects the relationship between sovereignty, governance and conflict resolution*”, as in the context of the Arab Middle East, many conflicts are framed as stemming from the failed nation-building based on artificial state boundaries. Some solutions that have been proposed are, in fact, redefining sovereignty through different forms of decentralisation, federalism, local autonomy, or even state partition. However, according to Heydemann, the civil wars in the Middle East have weaponised sovereignty into rigid, unitary, centralised and indivisible definition. International recognition for sovereignty can thus improve one side’s advantages in military success and weaken their incentives to negotiate. (Heydemann 2018a, 49-50.) We can see this dynamic with the Syrian government’s sovereignty being strengthened by its international allies Russia and Iran, which has contributed to the military successes of the government and its reluctance to participate in the negotiations under the UN auspices in Geneva.

The reason why the reconstruction is such a dilemma for the EU is because the statebuilding approach and strong conditionality clashes with the Assad government’s resilience, but on the other hand, the strong humanitarian focus and legitimation for the EU’s role in the conflict would push the EU to relieve human suffering and support an environment for longer-term development in the country, as well as in the neighbouring countries. Because the EU cannot support the Assad government, it is limited in possibilities of action to support individual human lives. Statebuilding approach’s aim of strengthening the government’s capacity to reconstruct both its institutions and the country more widely contradicts EU’s objective of getting rid of the current political structures. In other words, the question is about how to help Syrians rebuild without strengthening the system against which many of the people rose in 2011, and how to reconstruct without legitimating Assad. This could lead to strengthening the conflict drivers that led to the conflict in the first place.

Richmond, Björkdagl & Kappler’s (2011) statement that the normative approach of the EU, with the emphasis on rights and needs of people in social and cultural contexts, might be less capable to respond to ‘hard power’ issues, is a very central one in the case of Syria. Despite the strong reconstruction conditionality backed with significant

economic and diplomatic power, the leverage the EU had hoped to tip the scale towards political transition has not worked. This can represent a significant blow to the approach.

In using conditionality, the EU has run into two challenges. Firstly, the sanctions are affecting the Syrian population more than they are affecting the Assad government. The EU's Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive Measures state that the "*Sanctions should be targeted in a way that has maximum impact on those whose behaviour we want to influence. Targeting should reduce to the maximum extent possible any adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons not targeted or neighbouring countries.*" (European Commission 2017, 2.) However, for example, as the health sector has been already under pressure due to violence and deliberate attacks that target health facilities, the sanctions have also affected the access to health care, medicines and other essentials (e.g. Al Faisal & Alsaleh 2012). The humanitarian aid sector has also suffered from the sanctions, as some of the dual-use products, which require special clearances to be exported, may be needed for relief operations. Process of obtaining licences can be too hard, slow and costly for many humanitarian actors. These dual-use items include for example agricultural fertiliser, certain drilling tools and pipes, chlorine products used for water purification and sanitation, and power generators. (see, e.g. Lund 2019.)

Secondly, the Assad government is not interested in receiving European money in the first place, but holds its allies Russia and Iran, and potentially China, to come for its aid. However, neither Russia nor Iran has the capacity to cover the costs of reconstruction, as was argued earlier. It will also be left to be seen how much the Gulf states will be interested in investing in the country. There have been some signs of rapprochement between the Gulf states and Syrian government, for example at the end of 2018 there was discussion on readmitting Syria to the Arab League (see, e.g. Macaron 2018; McKernan & Chulov 2018).

Samaha (2019) raises several counter-productive effects that the EU's sanctions can have on the political level. The first is that the government that has gotten used to sanctions since 1980s has developed resilience structures that protect it from the main effects. Through the control of patronage networks, shortages will help to solidify government's control, with the support of the government's allies. It can also use the

sanctions to blame the economic problems to external actors. Secondly, the sanctions *”criminalise the Syrian government as a whole, and consequently those who do any work in government-held territories”*, which leaves very little space for the economy to operate. This hurts the population widely. (ibid.)

Thus the contradiction is that while imposing the sanctions on the regime that does not seem to weaken from it, the EU at the same time affects the humanitarian situation in the country negatively. This effect can be seen both in the Syrian population and the operations of humanitarian actors. After eight years of conflict, the government has tightened its grip on the country and its economy, despite the sanctions.

### **6.3 Final conclusions**

How can the EU promote its humanitarian and normative objectives of being on the side of Syrians, without strengthening the Assad government? If the conflict continues, and the political transition is nowhere near in sight, what can the EU do to fulfil at least some of its objectives? Will the EU have to loosen its preconditions for reconstruction assistance if the political process does not move forward, but the risks for human security in Syria, as well as in neighbouring countries and other refugee-hosting countries, including Europe, become more prominent?

The concept of reconstruction itself might come to play at this kind of a scenario. It has been argued above that the concept of post-conflict reconstruction is flexible and encompasses a large variety of features and principles. Defining boundaries between what is reconstruction and what is post-conflict recovery, stabilisation and humanitarian assistance is not easy in all contexts, and this is where the EU and other actors might have more space for their actions.

The EU strategy for Syria (European Commission & HR/VP, 3) notes: *“Bilateral cooperation with the Syrian government was suspended after the regime’s violent repression of the civilian uprising in 2011. The EU has, nevertheless, continued to support the Syrian people, through humanitarian assistance to save lives, as well as aid to provide essential services and support civil society.”* This statement makes a clear separation between the receivers of the assistance that the EU provides: the Syrians, not

the government, are the receivers of aid and the ones that need it. Thus the EU highlights being on the side of the people. The funding has also been said to target humanitarian assistance as well as non-humanitarian assistance, such as education, support to livelihoods, local governance, health and civil society support. (ibid.) However, are these activities and others such as demining, stabilisation, rehabilitation of basic infrastructures and service delivery reconstruction? Who decides?

Brown (2018, 8) makes an interesting observation that the EU support for local governance and civilian stabilisation for opposition areas during the conflict has been, in fact, anticipatory reconstruction already. These efforts form a counter-statebuilding effort, which works against the official government through strengthening opposition's political institutions. Thus instead of a liberal statebuilding, the EU and other western actors have actually operated in building counter-state institutions. (ibid.)

Also, the discussion about the concepts themselves has already started. In the EU-hosted high-level meeting on the Syria crisis, which was organised on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in 2018 (UN WebTV 2018), many participants of the discussion, including the EU and member states, highlighted the difference between stabilisation and reconstruction. Reconstruction is something actors cannot do, but they can do stabilisation. This could indicate that the realisation that despite the political process not moving forward, there Syrian people, including IDPs, have humanitarian and development needs, that need to be met.

Haid (2019, 19) argues that the political stance against reconstruction has not prevented reconstruction. International humanitarian organisations have started rebuilding infrastructure under the terms of early recovery, stabilisation and community resistance aid. Also, the UN has budgeted \$173,6 million to early recovery and livelihoods efforts in 2018 humanitarian response plan. For Haid, this undermines the official policies. (ibid.) Thus operating under different terms than reconstruction could, on one hand, offer the EU a way to address the needs of the most vulnerable and work towards its humanitarian objectives, but on the other hand, this can undermine the official policy and diminish its credibility. Why would the Assad government agree to the political transition, if it can rely on international community to recover the areas that it is not interested in reconstructing by itself? This represents the major dilemma for the European Union and other international actors.

Analysing these dynamics would require a more in-depth analysis of the EU policy from several perspectives, which is not in the scope of this thesis. However, through the analysis of the EU's approach, it was possible to point out several issues in the approach that contribute to this problem. The current research is mainly based on secondary sources. Adding interviews of key stakeholders inside the EU and its partners could provide a more in-depth view on how the policy has been formulated, and whether there has been contradictions and varying perceptions on it.

Additional research could be done on the approaches of the EU member states to the reconstruction of Syria and the policy coherence within the EU. Even though the official line of the EU has been unified, what policies do single member countries have on Syria and its reconstruction? For example, France and Germany have had sometimes differing policies compared to the EU line (see Koenig 2017). Also, the effect of the European domestic politics, such as the discussions on the situation of refugees in Europe and the question of violent extremism, both jihadist and extreme right groups, could be taken into account to evaluate the approaches and policies. One could also explore the boundaries of the reconstruction as a concept: what activities are included in reconstruction in theory, in words, and action? How are different instruments used in different fields such as stabilisation, early recovery, as well as humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid? This research could analyse the EU instruments used and take into account the member state policies as well. Another way to continue the analysis could be a comparative analysis of reconstruction approaches of opposing powers on the conflict sides, for example, between the EU and Russia. This has been started on some levels by, for example, Bartenev (2018), who studied the Russian and Western approaches.

Finally, even though the EU emphasises the role of Syrians in solving the conflict, and that the EU is only supporting and not trying to make the decisions for them, is the reality like this? Have the Syrians been involved in, for example, the preparations for the post-agreement reconstruction? Have the Syrians been involved in planning and implementing the EU support in Syria and for the Geneva negotiations? Has their participation been meaningful or tokenistic? This would be an interesting topic for further research: to study what the meaningful participation of Syrians means in the policy context of the international actors. Does the presence of multiple negotiation tracks give more or less role for the Syrians themselves? When a peace process becomes

locked, is the proliferation of tracks a positive or negative development? In Syria's case, these tracks were not able to produce significant progress in producing a political solution to the conflict.

These possible strands of research represent only a fraction of what kind of research could be done in the case of reconstruction of Syria. It has become clear that the topic is becoming more and more acute and the dilemmas related to it more known among international actors. On the other hand, the current situation of protracted conflict in Syria has led to fundamental policy questions such as: is alleviating human suffering more important than defending political and normative principles that would be violated in supporting development in a state led by an autocratic leader?

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