

Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process

1. The EU reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two state solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign, and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition. The EU reaffirms that there is no alternative to a negotiated two state solution. The regional context, including the ongoing radicalisation and spread of terrorism, makes it even more urgent to end the conflict. The status-quo is not an option, as the viability of the two state solution is constantly being eroded by new facts on the ground. The EU urges both parties to demonstrate their stated commitment to the two state solution through concrete actions. Actions by either side which call into question their stated commitment to a negotiated solution must be avoided. The EU will actively support the parties to restore confidence and create an environment of trust necessary to engage in meaningful negotiations as soon as possible.

2. An immediate priority must be to address the grave situation in the Gaza Strip. One year after the conflict, the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in the Gaza Strip remains dire. In light of the urgent needs of the people in Gaza, all international community pledges should be honoured. The EU furthermore expresses its concern over UNRWA's severe lack of funds and, as a leading donor to UNRWA, calls on all concerned donors to step up their funding.

The EU believes that compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law by states and non-state actors, including accountability, is a cornerstone for peace and security in the region.

3. The EU welcomes recent steps taken by Israel to ease restrictions in Gaza. However, further positive measures are now needed that enable the full delivery of humanitarian aid, reconstruction and economic recovery on a permanent basis. The EU calls for a fundamental change of the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Recent rocket fire by militant groups is unacceptable and underlines again the danger of escalation. All stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace. The EU calls on all parties to agree on a durable ceasefire that prevents a return to conflict, strengthens Gaza, as it is an integral part of a future Palestinian state, and reinforces the link between Gaza and the West Bank.

4. The EU urges all Palestinian factions to find common ground, based on non-violence and reconciliation, and to work together to address the needs of the Palestinian population. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an important element for reaching the two state solution. In that regard, the EU calls on the Palestinian factions to make reconciliation and the return of the PA to Gaza a top priority. The PA must take greater responsibility in this regard and assume its government function in the Gaza Strip, including in the field of security, civil administration and through its presence at the Gaza crossing points. The EU is ready to provide full support to these efforts, including through the rapid reactivation and possible extension in scope and mandate of its EUBAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS missions.

5. The EU is committed to working with all sides, including through implementation of existing agreements, to allow the socio-economic development of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and empower Palestinian institutions in preparation for statehood, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU stresses that actions such as the easing of restrictions must be part of a fundamental change of policy with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory. It calls on Israel to enable accelerated Palestinian construction, as well as social and economic development in Area C. Such actions will serve to strengthen the prosperity and security of both Israelis and Palestinians. It further calls on Israeli authorities to halt plans for forced transfer of population and demolition of Palestinian housing and infrastructure in the Susya and Abu Nwar communities.

6. The preservation of the viability of the two state solution is at the core of EU policy and will remain a priority. In this regard, and recalling that settlements are illegal under international law, the EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in this context, such as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation - including of EU funded projects - evictions, forced transfers including of Bedouins, illegal outposts, settler violence and restrictions of movement and access. These actions seriously threaten the two state solution. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both states. The EU will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground and their broader implications and remains ready to take further action in order to protect the viability of the two state solution. The EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to ensure continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. The EU expresses its commitment to ensure that - in line with international law - all agreements between the State of Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

7. Securing a just and lasting peace will require an increased common international effort. The EU, notably through the action of its recently appointed Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, will work actively on a renewed multilateral approach to the peace process in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including partners in the Quartet, notably the US, in the region and the United Nations Security Council. The establishment of an International support group is a possible way to contribute to this end; the Council asks the High Representative to explore options for implementation of this initiative with regional and international actors and to report back in early September. The EU's position on parameters, as set out in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of July 2014, provides a basis for achieving consensus on the way forward. The EU is ready to engage in joint work with regional partners on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, and welcomes ongoing efforts of the Quartet in this regard.

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