

**Question for written answer E-8682/2010
to the Council
Rule 117
Emilio Menéndez del Valle (S&D)**

Subject: Football, Palestine and Israel

The signing of the 1994 Oslo Agreements gave rise to hopes that a viable, secure Palestinian State would be established in the relatively near future, and would coexist with the existing State of Israel, whose security was guaranteed.

On the basis of the Oslo Agreements, Israeli teams were admitted to European sporting competitions.

People also thought that – at least as far as sports were concerned – Israel would immediately facilitate freedom of movement for Palestinians.

Not so. And when it comes to the most important sport – football – the Palestinian national team has been the victim of every kind of obstacle, hindrance and difficulty. Not to mention much harsher action. For example, during the last invasion of Gaza, Israeli forces bombarded the Palestina Stadium, the offices of the Palestinian Olympic Committee, and killed two former members of the national team.

For the team, taking part in competitions has always been an odyssey. Until very recently, the team had to play in Jordan, Egypt or Qatar because it had no pitch that met the FIFA requirements. They now have a FIFA-standard pitch. Little good it does them. Mean-spiritedly, the Israelis continue to create countless obstacles, just as they do with the so-called political peace process. Footballers are prevented from leaving the Occupied Territories to compete abroad, while footballers from the Palestinian diaspora are stopped at the Israeli border and prevented from entering the Territories to take part in competitions.

The most recent case, last August, when six players were prevented from taking part in a match in Mauritania. For security reasons, according to the official explanation.

All of this led an indignant Michel Platini, the UEFA President, to hint some weeks ago that UEFA would expel Israeli teams from European competitions if this attitude continued.

I know that the Council has its difficulties when it comes to playing an active and effective part in the so-called peace process (despite the fact that the largest economic contribution comes from the EU). Nonetheless – and for the sake of making the tragic situation of the Palestinian people even a tiny bit less bitter – does the Council think that on this side issue, it could take any effective steps to persuade the Israeli authorities that, with regard to this issue, at least, they should apply common sense and refrain from applying small-minded measures?