



EUROPEAN ORGANISATION FOR STRATEGIC POLICY

STRATEGIC BRIEF · SB 02 / 2026

Syria's Transition and Europe's Strategic Responsibility

Institutional recovery, inclusion and regional diplomacy after the fall of Assad.

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EXECUTIVE JUDGEMENT

European engagement with Syria should be conditional but not passive: support must protect civilians, strengthen legitimate institutions and reward observable inclusion while preserving leverage against renewed coercion, exclusion and transnational militancy.

KEY FINDINGS

- Behavioural moderation should be judged through institutions and treatment of minorities, not rhetoric alone.
- Early recovery can stabilise public administration without conferring unconditional political legitimacy.
- Fragmented security authority remains the principal threat to a durable national transition.
- Regional guarantees and European support must reinforce one another rather than create competing channels.

A transition of conduct and institutions

The fall of Assad opened political space but did not resolve the distribution of coercive power, the protection of minorities or the legitimacy of national administration. Public language has become more pragmatic, and authorities have shown interest in recognition and recovery. These changes matter, but moderation should be tested against observable conduct: appointments, local participation, property rights, detention practice and the ability of institutions to restrain armed actors.

Conditional engagement

Europe should avoid both premature normalisation and strategic absence. Assistance can support municipal services, documentation, education, health and accountable public administration while remaining tied to transparent delivery and independent monitoring. Conditions should be specific enough to guide decisions and flexible enough not to punish civilians for setbacks beyond their control.

Security and inclusion

The durability of the transition depends on whether armed authority becomes subject to legitimate institutions and whether communities believe those institutions protect them. Security-sector sequencing, local representation and credible investigation of abuses are therefore connected. External actors should not sponsor parallel structures that deepen fragmentation for short-term influence.

Europe's distinctive contribution

European leverage lies in long-term institutional support, recovery finance, education, standards and diplomatic coordination with regional actors. A shared European framework should specify what progress unlocks deeper cooperation and what reversals would pause it. The objective is a sovereign, inclusive and administratively capable Syria, not the management of indefinite dependency.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Tie phases of engagement to observable institutional and inclusion benchmarks.
- 02 Protect essential civilian recovery through independently monitored delivery channels.
- 03 Support documentation, property rights and local administrative capacity.
- 04 Coordinate European conditions with regional diplomatic and economic incentives.
- 05 Maintain contingency measures against renewed coercion, exclusion or transnational militancy.

DECISION AND MONITORING MATRIX

Priority	Decision horizon	Evidence of progress
Tie phases of engagement to observable institutional and inclusion benchmarks.	0-90 days	Minority participation
Protect essential civilian recovery through independently monitored delivery channels.	3-12 months	Security-sector consolidation
Support documentation, property rights and local administrative capacity.	12-36 months	Humanitarian and recovery access
Coordinate European conditions with regional diplomatic and economic incentives.	Continuous	Property and documentation rights
Maintain contingency measures against renewed coercion, exclusion or transnational militancy.	Annual review	Minority participation

INDICATORS TO WATCH

- Minority participation
- Security-sector consolidation
- Humanitarian and recovery access
- Property and documentation rights

SOURCES AND METHOD

This publication distinguishes verified institutional evidence from CERAX interpretation and forward-looking judgement. Principal public sources are listed below; all recommendations are the institutional judgement of CERAX.

- EEAS, Syria and the EU



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Independent analysis. Diplomatic judgement. European perspective.