

Arab League agrees to bring Syria back into its fold

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Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry speaks during an emergency meeting of Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo. [Khaled Desouki/AFP]

Cairo, May 7 (RHC)--Foreign ministers from Arab League member states have agreed to reinstate Syria's membership after its suspension more than 10 years ago, according to Iraqi state media. The ministers voted for Syria's return into the fold at the Arab League's headquarters in Cairo on Sunday.

The decision was made in advance of the Arab League Summit in Saudi Arabia on May 19th and amid a flurry of regional normalisation of ties with Damascus in recent weeks. Syria's Arab League membership was revoked in March 2011.

The vote took place following a meeting of top regional diplomats from Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria in Jordan last week, where they dubbed the process of bringing Damascus back into the Arab fold the "Jordanian Initiative."

The restoration of ties with Damascus quickened pace following the deadly February 6 earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and the Chinese-brokered re-establishment of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which had backed opposing sides in the Syrian conflict.

While Saudi Arabia had long resisted normalising relations with al-Assad, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud visited Damascus last month for the first time in more than a decade, the two countries also restoring embassies and flights between them.

Meanwhile, the United States has said it will not change its policy towards the Syrian government, deeming it a "rogue" state, and urging Arab states to get something in return for engaging with al-Assad.

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