

EU-Israel Association Council - EU statement

EIGHTH MEETING OF

THE EU-ISRAEL ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

(Luxembourg, 16 June 2008)

Statement of the European Union

1. The EU warmly welcomes this **eighth Meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council which** takes place shortly after Israel celebrated sixty years since the establishment of an independent State of Israel.
2. Last year, during the seventh Meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council, Israel proposed to upgrade its relations with the European Union and has presented a series of proposals to achieve this goal. The EU, responding positively to Israel's request, expresses its deep satisfaction with the fact that this EU-Israel Association Council will mark a new phase in our relations.
3. Our common goal to upgrade relations stems from our awareness of the traditional links, the cultural and human values, and the economic and security interests that we share. Israel is a key partner of the EU in the Mediterranean. It has contributed to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since its origins in 1995. As a vibrant market economy, with a well developed public administration and a functioning rule of law, Israel also possesses the necessary institutional structures which permit it to work ever more closely and intensively with the European Union.
 1. Since its conception in 2003, the European Neighbourhood Policy has contributed to an increase in both the quantity and the quality of relations between the EU and Israel. The European Neighbourhood Policy provides a flexible framework for further strengthening of relations with all ENP partners, including the Palestinian Authority, on the basis of the principle of differentiation, ensuring equal possibilities for all partners. Further upgrading of relations will take place within this context. The EU considers that the upgrading of relations with Israel serves the purpose of pursuing the common objectives and interests of both parties.
 2. The European Union wants to continue to develop its partnership with Israel in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and in the framework of the broader objective to promote stability, cooperation, and prosperity in the Middle East. Such a partnership will imply a stronger involvement of the European Union in the peace process and in the monitoring of the situation on the ground. In this context, the European Union considers that the creation of a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous

and viable Palestinian state, living side by side with a secure and prosperous Israel, will contribute significantly to peace and stability in the Middle East.

3. The European Union is determined to develop a closer partnership with Israel. The process of developing a closer EU-Israeli partnership needs to be, and to be seen, in the context of the broad range of our common interests and objectives which notably include the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the implementation of the two-state solution. The European Union also considers the need for urgent confidence building measures taken by the parties according to the Road Map in order to improve the security of Israelis, ease the daily life of Palestinians and to sustain the final status negotiations currently underway.
4. In response to our common desire to upgrade bilateral relations, the European Union looks forward to gradually strengthen cooperation by different means both at the political and sectorial levels in line with our common interest, and to make use of new possibilities to enhance Israeli cooperation in the relevant community programmes.
 - a) Reinforced political dialogue between Israeli and EU representatives on a range of levels, including meetings of Israeli and EU foreign ministers in the context of the Association Council; troika meetings at ministerial level in the margins of the United National General Assembly meetings in New York; ad hoc meetings of the Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry with the Political and Security Committee; ad hoc invitations to relevant Working Group meetings to discuss such issues as MEPP, human rights, combating terrorism, cooperation in multilateral fora, CFSP, ESDP, MDG, arms control; establishment of a full fledged Subcommittee on Human Rights instead of the informal Working Group on Human Rights; informal Policy Planning talks on strategic issues; CFSP alignment according to the conditions and procedures established by the EU.
 - b) Economic and social cooperation and development, notably in the area of employment and social affairs, gender equality and the fight against discrimination, including cooperation with European agencies and institutes.
 - c) Trade-related issues, market and regulatory reform, with a view to achieving greater convergence towards the EU acquis, in line with Israel's wish for significant integration into the European Single Market, in areas such as public procurement technical regulations on industrial products, intellectual and industrial property rights, competition policy, sanitary and phito-sanitary legislation etc.
 - d) Cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs, notably in the areas of fight against organised crime, terrorism, and money laundering and data protection.
 - e) Transport, energy, information society, environment and science and technology. This could include further cooperation in aviation, increased

convergence of Israel energy policy towards the principles of the EU internal energy market, including approximation of regulatory policy and legislation in the electricity and gas sectors, cooperation in the wider context of e-government, and convergence in aspects of environmental governance.

- f) People to people contacts. A deepening of relations could entail specific cooperation activities between the EU and Israel within existing regional co-operation instruments such as Tempus IV and Erasmus Mundus as well as work on a joint declaration on cooperation in higher education. The EU Health programme 2008-2013 is open for Israel's participation.
 - g) Trilateral cooperation: facilitation of **cooperation with the Palestinians** on issues such as energy, transport, and trade, in line with the EU-Israel Association Agreement and the EC-PLO Interim Association Agreement.
8. As stipulated in the current ENP Action plan, the EU and Israel will start negotiations reviewing the content of the Action plan. The process of identification of concrete actions in each area will be carried out jointly in the following months. The existing structure of subcommittees will provide the necessary expertise to formulate the content and scope of an instrument which should replace the current ENP Action Plan due to expire by April 2009. Upcoming subcommittee meetings will therefore be tasked to develop, each one in its sector, the content of the upgrading in each field, to be included in a document that will serve as a guide on our common way forward after April 2009.
 9. Since the last Association Council held in March 2007, both parties actively pursued the implementation of the EU-Israel ENP Action Plan. The ENP Progress Report, published by the Commission in April 2008, thoroughly described the progress made with regard to the implementation of the priorities addressed during three years since the adoption of the ENP Action plan in April 2005. It states that the ENP has clearly played a catalyst role in boosting EU-Israel relations and that the Action Plan has provided the platform to develop more profoundly EU-Israel cooperation in many fields, paving the way for Israel's participation in a number of EU initiatives, with Israel being among the front-runners in making use of the new possibilities for ENP partner countries' to participate in Community programmes.
 10. The work done within the structure of the Association Agreement since the last meeting of the Association Council demonstrates that deepened cooperation is already a reality when it comes to the commitment of both sides to fulfil their respective engagements under the ENP Action Plan. It also illustrates the scope and quality of EU-Israel relations in a wide range of areas. The recent meeting of the EU-Israel Association Committee provided an opportunity to take stock of the significant progress made in the context of our cooperation within the ENP.
 11. Some notable achievements over the past year are that: Israel – thanks to the signing of the framework protocol – is now in a position to participate in

Community programmes. It is the first ENP country able to participate in the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme. In agriculture, a major step forward towards market integration between the EU and Israel has been made with the recent common understanding on mutual trade concessions in the fields of agricultural products, processed agricultural products and fisheries. In transport, horizontal negotiations on air transport have been finalised, and negotiations on a comprehensive agreement in air transport are about to start, opening up markets and potentially generating significant benefits for European consumers. Israel's participation in the Intelligent Energy-Europe programme is now also possible in principle. In the area of customs cooperation, mutual administrative assistance is functioning well, and communication and cooperation in the fight against fraud were significantly improved (e.g. full connection to OLAF's Anti Fraud Information System). As regards (employment) social affairs and equal opportunities, cooperation in the field of gender equality is about to be deepened. In the field of justice and legal matters, important progress has been made on the way towards negotiating an operational agreement between EUROPOL and Israel. Thanks to the Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement with the EU (only non-EU country fully associated with EU's Framework Programmes since 1996), over 1,300 proposals involving Israeli researchers were already received under the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development, and 267 were accepted with a Community contribution of over €51 million. In the field of education, more than 80 Israeli students have already benefited from scholarships under the Erasmus Mundus exchange programme.

12. More recently, in addition to the EU-Israel Subcommittee on Political Dialogue and Cooperation, two informal working groups on Human Rights and International Organisations met and engaged in a thorough dialogue at expert level on a number of issues.
13. The meeting of the informal working group on Human Rights on 30 April 2008 provided for a third time the opportunity to discuss a broad range of important issues. In this context, the EU reiterates the need for an appropriate follow-up of issues discussed during the last meeting as well as generally on human rights situations of common concern. Strengthening the human rights dialogue between the EU and Israel is an essential part of the process of developing EU-Israeli relations. In this light, the EU intends to establish a subcommittee on human rights, within the framework of the Association Agreement, instead of the current informal working group.
14. Furthermore, a certain number of events were organized: a bilateral seminar on the fight against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. This second seminar of its kind provided a welcome opportunity to address issues of common concerns.
15. As of 1 January 2007, implementation of the European Neighbourhood Action Plan is being supported through a €m/year allocation under the **European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)**, destined to finance institutional cooperation activities.

16. The EU reaffirms its commitment to support the parties in the ongoing negotiations on all outstanding issues, including all final status issues, with a view to concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008 as agreed in Annapolis last November. These negotiations must urgently press ahead. The EU re-emphasizes the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a major element in moving the **Middle East Peace Process** forward.
17. The EU underlines the urgent need for swift and tangible results on the ground in order to sustain Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Action from both sides to implement their Roadmap obligations in parallel to the negotiations is vital in order to retain the confidence and support of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, the region and the wider international community.
18. The EU is deeply concerned by recent accelerated settlement expansion. The EU reiterates that settlement building anywhere in the occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law. Settlement activity prejudices the outcome of final status negotiations and threatens the viability of an agreed two-state solution. It reiterates its call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001.
19. The EU condemns the continued firing of rockets from Gaza on southern Israel including the recent attack in Ashkelon and all other activities which are contrary to international law and endanger civilians. While recognising Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the EU calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence. The EU urges all parties to ensure the protection of affected civilians in accordance with international law. The EU continues to support Egyptian efforts to bring about a cessation of violence and a solution that will allow for the reopening of all crossings.
20. The EU calls for the progressive removal of Israeli restrictions on movement and access in order to improve the situation on the ground and living conditions in the West Bank and revitalise the Palestinian economy. The EU welcomes as a step in the right direction the decision to remove a limited number of roadblocks but underlines the fact that much more remains to be done.