



## The Influence of the European Union in Palestine after the 7th of October:

# Capabilities Undermined by Contradictions

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رواء - مركز الدراسات  
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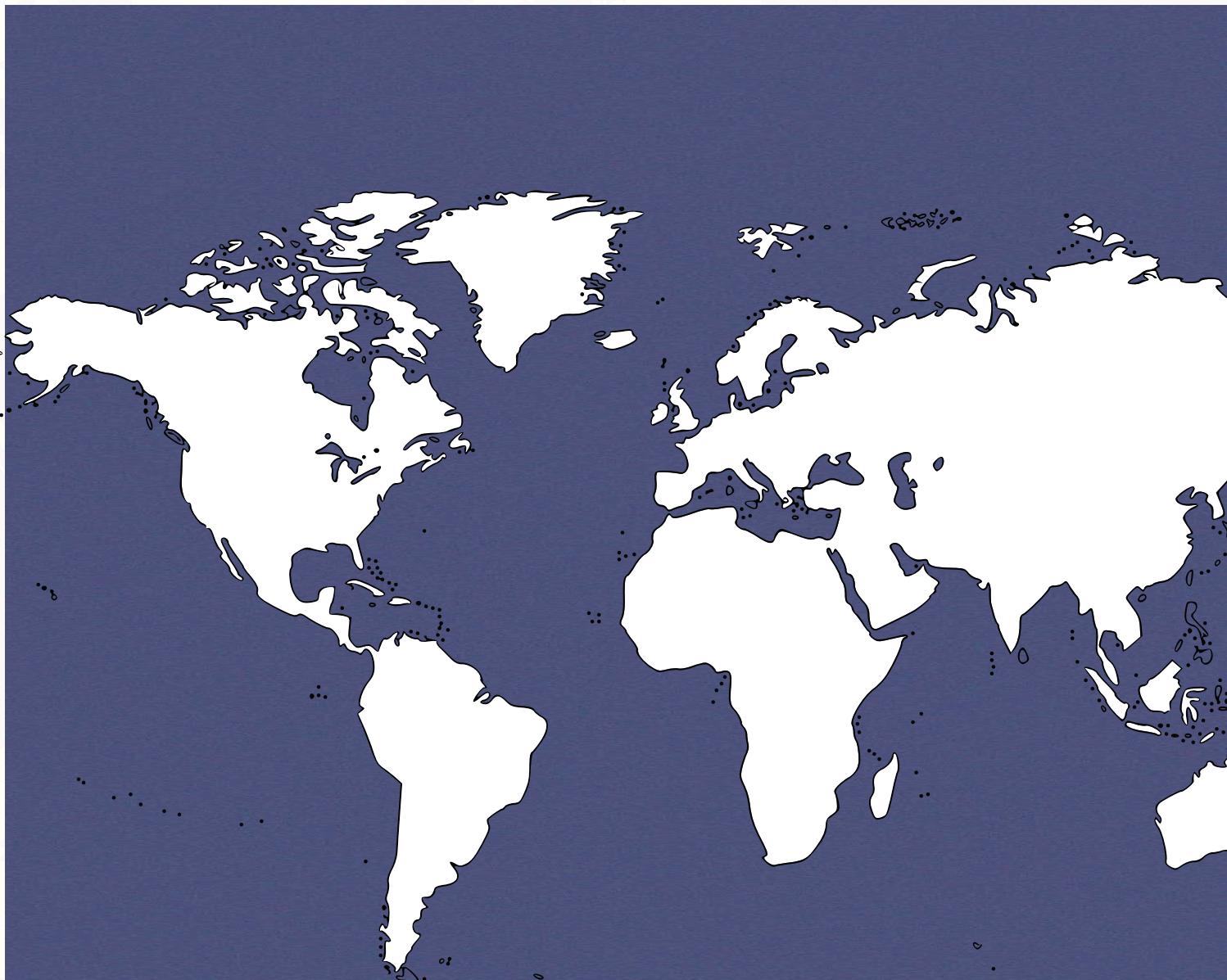
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# Introduction

On October 8th, 2023, only one day after the start of the Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip, the European Union (EU) Neighborhood Commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, who is of Hungarian origin, announced the complete suspension of financial and humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. He said: “The scale of terror and brutality against Israel and its people is a turning point.” (Várhelyi, 2023).

Since then, the EU’s stance towards Israel’s war and genocide on Gaza has been generally marked by hesitation and the utter lack of decisiveness; granting Israel impunity and unlimited support. Following the events of the 7th of October, the European states initially insisted in unison on Israel’s “right to defend itself” (Jacqué & Ricard, 2024). After Várhelyi’s overhasty announcement, the European Commission quickly issued clarifying statements that essentially amounted to a major backtrack of the aid suspension. This marked the return of the Palestinian cause on the forefront of the international and European agenda (Joyner, 2023).

This paper discusses a historical overview of the European Union’s (EU) role in Palestine, especially with the contemporary rise of European states recognizing the State of Palestine. It acknowledges the EU’s input and efforts over the decades in supporting the Palestinians in various fields but also discusses the problem with EU’s consensus crisis regarding October 7th and Israel’s live-streamed genocide in Gaza. Reports supporting this paper demonstrate the EU’s approach with Israel since the start of the genocide has been “business as usual”, allowing US weapons bound for Israel to transit EU territory, a choice that materially sustains the war,



marking the EU as complicit, and undercuts its claims of upholding international law (Akkerman & Bhriain, 2024). These contradictions were starkly evident when comparing the EU's rapid response to the ongoing war in Ukraine that commenced in 2022, and the sanctions imposed by the EU on many countries that undermined international law, such as Russia (Huber, 2025). Simultaneous with the EU's slow and hesitant reaction to the aggression and ongoing genocide in Gaza, where Israel is clearly<sup>12</sup> and seriously violating the international humanitarian law.

It also stresses, through facts and European historical stances, that the EU has a major potential and influential role in stopping or even ending the illegal Israeli Occupation of Palestine. The paper argues that even with those large capabilities, a limited impact is seen on the ground due to the EU's traditional cautious approach of "issuing statements", with bias towards Israel. The paper also shows how the EU has reduced its role in Palestine to being only a "payer". The EU's consensus crisis, compounded by American opposition to an independent European role in the region, have lowered the EU's ability to launch any applicable political initiative or adopt a unified position that would support the Palestinian self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign, contiguous, and viable Palestinian state grounded in international law.

The paper concludes with a series of recommendations across political, economic, advocacy, and civil society domains.

1 "Israel has openly defied international law time and again, inflicting maximum suffering on civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond." GENEVA – Israel must face the consequences of its campaign to undermine the legal framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts - a group of independent human rights experts (UN, 2024).

2 Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/09/2025/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds#:~:text=In%20%estabilishing%20%genocidal%20%intent%20%the,the%20%nature%20%of%20%their%20%operations.>



# Tracing the EU's Involvement in Palestine:

## A Historical Overview

After the Second World War, European states sought to produce a greater foreign policy coordination, and a system of coherence for European stances over worldwide issues through the European Political Cooperation (EPC) in 1970. Since then, and for decades, producing a unified and a common foreign policy for the European states in the EU has been one of the major struggles in benchmarking a reference point for Europe and its political stances regarding worldwide issues (Smith, 2004). This is evidently clear when it is examined over how European countries address the Palestinian issue and necessitates an urgent question into the EU's inability to develop effective and autonomous foreign policy frameworks. The EU's present paralysis is linked to deeper colonial continuities, when Israel began as a settler colonial project supported by European States and the Balfour Declaration in 1917 (Akkerman & Bhriain, 2024).

The Palestinian cause dates back to 1948, when Israel colonized the historic land of Palestine, and forced the displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinians, completely erasing more than 500 indigenous villages, in an event Palestinians call the Nakba (Khalidi, 1992). The Israeli settler colonialism of Palestine (Albanese, 2022) led to the world's longest-standing refugee crisis, "serving as a stark reminder that Palestine refugees continue to live amidst violence and occupation, while aspiring to a just and lasting solution to their plight", as described by the UN Committee on the Rights of Palestinian People (UN, 2023). The Nakba of 1948 ignited the first spark of the ongoing struggle of Palestinians, resulting in decades of dispossession and systemic violence by Israel, and ultimately leading to the division of the land into three parts: the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel. In 2024, the Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory<sup>3</sup>, received an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and concluded that the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian Territory is unlawful under International Law, and reaffirmed the urgent need for accountability and a just resolution (The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2022).

The first collective European position on the Palestinian cause dates back to 1971, with the EU taking a relatively advanced stance on the matter, supporting the two-state solution according to the 1967 borders, the Right of Return of Palestinian Refugees supported by the 194 UN resolution, and the Palestinian right to self-determination based on the 242 UN resolution of 1967 (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). The relationship between the EU and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded during the 1980 Venice Declaration (Bouris, 2014), which involved the PLO in the peace negotiations with Israel (UK Parliament, 1980). The EU has been one of the major donors to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Palestinian civil society organizations since the first peace agreement between Israel and the PLO; the Oslo Accords, which resulted in the creation of the PA in 1993. The EU's multi-annual financial allocation for the PA under the European Joint Strategy 2021-2024 amounts up to €1.177 billion. Since 2007, the EU has disbursed more than 12.65 billion euros in aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, making the EU the largest donor towards the PA (European Union, 2024).

During the 1990s, third-party intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian political process was viewed as a necessary and beneficial factor. But over time, especially after the Oslo Accords, the political processes continued to stall without tangible results, and questions began to be raised about the effectiveness of the EU's role as a mediator, when its role has changed from a contributor to a container (Asseburg & Goren, 2019). In 2012, the State of Palestine was recognized as a member state with an observer status in the UN. The EU's role since then, and until the recent ongoing Israeli genocide in the Gaza strip, has been centered around the support of a two-state solution, humanitarian and development aid, condemnation of violence, criticism of the illegal Israeli settlements, the support for the Palestinian right of self-determination, alongside addressing the Israel's right of security (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> The Palestinian Territories recognized by 147 of the UN's 193 member states, encompass the Israeli-occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.



Venice Declaration  
1980



Over the years, there have been many efforts aimed at limiting European involvement in the path to peace by the United States (US). In 2014 for example, after the last round of negotiations between the PLO and the Israeli government run by the US Secretary of State John Kerry (PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, 2016), the US administration withdrew substantial funding from the PA, Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, Palestinian civil society organizations, and even the UNRWA. In response, European donor support increased up until 2019 towards the PA to compensate for the US cuts, while also donating towards Israeli pro-peace groups. Even with these major efforts, the EU was not successful in halting, reversing, or even slowing down the pace of fragmentation of the Palestinian territory and the effects of the illegal efforts of the Israeli Occupation. Making the EU remain more of a "payer" rather than a "player" (Asseburg & Goren, 2019). The US furthermore increased tensions in the region when it recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 under President Trump's administration, and his "Deal of the Century" plan. That only increased the fragmentation of the Palestinian territory and endorsed Israeli control over large portions of the West Bank (RO'A, 2025). The EU responded to the US's recognition with rejection, stressing that the status of Jerusalem must be determined through negotiations (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

Even with the EU's continued donor support, and the policy of issuing statements, Israel has been given clear impunity by many European States and the United States. Israel has a clear and continued pattern of refusing to abide by solutions proposed by the EU under international law, knowing that any "threatening of sanctions" would not be put in action. A clear example goes back to the events of 1982, when Israel refused to abide by the solutions proposed by the European Community in the Bonn Declaration during the war on Lebanon in 1982, as this was the first time the EU has ever threatened to sanction Israel (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

The European Union has positioned itself as a supporter of the Palestinians but limited its role to aid and declarations rather than enforceable action. Its early commitments to Palestinian self-determination and opposition to Israeli violations should be transformed into tangible political measures. This contradiction between stated principles and practical inaction introduces the next section on European stances toward Palestinian statehood.



# European Stances on Palestinian Statehood:

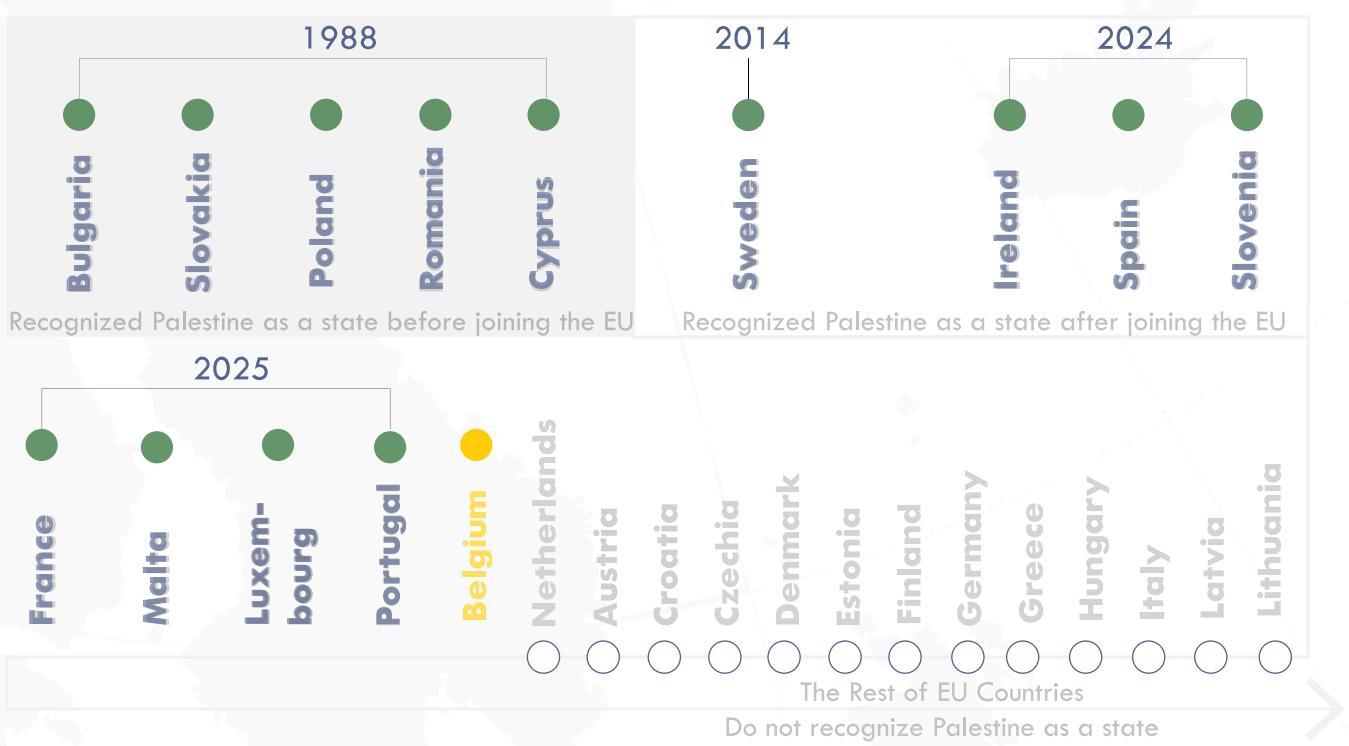
## Recognition without Operationalization

There are 27 states in the EU, 13 states recognize the State of Palestine. Sweden was the first EU member state that recognized the State of Palestine in 2014 and extended full diplomatic relations with the PA. There are 5 countries that recognized the State of Palestine before joining the EU, which are: Bulgaria, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, and Cyprus (Cafiero, 2024). In 2024, Ireland and Spain approved the recognition of Palestine as a state in May 2024. The Republic of Slovenia followed a month later in June 2024 (GOV.SI, 2024). In September 2025, France, Malta, Luxembourg and Portugal recognized Palestine as a state. While Belgium has issued its intent to recognize Palestinian statehood, but that it would not “legally recognize” until certain conditions are met (Wu, 2025).



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European states' stances vary regarding the Palestinian cause, with some countries such as France, taking independent stances. France, alongside Saudi Arabia, have developed an initiative in May 2025 that aims at recognizing Palestine as a state in a UN preparatory session titled "the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution" (UN, 2025). In July 2025, after the preparatory session, President Emmanuel Macron informed the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas that France will officially recognize Palestine as a state in September of the same year in the UN General Assembly in New York (Lukiv Jaroslav, 2025). Malta has also announced its plans to recognize Palestine as a state in the same upcoming Assembly joining France (Lederer, 2025).

Hence, the stances taken by the European states demonstrate their uneven split into three significantly divergent categories regarding the Palestinian cause (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2025):

1. States most critical of the Israeli government policies (Spain, Ireland, Sweden, Slovenia, Belgium).
2. States most aligned with the Israeli government policies (Germany, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus and Czech Republic).
3. States balancing the divergent European positions and achieving consensus (France).



The number of European states recognizing the State of Palestine has increased in the past two years, and more evidently in the past few months, with the most recent being France. The reasons for this are complex, strategic and responsive to events on the ground. The most prominent is the genocide in Gaza, along with Israel's continued and deliberate starvation of the people there. Israel's continuous violations of international law and international humanitarian law in Gaza, with its continuous attacks on Syria and Lebanon are also influential factors. These events have increased the public pressure on European states to abide to their principles and moral obligations and have pushed them to use the recognition as strategic leverage that pushes Israel into accepting a ceasefire (Zaidawi, 2025).

# But, at what cost does recognition come?

According to Israeli Haaretz Journalist Gideon Levy (2025), European recognition goes without operationalization. He argues that European recognitions are “words” that act as an outlet for the public anger against Israel and its actions in Palestinian lands by giving it a “soft warning”, instead of punishing it. These same recognitions are a bogus substitute for the sanctions that should be imposed on a state that is actively practicing a live-broadcast genocide. He insinuated that the European governments use this strategic tactic to publicly but softly voice “anger” and refusal to Israel’s actions. He called this approach “verbal silence”. He also sees that European states’ would experience some kind of consequences triggered by sanctioning Israel.

*“Gaza is starving, yet Europe’s only action is limited to recognizing a Palestinian state, will that feed the starving in Gaza?”* (Levy, 2025)

Since the Genocide, Israel openly-admitted the use of starvation as a weapon against Palestinians in Gaza, all-the-while increasing both its military and settler violence towards Palestinians in the West Bank. Some European ministers have called for sanctions on the Israeli government, but the rest of the European governmental entities could not take collective stances (Mcmurtry, 2024).

These recognitions have always sparked rage and condemnation across Israeli officials, which clearly underlines Israel’s greater policy regarding any future peace processes and the two-state solution. Apart from condemning the EU states recognizing the State of Palestine, Israeli policies disregarded and prevented the entry of European diplomatic officials of some of these states (Schatz, 2018). Consequently, after France’s most recent announcement of recognizing Palestine as a state, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized the recognition, saying it “rewards terror” (Lukiv Jaroslav, 2025). Not only that, Amir Ohana, an Israeli Knesset speaker, has boldly stated as well, responding to France: “if you want a Palestinian state, build it in London or Paris”, at the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva on July 30th, 2025 (Neev, 2025).

This discriminatory statement by Ohana came after similar moves by several non-European states, including the United Kingdom and Canada, which issued conditional promises to recognize Palestine as a state (Frost, 2025). One could argue that these conditional pledges serve as warning signals meant to pressure the Israeli government to halt its genocidal campaign against Palestinians in Gaza. In this framing, even the minimal acknowledgment of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and existence is perceived by some states as a form of “punishment” or “threat” to Israel (RO’A Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2025).



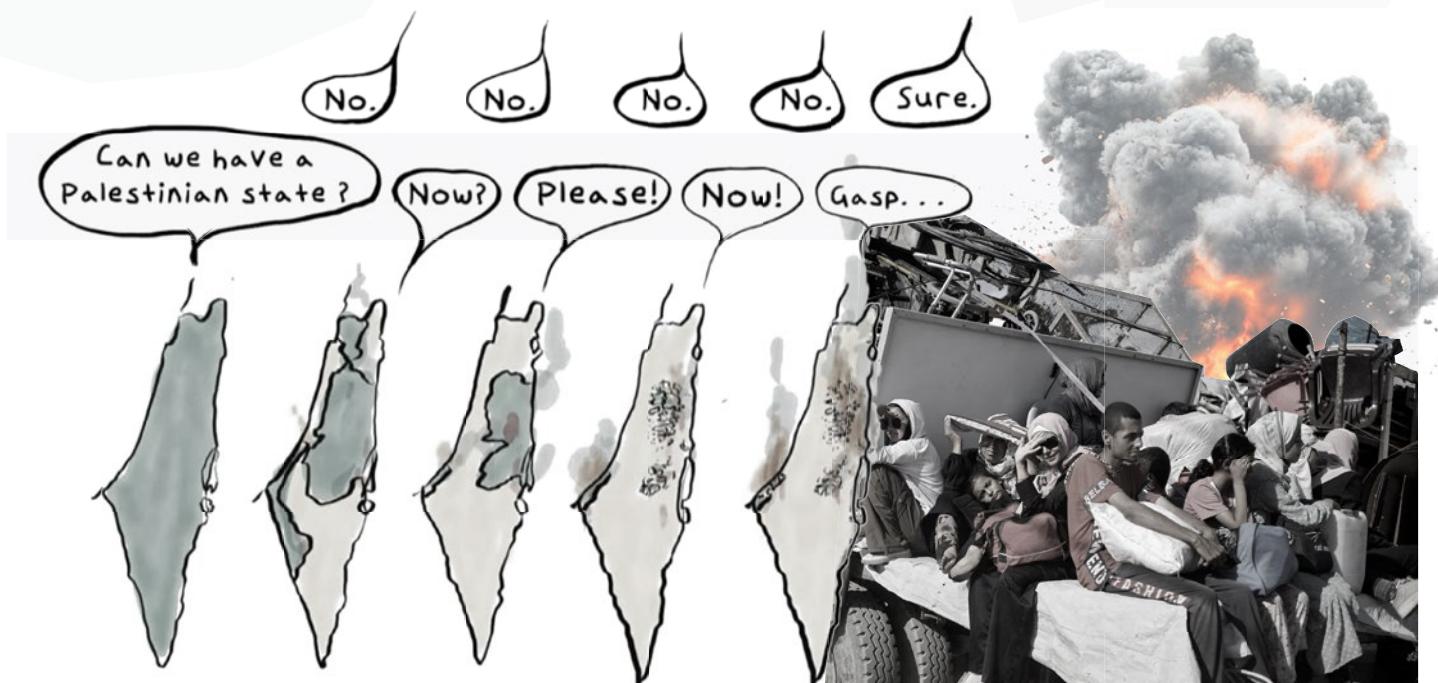
Similarly, after Ireland's recognition of Palestine as a State, Israel decided to close its embassy in Dublin, under the diverting accusations of "antisemitic" and "anti-Israel" policies (Berman, 2024). The Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris responded to this decision on X (formerly twitter):

*"I utterly reject the assertion that Ireland is anti-Israel, Ireland is pro-peace, pro-human rights and pro-international law."* (Harris, 2024)



Even when the idea of recognition provokes anger among Israeli officials, the absence of operationalization of statehood recognition renders these recognitions symbolic, especially when the United States is unconditionally supporting Israel (Levy, 2025). This impunity granted by the United States allows Israel to clearly disregard these recognitions (Ramallah News Agency, 2025). The most evident example is the recent Knesset approval of a non-binding motion in favor of annexing the West Bank, calling Palestinian land "inseparable parts of the Land of Israel"<sup>4</sup> (Sokol & Staff, 2025). The nexus between the recognitions and the annexation will define a new phase in the Palestinian struggle, as the Knesset vote "shatters the legal ambiguity Israel has long invoked to justify its occupation under the guise of a temporary situation" (Qafisheh & Zaro, 2025).

Hence, without coordinated international action against Israel, as well as a unified European stance capable of passing sanctions and punishments over the illegal and criminal Israeli actions, recognizing a Palestinian state will mean little change on the ground, and would circle us back to the idea of issuing statements with no real action (Cafiero, 2024). The European states must operationalize symbolism through concrete actions: sanctions against illegal settlements, diplomatic isolation of annexation advocates, economic boycott, arms embargo and support for Palestinian state-building (Qafisheh & Zaro, 2025)



© @weirdmomart (Instagram), 2025.

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4 The Knesset's vote serves as critical evidence for the ongoing International Criminal Court investigation into "the Situation in the State of Palestine" (ICC-01/18). <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/opinion/opinion-recognition-vs-annexation-turning-point-for-palestine-in-international-law/3647441>

# The EU's Consensus Crisis: the Double Standards and Complicity

In the first 3 months following October 7th 2023, the EU's statements and declarations did not include any call for a ceasefire or an end to the brutal suffering of the Palestinian people caused by Israel in Gaza. Nor were the increased Israeli Occupying Forces' and Israeli settlers' attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank mentioned (M. Jones, 2024). Statements by some EU states, alongside the visits of some European leaders and EU officials to Israel at that time, demonstrated a bias towards the Israeli narrative and showed clear harmony with the US administration's position (Wax & Barigazzi, 2023). This was mainly driven by historical guilt and senses of injustice (Pardon, 2024). Yet, such rhetoric masks the reality of occupation and transforms Europe's moral identity into a mechanism of complicity, where the language of democracy serves to justify silence in the face of systematic violations of Palestinian rights and self-determination (Akkerman & Bhriain, 2024). In recent years, some European countries cultivated growing bilateral economic and business ties with Israel, alongside political affinity with far-right political leaders (The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023). All of this has severely damaged the EU's reputation as a "moral compass" and a normative force in the eyes of the global majority (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

In this essence, the EU has granted Israel the the luxury of time to continue with its military aggression in Gaza and the West Bank, which demonstrates yet another form of complicity in the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people. The first time European leaders agreed to call for a ceasefire to end the suffering in Gaza, was after more than 6 months into the genocide<sup>5</sup>, and by then more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, two-thirds of them are women and children (Junyent, 2024). Even with some states calling for a cease fire a month into the war such as: Spain, Ireland, Belgium and France, the lack of a unified decision-making agenda or consensus within the EU stalled the ceasefire announcement decision.

In May 2025, with the continued violations of international law and human rights that the Israeli Occupation is committing against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, the EU has decided to review article 26 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement signed in 2000, to sanction Israel. Article 2 in the Agreement requires Israel to "uphold international human rights". This review was aimed to enforce pressure on Israel to allow aid into Gaza (Cîrlig, 2025). Some European states required urgency of the sanction, regarding the "review" as part of stalling. The Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel stressed that he would urge EU foreign ministers to suspend the trade agreement immediately (Baha, 2025).

**Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, during a minute's silence in Brussels for victims of 7th of October, on October 11th 2023.**



<sup>5</sup> "The ICI found it plausible that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and other prohibited acts under the Genocide Convention, recognizing the real and imminent risk of irreparable harm to them." (Al-Haq Human Rights Organization, 2024)

<sup>6</sup> "Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement." — Art. 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement (Bárcena, 2025).

However, the level of urgency of this review or its timeline were not stated. The Agreement was signed in 2000, and Israel has never faced any sanctioning threats despite its recurrent violations of international law and human rights, including the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, and illegal settlements, decades before the genocide even started (Bárcena, 2025). With the ongoing genocide, the review is seen as a delicate step that only “threatens” Israel into “possibly” being sanctioned by the EU. What makes this step delicate goes back to the roots of the complex and non-unified European policy. And on July 15th, two months after the review announcement, European member states’ foreign affairs ministers met to decide whether to suspend the Agreement, yet disregarded all possible sanction options<sup>7</sup> on Israel (Amnesty International, 2025). In response, Agnès Callamard Amnesty International’s Secretary General (2025) said:

*“The EU’s refusal to suspend its agreement with Israel is a cruel and unlawful betrayal – of the European project and vision, predicated on upholding international law and fighting authoritarian practices, of the European Union’s own rules and of the human rights of Palestinians. This will be remembered as one of the most disgraceful moments in the EU’s history. European leaders had the opportunity to take a principled stand against Israel’s crimes, but instead gave it a greenlight to continue its genocide in Gaza, its unlawful occupation of the whole Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and its system of apartheid against Palestinians. The EU’s own review has clearly found that Israel is violating its human rights obligations under the terms of the Association Agreement. Yet, instead of taking measures to stop it and prevent their own complicity, member states chose to maintain a preferential trade deal over respecting their international obligations and saving Palestinian lives.”*

On a similar and recent event, also in July 2025, the EU has reviewed suspending Israel from participating in Horizon Europe<sup>8</sup> program, in response to the “humanitarian crisis” unfolding in Gaza. The result of the review did not let the EU suspend Israel from the program, again due to the lack of consensus (Al-Quds News Network, 2025). This shows how the gap between “rhetoric and action” and the double standards within the EU (Huber, 2025) also in its research and industrial policies: 130 Horizon Europe projects with Israeli participants were approved after 7 October, channeling €126 million, including direct funding to Israel Aerospace Industries and Israel’s Ministry of Health, when Gaza’s universities and hospitals were laid to waste (Akkerman & Bhriain, 2024).

**Backlash against Ursula von der Leyen for not speaking up about the humanitarian consequences of Israel’s attacks on Gaza. On the same day, Israel killed 1055 Palestinians, and injured 5184.**



<sup>7</sup> “The EU was presented with 10 potential options for sanctioning Israel, ranging from suspending academic cooperation and visa-free travel, to blocking imports from Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and ending political dialogue with Israel. None received the necessary support.” (Omer, 2025)

<sup>8</sup> Horizon Europe is a research and innovation funding programme, with an indicative funding amount of is EUR 93.5 billion for the period of 2021-2027. [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en)

The crisis of the EU's consensus always surfaces when European countries like Germany, sees sanctioning Israel as an off-table matter. Germany has only issued "stern statements" criticizing the war on Gaza (Ahelbarra, 2025), and it has also stressed that recognition of a Palestinian state should occur at the end of two-state solution peace talks. But with the rise of other European states' recognitions, the German foreign minister insinuated that Berlin would respond to any unilateral movement by Israel, specifically after the annexation plans of the West Bank and Gaza surfaced publicly. This is mainly because Germany is on the path of being isolated internationally due to its unconditional support for Israel; driven by historical guilt (Akkerman & Bhriain, 2024). The German foreign minister's remarks were marked as the strongest warning yet to Israel (Marsh, 2025). France has also issued warnings of "concrete actions" and "possible" sanctions over Israel for denying aid into Gaza. Ultimately, Germany, and Italy recognizing the State of Palestine would drastically shift the balance in Europe. The government in Germany even goes within further steps, imposing severe limitations to free speech domestically, even incarcerating their own citizens simply for calling Israel to abide by international law (Cafiero, 2024).

The EU's failure to sanction Israel has been criticized by many human rights organizations and even by some EU member states as well, which compelled these states to act independently (The Hind Rajab Foundation, 2025):

- The Republic of Slovenia has decided to act independently and take measures to be the first European country to prohibit the import, export, and transfer of weapons to and from Israel (Al-Jazeera, 2025).



- The Netherlands has decided to label Israel as a country that poses a "national threat" as well, to impose a travel ban against the Israeli ministers: Itamar Bin-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, in response to Israel's human rights violations in Gaza and the ministers' public statements supporting ethnic cleansing (Euronews, 2025). However, even with these considerable and unprecedented political steps taken by the Netherlands, it continues to maintain military ties and arms trade with Israel, exporting and importing weapons despite the ongoing war crimes. It has yet to consider an arms embargo, underscoring its complicity and double standards (Hind's Call, 2025).



- Ireland's president took an unprecedent step and has called upon the UN secretary general to invoke powers under Chapter Seven to bypass Security Council gridlock<sup>9</sup> and deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza (Biçer, 2025).



- In a more surprising and recent step, on August 8th, 2025, Germany issued its plans to halt shipments of military equipment that could be used in Gaza. This came after the unilateral decision by the Israeli security cabinet approving a plan to expand the war in Gaza. Chancellor Friedrich Merz has issued this plan to halt by Germany, and also warned Israel against any steps towards annexing the occupied West Bank (Al-Jazeera, 2025).



The double standards within the EU's foreign policy are also evident when Israel's war on Gaza is compared to other global "conflicts". The swift and unified decision taken by the EU to cut all trading ties with Russia as soon as the war with Ukraine started, is just one example (Bolan, 2025). Some EU countries; including France, Italy, Greece, and Germany, are undermining of international law, as they actively ignore the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Benjamin Netanyahu (Abu Eid, 2025). This impunity moves towards a form of complicity with Israel's regime of settler-colonialism, apartheid, and military occupation (BDS, 2025).

The influential capabilities of the EU's foreign policies have been proven by many EU-led sanctioning movements. The EU worked dominantly against the apartheid in South Africa, that ultimately led to the dismantling of the regime in the country (Qafisheh & Zaro, 2025). Similarly with Russia and South Africa, the EU has pursued immediate actions and accountability measures against countries that committed crimes and violations against International and Humanitarian law<sup>10</sup> (European Commission, 2025), stressing once again on the moral stance the EU should carry in response to Israel's crimes. The list of countries sanctioned by the EU is long and shows EU's capabilities in upholding international law. The only way for the EU to end its complicity, is through immediate suspensions and sanctions, not through rhetoric, recognitions and reviews (Bárcena, 2025). The EU must be careful to equally condemn any war crimes carried out by Israel to be credible in the eyes of Palestinians, and the international community (Joyner, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> The UN Security Council gridlock refers to the council's inability to take decisive action on critical global issues due to the veto power held by its five permanent members.

<sup>10</sup> The following list of countries EU sanctioned for crimes and violations committed against International and Humanitarian Law: Afghanistan, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Moldova, Myanmar/Burma, Nicaragua, Niger, Russia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zimbabwe (European Commission, 2025).

*"I think that there cannot be any moral ambiguity here or double standards."*

- Josh Hiltermann<sup>11</sup>.

On the other hand, the citizens majored by the young population within the European countries show massive and widespread support towards Palestine, demanding an end to the genocide in Gaza. Demonstrations swept the streets of Europe after widespread dissemination of images and videos of Israeli bombing of hospitals and residential buildings, in addition to blatant violations of international law. These marches occurred in major cities such as London, Berlin, Bern, and Paris. In June 2025, at least 75,000 people marched in Brussels and another 100,000 in the Hague, which were some of the largest rallies held in Europe to draw attention to Israel's actions in Gaza (De Ruiter, 2025). These demonstrations contributed to pressuring European governments in the EU to take a moral political stance (The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023).

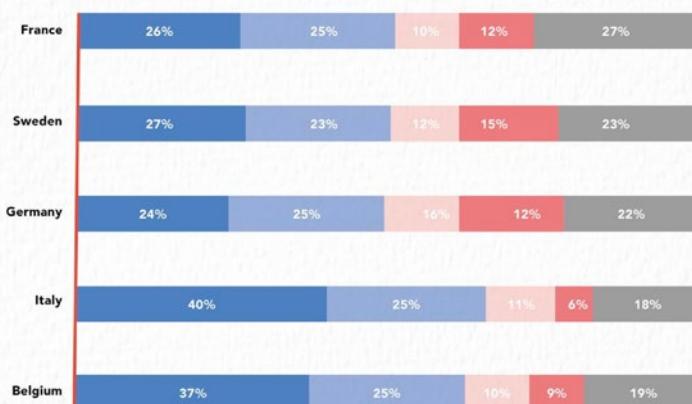
These demonstrations ultimately highlighted gaps between the public opinion and the governments. And the gaps were pinpointed when a public opinion poll was conducted in five European countries; Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Sweden by the international polling company Yougov plc. The polls convey that more than a half of people in voting age support a ban on arms trade with Israel, and a significant amount are aware of claims that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza (The Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy, 2024).

### **Half of voters in 5 European countries support Banning arms trade with Israel.**

Q: To what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose your country doing the following?  
(Banning trading arms with Israel)



### **Poll by Yougov**



Moreover, many grassroots people-to-people solidarity campaigns were initiated in support from people around the world, including Europe towards Palestinians in Gaza. The Freedom Flotilla Coalition was one focused on breaking the illegal siege on Gaza, by sending out a ship full of international volunteers carrying life-saving supplies (The Freedom Flotilla Coalition, 2025). The Israeli Occupying forces intercepted and illegally kidnapped the ships in international water, in both June and July 2025. The European Union avoided addressing the legality of Israel's actions and instead stated that responsibility for protecting the detained individuals lies with their respective countries of nationality, offering no condemnation or direct response to Israel (EU News, 2025). This furthermore stresses the impunity given by the EU towards Israel.

Some European experts argue that the public opinion is not the main driver behind changes in policies of some European member states. It is seen that even with the recognitions of the Palestinian State by some European member states such as Slovenia, such decisions totally depend on the European government currently in position within the member states themselves, which could change in the future depending on future European elections (RO'A Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2025).

To summarize, the EU and the international community face a parallel test regarding their actions towards Palestine. Israel has been allowed to behave the way it has been behaving with no boundaries or respect towards human rights and war crimes. The EU is capable of translating international norms into action, but until now refuse to do so. The lack of consensus and the EU's repeated history of only issuing statements - whether threatening or criticizing - towards Israel, with no actual actions on the ground presents itself in the same dilemma again and again, as words with no actions, and concludes a form of complicity (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

11 Josh Hiltermann is an analyst from the International Crisis Group think tank in Brussels (Joyner, 2023).

# EU and its Influence in Palestine: A Bold Payer but A Timid Player

European history clearly demonstrates its moral stance on foreign policy and sanctions towards criminal regimes, as discussed in the previous section, but shows double standards when it comes to Israel and Palestine. But is this always the case?

It is clearly proven by European historical stances in Palestine, on the ground, that if European states disregarded their reluctance over sanctioning or taking actual actions towards the illegal Israeli Occupation and actually wanted to be a “player” in positive advancement of the peace processes instead of a “payer” who issues statements, there would have been sustainable steps in the peace processes and the enactment of the two-state solution. This section aims at contextualizing the EU’s foreign historical influence in the region, with the current events, to prove Europe’s political capabilities are undermined by contradictions.

One major event date back to the year 1993, when a letter was sent by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst demanding protection of Palestinian institutions functioning within the boundaries of East Jerusalem from Israel. Shimon Peres, the Israeli prime minister at that time replied with a letter promising not to hamper any of the activities of such institutions (Peres, 1993). But unsurprisingly, in 2001 the Israeli government under the lead of Ariel Sharon has directly violated the pledge made by Israel in 1993 regarding Holst’s message (MIFTAH, 2001). Since then, EU Representatives only issued statements alongside EU missions “regretting” the extension of the ban on the Palestinian institutes (The European Union Representative & The EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah, 2019).

Another historical event in the region where the EU was successful as a mediator, goes back to the second Intifada in 2002. A five-week siege on the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem (West Bank) was terminated following a negotiated agreement of exile between Israel, the PA and European mediators. The deal focused on the exile of “Wanted Palestinians” to parts of Europe and the Gaza Strip. This event highlighted the EU’s potential as a diplomatic actor in the region but also exposed the tensions between the European and American approaches, as the US was not consulted about the EU’s mediating role (Cowell, 2002).

In 2015, the EU adopted guidelines on labelling of settlement products within an Interpretative Notice on indication of origin of goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 (Bouris, 2014). This notice was not made as a legislative or a mandatory guide, but as a guidance. It required products of Israeli settlements’ products from the Occupied Palestinian Territories to be labeled as such, and not as products of Israel. This was mainly issued for consumer protection and origin labeling and clarified responsibilities for enforcement and maintaining trade transparency. It also firmly affirmed that the EU does not recognize these areas as part of Israel under international law, regardless of their status under Israeli domestic law (EU, 2015).

Furthermore, the influence of the EU is great, but timid. Ireland for example has been pushing for international condemnation of the illegal settlement policies in the West Bank. It has issued a UN resolution<sup>12</sup> in 2018 to take a step forward in boycotting the products of Israeli settlements (Nason, 2018). While this step is beneficial, it lacks actual sanctions towards the Israeli Occupation policies.

In the same year, Israeli Authorities proceeded with plans to demolish the Bedouin Palestinian village Khan Al-Ahmar in Jerusalem to illegally annex the land and make room for the expanding nearby settlement. The high Israeli Court rejected petitions by the residents of the village and allowed the Israeli Occupying State to carry out this war crime (B’Tselem, 2018). As a response, France, The Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, UK, Belgium, Germany and Italy issued a joint statement regarding this illegal act, stressed possible consequences, and called upon Israeli Authorities to “reconsider” their decision (Sweden Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018).

A similar event also occurred when the EU also issued a statement stressing the illegality of Israeli settlements in the South Hebron Hills of Masafer Yatta in the West Bank in 2022. In May of that year the Israeli Supreme Court decided on the eviction of the residents of the village in favor of settlement expansion and the demolition of the homes of some 1200 Palestinians. The EU condemned the decision and stressed on Israel to cease its plans (European Union External Action, 2022). The EU's role in the West Bank further increased at times when some far-right extremist Israeli settlers were sanctioned under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime over violent activities against Palestinians (Council of the European Union, 2024).

Alongside being the largest international donor to the Palestinian Authority, the EU also plays a significant role in supporting Palestinian democratic life by backing the electoral process. Throughout the previous Palestinian Elections, the EU provided financial and technical assistance, observatory missions, and promoted democratic practices. They welcomed the elections that were to happen in 2021 and called upon the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections across all Palestinian territory. This was before the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas decided to postpone the elections until further notice (European Union External Action, 2021).

Unfortunately, with the US's monopoly, the EU's policies and the consensus crisis, the EU's huge role is reduced to funding and supporting Palestinian "development" and "stability", rather than mediating or producing actual change (Bouris, 2014). Since 1993, the total European aid to the Palestinians has been estimated to be around 5.6 billion euros, which is 25 times as much aid as European countries received from the Marshall Plan after World War II (BBC, 2013). Even with the EU's funding role to Palestinians, its economic relation with the Israeli Occupation is complicit in sustaining and normalizing the occupation (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). In 2022 alone, the trading sum between Europe and Israel has reached about 46.8 billion euros, making Europe Israel's first trading partner (The European Union, 2025) .

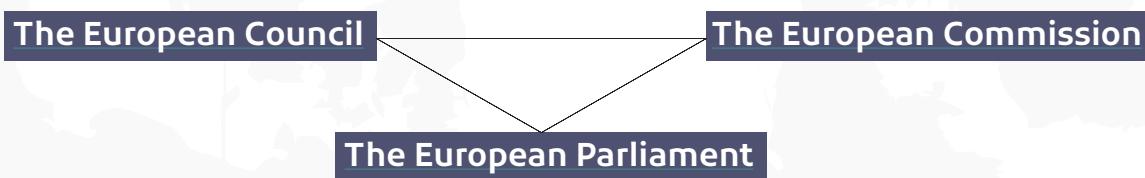
Collectively, these events, policies, and the US administration's role prove that the EU's involvement is largely limited to a supporting humanitarian aid, monitoring the events on the ground, and carrying a symbolic role of a potential influential position in Middle Eastern diplomacy.



# Summary of the Ground Realities and Political Analysis

The lack of consensus within the EU is a complicated dilemma, that goes beyond the member states themselves, and towards the technical framework of how the EU works. The European institutions responsible for the decision-making agenda in the EU are the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament (EU Watch, 2023).

- The European Council: Represents the highest level of political cooperation between EU countries. It consists of heads of governments of the 27 members, adopting conclusions and producing positions on key policy matters regarding EU's position.
- The European Commission: The main executive arm of the European Union, it prepares proposals regarding certain issues and passes them to the Council.
- The European Parliament: Consulted on foreign policy, but do not have any form of decision making.



The EU's ineffectiveness and the decline of their role in producing actual change within the Palestinian reality is a result of a complex and various interpolations, including the failure to reach a sufficient convergent approach among the EU member states, the geopolitical changes within the European region, the economic crisis, the lack of levers and instruments, and the US effect on the Middle East which relegated the EU to a secondary role in the region (Musu, 2010). In 2016 Israel pushed the EU Member States to adopt Israel's own vague definition of anti-Semitism. The Israeli government up to this day uses this same definition to justify its apartheid and occupation against Palestinians (Asseburg & Goren, 2019). Some EU member states such as Germany and France stopped funding UNRWA after October 7th, also adopting Israel's accusations of UNRWA's affiliation with Hamas. This raises a genuine question about the level of Israeli influence on some European States (Jones, 2024). It also argues, how the EU states were rapidly responsive to sanction and stop funding the UNRWA, in response to "allegations" without eminent proof, but failed to sanction Israel or cut its economic ties with the Occupying State over actual violations of international and human rights laws (Akkerman & Bhriain, 2024).

In summary, The EU's current policy dates to the early years of the EPC (Musu, 2010). The EU's consensus crisis is mainly affected by the individual nation's interests of the member states, and external pressures (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). The EU showed clear inability to adapt its policies and its institutions to many events, like October 7th, the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and its repercussions. These divisions in the EU were enlarged on the internal level of its own members as well. The way the EU's consensus work; adopting proposals only works if all member states are in agreement (Europa Nu, 2023). All of this, result in the lack of ways into moving forward and are the priority issues within European foreign policies. This lack of agreement has increased over time due to the rise of right-wing politics in Europe, the internal refugee crisis in Europe, and some European states adopting US stances and policies as well (Asseburg & Goren, 2019).

# Conclusion

The European Union maintains the commitment of providing financial support to the Palestinian Authority and civil society organizations, being the PA's largest donor. It carries a rich influential history with Palestinians, and has the tools as a potential "player" that could help end the Israeli Occupation. But being only a "payer" weakens the support for envisioning an independent and a democratic Palestinian State, and undermines the capabilities of the EU in the region. With the increasing number of European member states recognizing the State of Palestine, the EU should work on ways to operationalize statehood recognition for it to not only be a symbolic statement. Operationalization should move beyond symbolic recognition of Palestinian statehood, and adopt a confrontational and principle-based approach through legal, economic, and diplomatic instruments. This should include sanctions and accountability measures in order for the EU to keep its moral reputation; arms embargoes, trade restrictions, and financial bans on banks and companies tied to the Occupation and war crimes. It must also criminalize complicity by EU-based entities under its corporate due diligence laws.

Historically, the EU took stances that positively affected the trajectory of events in the Palestinian landscape, compared to the stances taken towards the ongoing genocide. In this essence, Palestinian state-recognition should not be only limited to the traditional approach of issuing statements.

Nevertheless, the recognitions signal Israel's failure to stretch international law to make the occupation appear somewhat moral and legal, and even de facto annexation of the West Bank using both religious and non-religious arguments, killing the idea of a Palestinian state (Cafiero, 2024). Recognition must come with an end to the Israeli Occupation, clearly defining the borders, and holding Israel accountable whilst ending its international impunity (Scheindlin, 2025). This would transform recognition into a legally binding, enforceable policy with material consequences, rather than political rhetoric.

The Internationalization of the Palestinian cause backed by the worldwide-nations' public support, is also alarmingly important, as there is no balance between Palestine as the occupied entity and Israel as the occupying state. The EU and its member states should not conflate historical guilt with current events in Gaza, as this undermines their ability to take principled action. Past atrocities must not serve as a justification for avoiding sanctions or accountability measures against Israel today.

# Recommendations

## 1. Political Recommendations

- Reassessment of the Path to Peace: We call upon the EU and its member states to redefine the path to peace through a restorative justice approach. Especially in the light of the current situation and the ongoing famine and genocide in Gaza.
- Propose Legislative Initiatives: Support parliamentary initiatives that condemn human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories and advocate for sanctions on Israel if it continues to breach international law. Notably, similar proposals have been put forward by Spain, Ireland, and former EU Foreign Affairs Chief Josep Borrell.
- Engage EU Parliamentary Committees: Work closely with relevant European Parliament committees — including the Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, and International Trade committees — to adopt stronger positions in support of Palestinian rights.
- Push for Recognition of the State of Palestine: Advocate from within the European Parliament for full EU recognition of the State of Palestine, grounded in relevant UN resolutions and international legal commitments.
- Promote Inclusive Palestinian Political Participation: Encourage greater involvement of youth and women in Palestinian political processes to diversify leadership and promote political reform. Support for democratic elections and institutional renewal can help restore legitimacy to Palestinian governance.
- Strengthen Legal Coordination with Arab Partners: Coordinate with Arab states to focus on the legal dimensions of the Israeli occupation and the need for the EU to uphold international law and UN resolutions. This could help catalyze broader EU recognition of Palestinian statehood.
- Support Independent War Crimes Investigations: Press Israel to allow independent investigations into human rights violations in Gaza and the West Bank. The EU should call for accountability and support referring these cases to the International Criminal Court.
- Listen to voices of justice, such as Francesca Albanese and provide protection for her from US sanctions.
- Support the implementation of international law and international humanitarian law and moving away from the double standards.

## 2. Economic Recommendations

- According to European Middle East Project (EuMEP), the EU is both Israel's biggest trading partner and the largest donor to Palestinians yet remains unwilling to convert that leverage into enforceable policy. Hence, the EU should work on leveraging economic tools to put an end to the Israeli genocide of Palestinians and to end to the Israeli Occupation.
- Support Sustainable Palestinian Economic Nation Building: The EU should encourage and support the State of Palestine to become a productive state by supporting industrial estates and encouraging local industries sustainable. This should also be followed by trade agreements to encourage importing Palestinian products into Europe.
- Foster Genuine Dialogue-Based Partnerships: The EU should support meaningful partnerships with all sectors of Palestinian society not only at the official level but also among grassroots actors and civil society by promoting collaboration with the Palestinian private sector. This can help develop independent local economies, strengthen economic systems, and enhance political stability. Partnerships with European universities and civil society - through seminars, workshops, and cultural/intellectual exchange programs - can foster localized and contextualized understanding of the situation on the ground.
- Support Youth Initiatives: Provide funding and institutional support for Palestinian youth-led initiatives that aim to promote dialogue and cooperation between Palestinian and European youth. Also, support youth exchange programs into Palestine, for a ground-based educational experience.
- Expose and Stop the Trade with the Illegal Israeli Settlements: Highlight the issue of trade with Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Focusing on this economic dimension can influence opinion within pro-Israel factions in the European Parliament. The EU should be pressured to ban and instantly halt trade with these settlements; this is a step that could mark a turning point in the EU's policy.
- Impose an Arms Embargo on Israel: The EU should ban arm sales to Israel, especially given their use in structural and deliberate attacks against Palestinian civilians.

### **3. Awareness & Public Advocacy Recommendations**

- Utilize Social Media for Public Engagement: Use digital platforms to directly engage European audiences, helping shape public opinion and raise awareness about the Palestinian narrative.
- Launch Joint Awareness Campaigns: Support Palestinian-European awareness campaigns aimed at educating European societies and encouraging the EU to take more supportive positions. Also, support youth exchange programs into Palestine, for a ground-based educational experience. Support youth movements in European universities and aim to learn and constantly reassess their studies on the Question of Palestine with what relates to the ground.
- Hold Hearings in the European Parliament: Organize formal hearings featuring prominent Palestinian voices - including politicians, activists, and researchers - to present the situation from a human rights and international law perspective. Firsthand testimonies from Palestinians in the occupied territory can be especially impactful in humanizing the issue for EU lawmakers.
- Engage European Universities: Host lectures, film screenings, cultural events, and public discussions in European universities to increase awareness among young Europeans and build a new generation of pro-Palestine advocates.
- Push for Academic and Cultural Boycott: Advocate for European academic and artistic institutions to suspend cooperation with Israeli entities complicit in policies of occupation and discrimination against Palestinians.

### **4. Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations**

- Work on dialogue between Palestinian Civil Society Organizations and European Civil Society Organizations on raising awareness about the Palestinian cause and influencing European voters especially around election rounds, as the voters are the ones making a difference, choosing their governments.
- Document and Share Human Rights Violations: Collaborate with human rights organizations to provide credible evidence of Israeli violations including settlement expansion, arbitrary arrests, and the blockade on Gaza to help shift public and parliamentary opinion across Europe.
- Mobilize Palestinian Diaspora Communities: Encourage Palestinian communities in EU countries to engage in grassroots diplomacy and organize local advocacy events to highlight Palestinian rights and political realities. Establishing diaspora networks across Europe could improve coordination and amplify their collective influence on EU policy.
- Organize Official Palestinian Delegations to Brussels: Facilitate visits by Palestinian officials to meet with EU parliamentarians and institutions, helping to provide direct insight into the situation on the ground and advocate for stronger support of Palestinian rights.

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