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EU Disagrees With Russia Over Syrian Refugee Returns

By Reuters

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Nabil Mounzer / EPA / TASS

The European Union does not believe Syria is safe for refugees to go back, officials in Brussels said of a Russian push to have people return to the war-torn country and the international community to spend money on rebuilding it.

The bloc's foreign ministers will discuss the matter in Austria later this week.

EU officials expect the bloc to stick to its line that it would not offer reconstruction money for as long as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad — propped back to power by Russian and Iranian militaries — does not let the opposition share power.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin said before talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel earlier this month that everything needed to be done for Syria refugees to return.

"But the conditions are just not there. Russia would want us to pay for it but Syria under Assad is not safe," said one EU official.

The EU has backed Syrian opposition groups in the multi-faceted war that has raged for more than seven years, largely because global and regional powers disagree on how to end it.

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