



COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 14 March 2008
7648/08 (Presse 72)
P 032

Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Middle East

Middle East Peace Process

1. The EU expresses its full support for the Annapolis process and its commitment to support the parties in their negotiations with a view to achieve a two-state solution. A just and sustainable solution to all aspects of the Middle East Peace Process can only be achieved through negotiation. Despite the difficulties that the process has recently experienced, the EU welcomes the intention of the parties to resume their negotiations and looks forward to an early meeting of Quartet principals.
2. The EU is deeply concerned about the recent violence in Gaza and southern Israel, especially the civilian casualties. It condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack on a seminary in Jerusalem on 6 March and the continued rocket attacks. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self defence, the EU calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence.
3. The EU stresses the need for swift and tangible results on the ground in order to sustain negotiations. Action from both sides to implement their Roadmap obligations is vital in order to retain the confidence and support of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, the region and the wider international community. The EU is deeply concerned about the recent Israeli announcement to extend the settlement of Givat Ze'ev. 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. The EU therefore urges Israel to take immediate action in particular on settlements and outposts. It calls on the Palestinian Authority to make further efforts to implement its obligations with regard to security, where needed in cooperation with the Israeli authorities. In this regard the EU remains ready to strengthen and extend its EUPOL COPPS mission in order to support the reinforcement and reform of the Palestinian security forces.
4. The EU considers that the violent confrontations in and around Gaza have serious security implications. The EU is deeply concerned by the unsustainable humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the controlled and sustained reopening of all crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. While reconfirming in this context the Council Conclusions of January 2008, it extends its full support to efforts to facilitate a peaceful solution to the present crisis. This solution should provide for a lasting period of quiet. The EU reiterates its readiness to resume its monitoring mission at Rafah according to the Access and Movement agreement of November 2005.
5. The EU recalls its commitment at the International Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State last December in Paris to support efforts to build the future Palestinian State in accordance with the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. For its implementation it calls for Israeli cooperation. The EU expresses its full support to the upcoming International Conferences on Investments and economic revival in Bethlehem and in Support of Palestinian Civil Police and Rule of Law in Berlin.

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The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.