



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process

*2870th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 26 and 27 May 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The EU reaffirms its commitment to support the parties in the ongoing negotiations on all outstanding issues, including all final status issues, with a view to concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008 as agreed in Annapolis last November. These negotiations must urgently press ahead. In this context, the EU also welcomes the recent meetings of the Quartet principals including with Arab foreign ministers and of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of 2 May in London. The EU re-emphasizes the continued and constructive involvement of Arab partners and the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a major element in moving the Middle East Peace Process forward. The Council recalls that peace in the Middle East requires a comprehensive solution and in this regard welcomes the announcement that Syria and Israel have agreed to initiate peace negotiations under the auspices of Turkey.
2. The EU underlines the urgent need for swift and tangible results on the ground in order to sustain Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Action from both sides to implement their Roadmap obligations in parallel to the negotiations is vital in order to retain the confidence and support of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, the region and the wider international community.
3. The EU is deeply concerned by recent accelerated settlement expansion. The EU reiterates that settlement building anywhere in the occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law. Settlement activity prejudices the outcome of final status negotiations and threatens the viability of an agreed two-state solution. It reiterates its call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001.

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4. The EU condemns the continued firing of rockets from Gaza on southern Israel including the recent attack in Ashkelon and all other activities which are contrary to international law and endanger civilians. While recognising Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the EU calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence. The EU urges all parties to ensure the protection of affected civilians in accordance with international law. The EU continues to support Egyptian efforts to bring about a cessation of violence and a solution that will allow for the reopening of all crossings.
5. The EU calls for the progressive removal of Israeli restrictions on movement and access in order to improve the situation on the ground and living conditions in the West Bank and revitalise the Palestinian economy. The EU welcomes as a step in the right direction the decision to remove a limited number of roadblocks but underlines the fact that much more remains to be done.
6. The EU remains deeply concerned about the unsustainable humanitarian situation in Gaza. It reiterates its call on all parties to work urgently for the controlled reopening of the crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. In this context, it calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations regarding the uninterrupted provision of fuel and electricity supplies, as well as that of all other humanitarian assistance. It condemns the attacks from Gaza against the crossing points and terminals and their negative consequences on the delivery of humanitarian aid and fuel. It reiterates its readiness to resume its border assistance mission at the Rafah crossing point as soon as conditions allow under the provisions of the relevant international agreements related to Access and Movement concluded in November 2005.
7. The EU remains committed to assisting Palestinian state-building efforts across a broad range of areas. It welcomes the Palestinian Authority's efforts to develop an effective and reformed security sector and encourages ongoing efforts towards the fulfilment of its Roadmap obligations in this field. In this regard, the Council expresses its full support to the international conference in support of Palestinian civil security and the rule of law to be hosted by Germany on 24 June 2008. It has decided to expand the EUPOL COPPS mission to support the criminal justice sector namely in the fields of the judiciary and the penitentiary, in co-operation with international partners. It welcomes the recent package of measures agreed by the Quartet Representative with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, aimed at enhancing both economic activity and the capacity of Palestinian Authority security forces, by improving their ability to operate freely. It emphasises the importance of early implementation of these measures. The Council also welcomes the success of the recent Palestinian Investment Conference in Bethlehem in taking forward the economic development agenda.
8. The EU underlines the need to deliver on pledges made at the International Donor's Conference for the Palestinian State in Paris last December. In this context, it highlights the importance of keeping the institutions of the Palestinian Authority running in the second half of 2008, for which additional budget support is urgently needed. As the largest contributor of financial assistance to the PA, the EU calls on other donors to increase their budget support to the PA, with due regard for equitable burden sharing.