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500 Europeans fight along with militants against Syria: EU official

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The European Union's counter-terrorism coordinator says at least 500 Europeans are fighting along with the foreign-backed militants against Syria.

EU's anti-terror chief Gilles de Kerchove told British media on Wednesday that some 500 Europeans were in Syria, to fight against the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

He said that Britain, Ireland and France were among the EU countries to have the highest numbers of militants in Syria.

He also warned that the Europeans who have joined the militants in Syria would most likely be radicalized there and would be a serious threat when they get back to their countries.

On Monday, the EU foreign ministers met in Luxemburg and eased EU's oil embargo against Syria to assist the foreign-backed militants. Under the deal, European countries will be allowed to purchase oil from the militants in Syria and in turn provide them with funds needed to buy more weapons.

Syria has been gripped by unrest since March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of government forces, have been killed in the violence.

Damascus says the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

The Syrian government says the West and its regional allies, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, are supporting the militants.

Several international human rights organizations have accused militants operating in Syria of committing war crimes.