

Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign

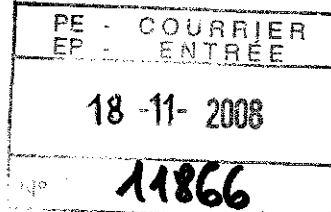
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Mr. Hans Pottering MEP
President of the European Parliament
European Parliament
B-1047 Brussels
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Dear Mr. Pottering,

One of the current political debates within the European Union is how to progress the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the context of Ireland's rejection of that Treaty. While much of the discourse has centred on the reasons why Irish people voted 'No', the debate has broadened to one of EU citizens' attitudes towards an evolving and increasingly centralised European Union. There appears to be a realisation that there may be a disconnect between the attitudes, values and priorities of EU citizens and the policy direction of the EU as an entity.

One such policy direction which is a major concern is that of EU foreign policy and specifically, EU foreign policy in relation to Israel. As citizens of the EU, we find it quite disturbing that the EU has not only forged, but continues to strengthen a relationship with the state of Israel, a state which is in open defiance of all internationally accepted standards of human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Charter, the Fourth Geneva Convention etc.. Membership of the European Union is something Irish citizens have valued because of its commitment to principles of democracy and respect for human rights. This increased collaboration between Israel and the EU is in total and utter contradiction to those principles. It clearly demonstrates that the EU desire to be an honest broker in the Middle East is not being realised.

In the first five months of 2008, Israeli forces killed nearly 400 Palestinians, mostly in Gaza, many of them women and children. In a report published on 6 March 2008, a group of NGOs including Trócaire, CAFOD, Oxfam, Amnesty International and Christian Aid stated that "the situation for 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip is worse now than it has ever been since the start of the Israeli military occupation in 1967". This situation came about as a result of Israel's economic strangulation of Gaza, which the EU itself described as "collective punishment" contrary to international humanitarian law. In this context, rather than re-considering the closeness of its relations with Israel, the EU came to the conclusion that its relations weren't close enough and, on 16 June 2008, a decision was taken to "upgrade" relations with Israel.

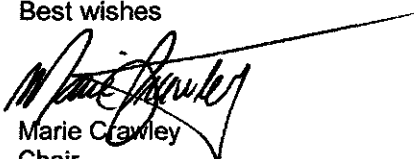
In sharp contrast, on 1 September 2008, the EU decided that meetings with Russia about a new partnership agreement would be postponed until Russia ends its military occupation of parts of Georgia. Had the conditions applied to Russia in September 2008 been applied to Israel in November 1995, the EU would have refused to enter into negotiation with Israel about becoming a partner until all Israeli troops had been withdrawn from Lebanon, Syria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The enclosed submission charts the continued upgrade of EU relations with Israel since the signing of the Barcelona Declaration in November 1995. It concludes that the EU has turned a blind eye to Israel's failure to fulfil its obligations in EU / Israel partnership agreements.

We invite you to consider this document in detail. We urge you to use your influence to overturn the EU decision to upgrade its relationship with Israel until such time as Israel complies with existing commitments and actively works towards a just solution for the Palestinian people. It is only when decisions such as these are taken and the EU re-asserts its position as defender and promoter of human rights that our trust and confidence in it will be restored.

We look forward to your response to this submission and in particular your comments on the divergence in EU foreign policy vis-à-vis Israel and Russia.

Best wishes


Marie Crawley
Chair

