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**EU suspends direct aid to Palestinian Authority, urges government to commit to Quartet principles**

EU ministers have endorsed the Commission's putting on hold of payments and technical assistance to the Palestinian government as a precautionary measure pending conclusion of a review of EU assistance against the new government's commitment to the Quartet's principles. Ministers, meeting in the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 10 March, underlined that the EU remains committed to supporting the Palestinian people and will continue to provide necessary assistance to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian population.

"Our aim is not to bring about the failure of the Hamas government, but to persuade it to accept our criteria" said Council President Ursula Plassnik. "Our aim is to see all parties contribute to a positive development in the Middle East by peaceful means".

EU Foreign Ministers decided to limit aid to non-governmental channels until they are satisfied that the new government shows a clear commitment to three basic principles: non-violence, the recognition of Israel's right to exist and the acceptance of existing agreements. Ministers also underlined the importance of improved access and movement and urged Israel to take steps to improve the humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinians. They welcomed recent statements by Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas indicating a willingness to negotiate on both sides.