



Delegation for relations with Palestine

24.3.2023

MISSION REPORT

following the official mission to the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Delegation for relations with Palestine

Members of the mission:

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(Verts/ALE) (Leader of the mission)

(S&D)

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(Renew)

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(The Left)

(The Left)

Introduction

From 20 to 23 February 2023, seven members from four political groups of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Palestine conducted their official visit to Palestine. This was the first official visit of the Delegation for relations with Palestine (DPAL) to the West Bank since February 2020. In May 2022, following the Israeli authorities' unilateral decision to ban the Delegation's Chair from entering Palestine and to deny access to the Gaza Strip to the whole Delegation, the Bureau of the Delegation had decided to cancel its mission as, in those conditions, the Delegation could not guarantee that it would be able to do its work freely.

The members participating in this official visit strongly denounced the decision of the Israeli authorities to ban once again the Chair of the Delegation, Manuel Pineda (The Left/ Spain) as well as MEP Ana Miranda Paz (Greens-EFA/Spain) despite previous approval by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs permitting her entering Palestine and to deny access to the Gaza Strip to the whole delegation. They highlighted that it was unacceptable that the Israeli authorities attempt to disrupt the program of the visit of the European Parliament, especially in Gaza where the social and economic situation is extremely dire, not least due to the effects of recurring bombings by the Israeli armed forces.

This official visit took place amid a very critical situation on the ground. While 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank in nearly two decades, the number of Palestinians killed in 2023 already surpassed the death toll by this time last year and are almost entirely committed by the Israeli Defence Forces. During the mission, Members could witness permanent tensions throughout Palestine due to the occupation, settlement expansion, demolitions and of evictions conducted by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. There has been a dramatic increase of settlers' violence and acts of vandalism in the Occupied Palestinian territories. Also deadly Palestinian attacks against Israelis occurred in Jerusalem and across the West Bank.

The delegation's main objective with this mission was to scrutinise the current political, social and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian Territories and to engage with political actors and civil society organisations (CSOs). The delegation met with the Palestinian government at the highest level, namely Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Minister of Foreign Affairs Riad Malki as well as representatives of Palestinian parties. The programme also included various visits on the ground and meetings with NGOs, think tanks and stakeholders working on the monitoring of occupation policies. The visit of UNRWA refugee camp (Balata) and the meeting with students of the university Birzeit, foreseen on 23 February, had to be cancelled due to a military operation by Israeli Security Forces into Nablus and the killing of eleven Palestinians.

The delegations was briefed upon arrival by the EU Head of Delegation, Ambassador Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, and a debriefing took place on the last day with the Consul General of Sweden in Jerusalem, Mr Julius Liljeström (SE CG/Presidency of the Council of the EU).

The delegation stressed that the tense and critical situation on the ground called for urgent action from the EU with strong support for the two state solution and clear communication vis-a-vis Israel to halt settlement construction, cease all forms of violence and fulfil its obligations under international law.

Summary account of meetings

1. The state of bilateral inter-parliamentary relations

The last official visit of the Delegation for relations with Palestine (DPAL) to the West Bank dated back to February 2020; hence, the mission in question was particularly relevant.

Despite the fact that the Delegation does not have a proper counterpart to hold an institutional outgoing IPM (as the Palestinian Legislative Council has not met in a regular session since 2007), the programme of the mission included important political meetings in Ramallah, not only with representatives of the Palestinian Authority (Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Minister of Foreign Affairs Riad Malki) but with representatives of Palestinian parties and other political stakeholders as well (Mustafa Barghouti/Palestinian National Initiative (PNI), Bassam Salhi /Palestinian People's Party (PPP) and Rateba Natsheh.

The representatives described the current Israeli government as the most hard line executive so far, and denounced the occupation and policies violating the rights of the Palestinian people (establishment of nine new settlements, deportations, confiscations, evictions and demolitions of houses, cultural occupation, and killing of Palestinians with impunity). They underlined that from their standpoint even the opposition (Lapid) could not be considered as moderate. They criticised the inaction of the EU towards Israel and its occupation practices as well as the double standards that the EU seems to apply on violation of international law and looking at the EU reaction re the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. They asked the EU to put pressure on Israel to put an end to the occupation, rather than being vocal only on the need to improve the living conditions of Palestinians under occupation.

The delegation stressed the need to see a functional and effective Palestinian Legislative Council carrying out its role as representative of the people and as legislator. The political participation, especially of the youth is important - they claimed - particularly against the backdrop of the significant gap in age and ideas between current leadership and the younger population. Members recalled that the European Parliament stands ready to send its elections observation team in support of the EU election observation mission, once a date is set.

Regarding the elections, the representatives stressed the need to ensure their free and fair conduct in East-Jerusalem, with particular attention to the free participation of all not only during the voting but also during the whole electoral campaign. They underlined the importance of having EU observers. They expressed their disappointment that reforms on the electoral law were not in the end as ambitious as they would have wished for (minimum age for being candidate still too high - 28 years old, a too low compulsory quota for women as elected members - 26 %, limited financial support for all parties, high participation fees for parties to run for elections). However, the threshold is relatively low (1.5%) allowing small parties to be elected. They stressed that the reconciliation process must continue (follow-up of the Algiers Agreement). National rights should be ensured with the end of occupation and civic rights through the democratic process and the end of internal divisions.

2. The state of bilateral political, economic, financial and social relations

In Ramallah, Members also met with Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Foreign Affairs Minister Riad Al-Malki. The delegation reaffirmed that the Palestinian Authority is a valuable partner for peace and State building, they however underlined that economic and political reforms are much needed. Both MFA and Prime Minister denounced the current Israeli government and its announced occupation plans, criticised the inaction of the international community towards Israel and its

occupation practises. Both called for the recognition of Palestine by all EU Member-States. MFA Al-Malki stressed that, in front of this current outburst of violence, the PA had decided to ask for a Resolution in front of the UN General Assembly and to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) about the type of regime Israel established in the Occupied Territories. Based on the answer of the ICJ, he expected the International community to react.

Prime Minister Shtayyeh underlined the political vacuum in which the Palestinian question is now placed to date. He highlighted the new initiatives that the Palestinian side is promoting with regional actors and in various fora (Munich Security Forum, African Union Summit etc.) in order to relaunch the peace process as well as to achieve national reconciliation. The PA is working closely with Algeria and Egypt, to favour a reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. He admitted the process is evolving slowly. He referred to the agreement reached in Algeria, but without being very optimistic about its implementation.

He repeated that the Palestinian Authority welcomed the two-state solution, while accusing Israel of systematically destroying any perspectives to achieve it. He considered that all Israeli governments are radical, and there is only a variation in terms of degree/intensity when it comes to their radicalism. He recognized the specific brutality of the new Netanyahu government, in which extreme right-wing parties participate, also regarding the rhetorical arguments displayed according to which Jewish people would have exclusive rights on the settlements in Palestine based on their right of return.

Mr Shtayyeh admitted that the PA public finances are in dire conditions. Israel is pushing the Palestinian National Authority to a collapse, by deducting illegally each month about 276 million shekels, without any financial audit and for improper reasons. The PA has a drafted reform agenda dealing with public finance, public administration, local government and security issues. He guaranteed that progress is on the way on reforms.

He stressed that elections must be conducted in Palestine, to fully reveal the democratic and inclusive nature of the state, but underlined that these can only take place were Israel to allow for them to take place in East Jerusalem. He considered that local governments' elections are also as important as national elections, while asserting that Fatah is not afraid to organize elections. He asked MEPs to help the PA with the national elections by pushing Israel to respect the signed agreement, including land security and legal elections.

Members encouraged the Palestinian Authority to organise the long-due presidential and parliamentary elections in all occupied Palestinian Territories, including East-Jerusalem and called on all actors to resume talks and efforts in order to set a new date, as soon as possible.

3. Human rights and occupation policies

The Delegation reaffirmed that the two state solution based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as the capital of both states remains the only viable option for the European Union to achieving peace, and hence strongly denounced settlers violence and the latest violent incursions by the Israeli military forces into Nablus as well as the provocative actions and unilateral decisions on settlement expansion and outpost legalisation by the Israeli government.

Erosion of the status quo of the Holy Sites - Growing pressure on Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem

Members were briefed during their visit to Haram Al Sharif about attempts by Israeli authorities to erode the status quo of the Holy Sites. Al-Haram al-Sharif, where Al-Aqsa Mosque is located, is administered by the Jordanian-appointed Jerusalem Waqf Council who decides what happens

within its boundaries. Beginning of the year, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited the compound and has been calling for greater Jewish access to the site, including the right to pray there. Israeli police has reportedly begun quietly easing restrictions on Jewish prayer in the compound. These news practices are trying to change the current status quo and establish Israeli control over the Islamic holy site.

A Visit of East Jerusalem, including the old town, and meetings with CSOs working on the monitoring of the occupation policies, allowed the delegation to witness the growing pressure on Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. Members were briefed by the Jerusalem Human Rights Consortium regarding the limitations on building permits for Palestinians in Jerusalem. In 2019 from the overall authorized housing units by Israeli authorities, less than 7.5% were approved for Palestinians. Between 2000 and 2021, settler population in East Jerusalem increased by approximately 46%. Members were informed about the City Centre Plan, which seeks to solidify Israeli sovereignty over an area regarded as the heart of the city. Regarding demolitions in Jerusalem, if the current trend continues, more than 1.600 demolitions and the displacement of more than 2.200 individuals are expected. Demolitions orders have increased by more than 300%.

Additionally, the Consortium updated the delegation about the troubling situation of Christians particularly in East Jerusalem as well as the West Bank, who face increasing attacks by far-right groups, including five in February 2023, and harassment in their traditional quarters in the old town or else they remain separated from their holy sites in Jerusalem as a consequence of the Israeli occupation and its policies. Christians as well as Muslims are, as Palestinians, are suffering from the alarming developments of the occupation.

Settlements, demolitions, evictions

The delegation went to East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem and the South Hebron Hills, including Masafer Yatta and witnessed the devastating effects of Israeli occupation - settlements, evictions and demolitions of properties - on the daily life of the Palestinian population, notably on their dire and deteriorating human rights situation.

In Bethlehem, Members were briefed by the Applied Research Institute about the expansion of Israeli settlements and, with visits on the ground, they perceived the unsettling acceleration of the expansion of the settlement enterprise in the West Bank and Jerusalem with house demolitions, harassments of Palestinian communities and killings in the South Hebron Hills (Masafer Yatta).

During these briefings and field visits, it was underlined that the perspective for the two state solution is fading due to settlements expansion and the Israeli narrative claiming that the Palestinian territory is not occupied but rather disputed. Israel's "facts-on-the-ground" policy to annex Palestinian territory and establish demographic realities through settlements will continue impeding any attempt to reach a resolution of the conflict. During the past few years, Israeli settlers adopted a new approach to take over Palestinian Land in the occupied territory, through illegally established Herding Outposts, most notably in the Jordan Valley area and the southern Hebron Hills. It was stressed to the delegation that on 13 February 2023, the Israeli Security Cabinet decided to legalize nine illegal outposts in the occupied West Bank and turn them into new settlements. In January 2023 the Israeli occupation Authorities notified that in the coming days, about 1,500 Palestinians from Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills, whose land was designated "Firing Zone 918", would receive notices of eviction from their homes.

The building of massive infrastructures to connect settlements to Israel proper became evident during the visit of an Israeli settlement (Giv'on Hahadasha) in the West Bank and exposed the contrast to the extremely limited freedom of movement of Palestinians. Members were briefed

about master plans for transportation, including roads for Israeli settlements and massive construction of "high-speed tunnels" into the land throughout the occupied West Bank in order to connect Israeli settlements together, and have more unified access to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and other big urban centers. The underground highways are planned to work in such a way to provide so-called "transportational contiguity" for both Israelis and Palestinians.

With two field visits in communities of East Jerusalem (Wadi Qaddoum and Jabal Mukabber) the delegation witnessed the pressure on the Palestinian residents facing eviction orders and demolitions. Discriminatory policies persist in the field of urban planning and construction due to demographic motives aimed at reducing the presence of the local Palestinian population as much as possible. Jabal Mukabber has been among the Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem with the highest number of demolitions per year. Since the start of 2023, there have been 58 demolitions across East Jerusalem - 25 residential units and 33 non-residential structures.

Members recalled that settlements are illegal under international law. The settlements and annexation must be stopped and reversed to obtain the two state solution and a viable Palestinian state. The delegation therefore condemned the recent decisions of the Israeli government to expand settlements and its memorandum of understanding transferring the civil administration over the occupied Palestinian Territories from the military commander to Minister Smotrich, which constitutes a de jure annexation. They underlined the importance of accountability, of the respect for international law and of the support to Palestinian presence in the West Bank with EU funding. Members recalled that the demolition and destruction of EU and EU Member States funded structures in the West Bank is steadily rising and call for Israel to stop demolitions and compensate for the loss. In almost all meetings, Palestinian interlocutors expressed their disappointment about the international community's inaction in the face of Israel's violations.

Civil Society

In Ramallah, meetings with a broad spectrum of Palestinian civil society representatives (Amnesty, Avaaz, Lawyers for Justice Group, Zimam, Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, Teachers CC, Istiqlal, AMAN) revealed the immense challenges to their work, as they face permanent pressure from both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Interlocutors mentioned the need to hold elections in Palestine, insisting that when these were to take place Israel should refrain from obstruction.

The delegation met with the six NGOs listed as "terrorist organizations" by the Israeli authorities, but recognised by the EU. Members condemned this designation, which seriously constrains their legitimate human rights and humanitarian work and recalled the long-standing cooperation of many of them with the EU and its Member States, calling for a reversal of this decision and asking Israel to cease the disruption of their work. They deplored Commissioner Varhelyi's arbitrary decision to suspend EU funding for one year, welcomed the decision of the European Commission President to resume funding, and underlined the European Parliament's position that EU funds should not be suspended without evidence of misuse. They reiterated EU's continuous support for civil society organisations and exchange between Europeans and Palestinians. NGOs expressed their strong concern over the Israeli government's plan to tax foreign government's financial contributions to civil society groups at a rate of 65%, essentially cutting them off essential funding.

Additionally in Ramallah, the delegation had an exchange of views with independent journalists (Al Jazeera, 24 FM, Wattan News Agency). Journalists stressed that they operate in a particularly high-risk environment due to political instability and security concerns. They have to deal with pressure from the Israeli side who at times restricts their access to some areas and thereby limits the topics they can cover (interviews with former prisoners are perceived often as provocation). They explained that contacts and networking with foreign Medias are not easy. The Israeli influence on the coverage of the events by the foreign Media is significant (see the case of assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh).

In Jerusalem the delegation met with various organisations working on the monitoring the occupation policies (ECHO, OCHA, West Bank Protection Consortium, B'Tselem, Ir Amim, Emek Shevek, Terrestrial Jerusalem, Mossawa Center-Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, Musalaha, Peace Now). Members were briefed on the systematic and various forms of suppression of freedom and violations of rights of Palestinians in the West Bank resulting from the occupation, on the perspectives for a solution and the role that the European Union and more specifically the European Parliament could play to this end.

Conclusions

As mentioned above, this was the first official visit of the Delegation for relations with Palestine to the West Bank, since February 2020 and after the aborted mission of the Delegation of May 2022 following the Israeli authorities' unilateral decision to ban the Delegation's Chair from entering Palestine and to deny access to the Gaza Strip to the whole Delegation. Once again, the delegation had to deal with similar practises and unilateral decisions of the Israeli authorities, resulting to the obstruction of the delegation's and European Parliament's work. Nevertheless, the delegation succeeded to have a very intense and fruitful mission with a large spectrum of meetings and in field visits.

The delegation met with high-level government representatives, representatives of political parties, of civil society, think tanks and other stakeholders in a very timely period, permitting a comprehensive and sincere dialogue with all stakeholders. The mission allowed the members to witness the current critical situation on the ground resulting from the occupation of the West Bank, including in East-Jerusalem and the deterioration of the human rights situation across the occupied Palestinian territories.

The key messages delivered by the EP delegation during the mission were : an end to the prolonged occupation, adherence to international law is essential to achieving peace in the Middle East and remains a fundamental priority for the European Union, particularly in view of the two state solution, based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as the capital of both states, as the only viable option; the critical need to organise the long-due presidential and parliamentary elections in all occupied Palestinian Territories, including East-Jerusalem.

Proposals for follow-up

The EP Delegation for relations with Palestine will continue to closely monitor the current critical situation on the ground. With its upcoming meetings, the Delegation will continue to raise awareness on the deterioration of the human rights situation across the occupied Palestinian territories as result of the ongoing Israeli occupation.

The Delegation will discuss the mission report in one of its upcoming meetings and will ask to report to AFET about the findings of this mission in the presence of VP/HR Borrell.

Annexes

- I. Final programme and list of participants
- II. Press statements

Annex I - Final programme and list of participants

FINAL PROGRAMME

Monday 20 February 2023

Reception with the EU Heads of Mission hosted by EU HoD Ambassador

Tuesday 21 February 2023

Visit to Haram Al Sharif
Visit to the South Hebron Hills and Masafer Yatta
Briefing on Israeli settlement policy
Visit of Old City - Briefing by Human Rights organisations
Meeting followed by dinner with civil society and community representatives

Wednesday 22 February 2023

Meeting with representatives of Palestinian Parties
Meeting with Dr Riad Malki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates
Meeting with PM Dr Mohammad Shtayyeh
Meeting with HR NGOS
Meeting with the Palestinian Independent Journalists
Dinner with organisations working on the monitoring the occupation policies

Thursday 23 February 2023

Meeting on settler outposts and visit on settlements
Field visit to home demolitions in East Jerusalem
De-briefing and diner hosted by the Consul General of Sweden in Jerusalem,

FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

7 Members

Ms Margrete AUKEN, *Chair*
Mr César LUENA
Mr Nicolás GONZÁLEZ CASARES
Ms Salima YENBOU
Ms Grace O'SULLIVAN
Mr Marc BOTENGA
Mr João PIMENTA LOPES

2 Staff DG EXPO

4 Political Group Advisors

8 Interpreters + 1 technician

Press statement

Delegation for relations with Palestine

22-02-2023

Statement of the Members of the official mission to the West Bank and to Gaza

Jerusalem, 22/02/2023

The last minute decision of the Israeli authorities to deny entry in the country to MEP Ana Miranda Paz, member of the DPAL, is unacceptable. Last week, for a second time since last year, the same entry ban concerned the Delegation's Chair Manu Pineda. Both decisions of the Israeli authorities target the European Parliament's work and our institution as a whole.

The Delegation's main objective with this mission is to scrutinise the current critical political, social and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian Territories and engaging with political actors and CSOs. The Delegation cannot accept that the Israeli authorities unilaterally decide which Members the European Parliament can or not entrust on a mission to visit Palestine.

The Israeli authorities had been informed well in advance of the composition of the delegation and the entry of Ana Miranda Paz had been authorised expressly by the Israeli authorities. She was instead stopped upon arrival at Ben Gurion airport, spent the night awaiting checks, was offered no accommodation, was handed an entry ban and booked on the first flight back to Spain.

The Delegation also recalls that Ms Miranda Paz, as all Members of the European Parliament, enjoys diplomatic status with all the attached rights and privileges and it will request that the European Parliament assesses whether these rights and privileges have been duly respected during her custody.

Additionally, the Israeli authorities also prevented the whole Delegation from entering the Gaza Strip. Members of the European Parliament have not been allowed to enter Gaza for over a decade, hindering work related to the extremely precarious humanitarian situation in this territory. The European Parliament with its latest resolution of 14 December 2022 "*on the prospects of the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine*" called for unhindered access for Members of the European Parliament to the Gaza Strip. This reality reminds the world that Israel is the occupying power of the Palestinian Territories, including Gaza.

These decisions show a regrettable lack of respect of Israeli authorities for the European Parliament and an attempt to unduly intervene on the way in which the Delegation for relations with Palestine should carry out its mandate. The situation is even more unfortunate in light of the recent visit of President Herzog in the European Parliament on 26 January, which strengthened the bond between our institution and the State of Israel.

Ms Margrete AUKEN, *2nd Vice-Chair*
Mr César LUENA
Mr Nicolás GONZÁLEZ CASARES
Ms Salima YENBOU

Ms Grace O'SULLIVAN
Mr Marc BOTENGA
Mr João PIMENTA LOPES

Press statement



Delegation for relations with Palestine
01-03-2023

European Parliament

The European Parliament delegation strongly condemned the occupation policies in the West Bank, including East-Jerusalem and expressed deep concern about the human rights situation across the occupied Palestinian territories. It reaffirmed that adherence to international law is essential to achieving peace in the Middle East and remains a fundamental priority for the European Union.

Seven members from four political groups of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Palestine, led by Vice-Chair Margrete Auken (Greens-EFA/Denmark) have concluded last Friday, their official visit to Palestine (20-23 February 2023). The members conducting the official visit strongly denounced the unilateral decision of the Israeli authorities to ban once again the Chair of the Delegation, Manuel Pineda (The Left/ Spain) as well as MEP Ana Miranda Paz (Greens-EFA/Spain) from entering Palestine and to deny access to the Gaza Strip to the whole delegation. They highlighted that it is unacceptable that the Israeli authorities attempt to block the European Parliament's work.

The Delegation's main objective with this mission was to scrutinise the current political, social and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian Territories and to engage with political actors and civil society organisations (CSOs). The delegation reaffirmed that the two state solution based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as the capital of both states remains the only viable option for the European Union to achieving peace, and hence strongly denounced settlers violence and the latest violent incursions by the Israeli military forces into Nablus as well as the provocative actions and unilateral decisions on settlement expansion and outpost legalisation by the Israeli government. Members recalled that settlements are illegal under international law. The settlements and annexation must be stopped and reversed to obtain the two state solution and a viable Palestinian state. The delegation therefore condemned, the recent decisions of the Israeli government to expand settlements and its memorandum of understanding transferring the civil administration over the occupied Palestinian Territories from the military commander to Minister Smotrich which constitutes de jure annexation. They underlined the importance of accountability, the respect for international law and supporting Palestinian presence in the West Bank with EU funding. In almost all meetings, Palestinian interlocutors expressed their disappointment about the international community's inaction in the face of Israel's violations.

The delegation went to East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, the South Hebron Hills, including Masafer Yatta and witnessed the devastating effects of Israeli occupation policies - settlements, evictions and demolitions of properties - on the daily life of the Palestinian population, notably on their dire and deteriorating human rights situation. Members perceived the unsettling acceleration of the expansion of settlement enterprise in the West Bank and Jerusalem with houses demolitions, harassments of Palestinian communities and killings in the South Hebron Hills (Masafer Yatta) as well as eviction orders and demolitions in communities of East Jerusalem (Wadi Qaddoum and Jabal Mukabber). The building of massive infrastructures to connect settlements to Israel became apparent during travels and visits of an Israeli settlement (Giv'on Hahadasha) in the West Bank and exposed the contrast to the extremely limited freedom of movement of Palestinians.

Members were briefed during their visit to Haram Al Sharif about attempts by Israeli authorities to erode the status quo of the Holy Sites. A Visit of East Jerusalem, including the old town, and meetings with Palestinian and Israeli CSOs working on the monitoring of the occupation policies, allowed the delegation to witness the growing pressure on Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. It also laid bare the troubling situation of Christians particularly in East Jerusalem as well as the West Bank, who face increasing attacks by far-right groups, including five in February 2023 and harassment in their traditional quarters in the old town or remain separated from their holy sites in Jerusalem as a consequence of the Israeli occupation and its policies. Christians as well as Muslims are, as Palestinians, suffering from the alarming development of the occupation.

In Ramallah, meetings with a broad spectrum of Palestinian civil society representatives and independent journalists revealed the immense challenges to their work, as they face intense pressure from both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The delegation met with the six NGOs listed as “terrorist organizations” by the Israeli authorities. Members condemned this designation, which seriously constrains their legitimate human rights and humanitarian work and recalled the long-standing cooperation of many of them with the EU and its Member States, calling for a reversal of this decision and cease disruption of their work. They deplored Commissioner Varhelyi's arbitrary decision to suspend EU funding for one year, welcomed the decision of the European Commission President to resume funding, and underlined the European Parliament's position that EU funds should not be suspended without evidence of misuse. They reiterated EU's continuous support for civil society organisations and exchange between Europeans and Palestinians.

In Ramallah, Members also met with Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Foreign Affairs Minister Riad Al-Malki. The delegation reaffirmed that the Palestinian Authority is a valuable partner for peace and state building, however underlined that economic and political reforms are much needed. Members stressed the need to see a functional and effective Palestinian Legislative Council carrying out its role as representative of the people and as legislator. Members encouraged the Palestinian Authority to organise the long-due presidential and parliamentary elections in all occupied Palestinian Territories, including East-Jerusalem and called on all actors to resume talks and efforts in order to set a new date, as soon as possible. The political participation, especially of the youth is important, particularly against the backdrop of the significant gap in age and ideas between current leadership and the younger population. Members recalled that the European Parliament stands ready to send its elections observation team in support of the EU election observation mission, once a date is set.

Members regretted that the visit of UNRWA refugee camp (Balata) and the meeting with students of the university Birzeit, foreseen on 23 February had to be cancelled due to a military operation by Israeli Security Forces into Nablus and the killing of eleven Palestinians. The delegation stressed that the tense and critical situation on the ground calls for urgent action from the EU with strong support for the two state solution and clear communication vis-a-vis Israel to halt settlement construction, cease all forms of violence and fulfil its obligations under international law.

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