
COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION

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2776th Council Meeting
General Affairs and External Relations
Brussels, 22 January 2007

President: **Mr Frank-Walter Steinmeier**
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany

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MIDDLE EAST

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

" - Middle East Peace Process

1. The Council expresses its full support for President Abbas and his continued efforts for national unity. It calls on all Palestinians to support these efforts and to end internal violence. The EU stands ready to work with a legitimate Palestinian government that adopts a platform reflecting the Quartet principles.
2. The Council welcomes the meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas on 23 December 2006 and emphasises the need for prompt implementation of commitments made at this meeting. It takes note of the partial transfer by Israel of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. It calls for the early resumption of the 2005 Sharmel-Sheikh understandings. The Council expresses the hope that this meeting will be the first in a series of meetings in the framework of a renewed political process, which should lead to meaningful negotiations on the final status. The ultimate goal should be an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state, living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours in peace and security.
3. The Council calls on the parties to consolidate the cease-fire in Gaza and to extend it to the West Bank. It condemns the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory and urges the Palestinian leadership to do everything in its power to put an end to such acts. While commending Israel for its present restraint concerning Gaza, it calls for an end to Israeli military interventions in the West Bank.
4. The EU calls for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier and commends efforts, including by partners in the region, to that effect. It also calls for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators detained in Israel.
5. The EU stresses the importance of strengthening the Palestinian institutions. It will continue to pursue practical and visible measures, including on access and movement, governance, the security sector and a functioning administration. It welcomes the extension of the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM) for three months, which – in coordination with the Office of the President – is providing essential relief to a large part of the Palestinian population. It reiterates its call on Israel for the immediate transfer of all withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. It encourages Israel to consider to do so through the TIM. The Council recalls the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and in this regard reiterates its continued commitment to the EU Border Assistance Mission in Rafah. It urges that Rafah and all other crossing points, notably Karni, be re-opened and remain open.
6. The EU is deeply concerned about the recent authorisation of settlement activities by the Israeli government, and the ongoing construction of the barrier on Palestinian land. These developments are contrary to international law and the Road Map. The Council calls on Israel to desist from any action that threatens the viability of an agreed two-state solution. Settlement activities in and around East-Jerusalem as well as in the Jordan valley are of particular concern. The EU will not recognise any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by both parties.

7. In this context, the EU emphasises its determination to play an active role in the framework of increased Quartet engagement, with a view to urgently put in place a political and diplomatic process offering a political perspective in the quest for a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, in line with the Road Map and the relevant UNSC resolutions, and also taking into account the Arab League Beirut Declaration. The Council underlines the need to work closely with the parties and regional partners. In accordance with the Road Map, the Quartet, in consultation with the parties, should in due course convene an international conference to realise these goals. At this critical moment, the Council looks forward to an early meeting of Quartet principals.

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