

11th July 2014

To: Ms Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

Cc: The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union
Mr Herman van Rompuy, President of the European Council
Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

Re: Important new statement by the European Eminent Persons Group on the Middle East Peace Process

We, the undersigned members of the European Eminent Persons Group (EEPG) on the Middle East Peace Process, are writing to you in the wake of the latest round of failed US-led peace talks to urge you and EU Foreign Ministers to move European policy to a new stage. The recent violent exchanges between Israel and Hamas vividly illustrate this.

The vacuum now threatening the search for a comprehensive settlement, while the rest of the region is so afflicted by instability, presents a real danger to European interests. Europe has no reason to assume that another round of US diplomacy will effectively fill this vacuum. Europe itself must take responsibility and act.

Members of the EEPG continue to believe that two states offer the best way forward for both peoples. The security and long-term stability of Israel, which is important to all of us, will not be achieved under the current conditions, nor will the legitimate rights and freedom of the Palestinian people.

Yet it is transparently evident that the Oslo approach has become increasingly threatening to a two-state outcome. For Europe to have supported such a flawed process so long without reservation now looks like a failure of fundamental policy. The increasing disengagement of Palestinians, and especially young Palestinians, from the political process is a particularly dangerous trend that European inaction has had the effect of encouraging. The tension arising from the criminal kidnapping of three young Israeli men illustrates the growing risks.

It is our view that Israel's need to make the key choices confronting its future (the options being two states, one democratic state or the risk of a single state with two classes of citizens) has become ever more acute; and yet our policies have encouraged Israel to postpone those choices and to entrench the occupation.

It will be important to assert three clear European priorities during the coming period: (1) supporting the nascent Palestinian internal reconciliation process; (2) taking further Europe's commitment to distinguishing between Israel 'proper' and the settlements in the bilateral relationship; and, perhaps most important, (3) according a much higher priority to addressing violations of international law on both sides and asserting basic Palestinian human rights under occupation. The EU's longstanding rejection of violence on the part of any participants in the peace process has of course to be a continuing pillar of our position.

These three elements can be developed along the following lines:

1. The European welcome for the process of **Palestinian political reconciliation** and for the formation of a new technocratic government of national accord should be followed by specific action. Palestinians are in need of more representative institutions: the holding of elections and implementation of PLO reform would help achieve this and better reflect the aspirations of the Palestinian people. The EU should offer practical and political support to long overdue Palestinian elections, to be held also in East Jerusalem. With regard to Hamas, an organisation that was, before the current round of violence, beginning to consider the political rather than the military option, the EU should emphasise international standards of practice and behaviour.
2. The FAC conclusions of May 2014 called for maximum **restraint on settlements** and committed the EU to closely monitoring developments. But settlements have been and continue to grow relentlessly. Europeans may not be able to stop this development, which most undermines the two state option. But significant further steps can and should be taken to disengage fully from the settlement enterprise and to apply European guidelines stringently and across new areas. The EU decision of 23 June in respect of the prohibition of imports from Crimea and Sevastopol is a relevant illustration of our preparedness to act in another crisis region. EU action on settlements in all areas must be a cardinal part of its insistence on the implementation of international law and its own policies. Through such action, the EU also raises the costs of the occupation, giving Israel an incentive to end it after more than 47 years.

Violations in the occupied territories of **Palestinian rights as enshrined in international law** should become a more central focus of Europe's discourse and policy in relation to this conflict. The Heads of Mission of EU states in the region have compiled important reports relating to Israeli policies and practices in Gaza, Area C, and Jerusalem. The HoMs' recommendations should be adopted without delay. The current structure of aid to the PA continues to perpetuate rather than challenge this status quo. The stronger application of normative international IHL standards to the OPTs is long overdue. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it also has the prospect of being more effective in bringing the Palestinians back to negotiations and deterring both further settlement activity and annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank.

The EEPG urges Members of the Council of Ministers to review these issues as soon as possible. The opportunity to re-think the present direction of travel is being considered within the political debate in both Israel and Palestine, and Europe's responsibility lies in aiding the search for a realistic new process based more firmly than the previous one on international standards and principles. If Europe wants the conflict resolved through the establishment of two states, it must act proactively and quickly.

We are sending copies of this letter to Members of the Council of Ministers and to the US Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the European Eminent Persons Group:

Frans Andriessen, former Vice-President of the European Commission

Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, former Vice-Prime Minister of the Netherlands

John Bruton, former Prime Minister of Ireland

Teresa Patricio Gouveia, former Foreign Minister of Portugal

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, former European Commissioner

Jeremy Greenstock, former UK Ambassador to the UN; Co-Chair of the EEPG

Wolfgang Ischinger, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Germany and current Chairman of the Munich Security Conference; Co-Chair of the EEPG

Miguel Moratinos, former Foreign Minister of Spain and former EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process

Ruprecht Polenz, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag and former Secretary-General of the CDU

Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal

Pierre Schori, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Sweden

Javier Solana, former EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and Former NATO Secretary-General

Peter Sutherland, former EU Commissioner for Competition and former Director-General of the World Trade Organization

Andreas Van Agt, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands

Hans Van den Broek, former Foreign Minister of the Netherlands and Former EU Commissioner for External Relations

Hubert Védrine, former Foreign Minister of France; Co-Chair of the EEPG