

After October 7: EU Policy Towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in 2023-2024

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Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1. EU and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before October 7.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2. Reactions and policy action after October 7</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3. New EU institutional cycle and future prospects.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>About EUROPEUM.....</i>	<i>11</i>

Introduction

The Hamas terrorist operation carried out in Israeli territory on October 7, 2023, came as a surprise to virtually everyone. The scale of the attack, the ineffectiveness of Israeli defences, and the subsequent Israeli response targeting the Gaza Strip led to an escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unseen since its historical beginning in 1948. Also, the regional and global spill-over of the attack was the greatest in decades. On October 8, Hezbollah joined the confrontation with Israel, followed to varying degrees by other parts of the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance. Houthi's involvement posed a threat to maritime security in the Red Sea, a route crucial to global trade and supply chains. Subsequent increasingly escalatory steps led to direct attacks between Israel and Iran. A wave of (still ongoing) protests swept through the world, proving that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is among the most resonant and activating global issues in the international community. The state of war in the early months of 2025 is the following: catastrophic destruction of the Gaza Strip, with tens of thousands of dead and wounded or displaced, and an ongoing humanitarian crisis for the Palestinian people. In consequence, multiple states and international organizations accused Israel of a cross-section of human rights violations – from war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing to genocide. Israel and Hamas reached a ceasefire in January 2025 that allowed dozens of hostages to be released by Hamas, yet many still remain in captivity. A permanent and massive Israeli military operation is underway in the West Bank, accompanied in parallel by the rapid expansion of Jewish settlements. The war between Israel and Hezbollah, after a phase of full-scale confrontation, was halted by an armistice concluded at the end of 2024. The situation, however, remains far from stable, and the effects of the crisis are long-term.

The surprise caused by the 7 October attack was shared by the European Union. The new iteration of the crisis in the Middle East represented another major political challenge for the European community, overlapping with those related to the Russia-Ukraine war, the migration crisis and other pressing issues requiring Union's involvement. The EU's policies towards Israel and Palestine came under scrutiny, and the situation once again highlighted the extensive level of divisions among the EU states, affecting the potency and perception of its actions. Furthermore, the crisis was taking place in the context of the European elections in June 2024, the new EU institutional cycle, and the presidential elections in the United States in November 2024.

The purpose of this text is to analyse the EU policy towards Israel's war with Hamas, its dynamics, and the changes it has undergone since October 7, 2023. The starting point is an analysis of the EU's approach in the years leading up to the crisis. Further, selected actions, changes and processes undertaken by the EU institutions at the Union level will be presented. The conclusion is an assessment of the policy, its effects and an approximation of its prospects, especially in the context of Donald Trump's second presidency. The analysis builds on desk research and interviews conducted in September 2024 with representatives of the EU institutions at various levels, diplomats, and experts on the region and EU policy towards MENA.¹ Due to space limitations, the article focuses primarily on the institutional dimension of the EU level, addressing member states' actions at the bilateral level to a lesser extent. The timeframe covered in the analysis is concluded by the start of the mandate of the new European Commission on December 1, 2024.

¹ The author conducted in total eight interviews in Brussels with EU and non-EU diplomats, representatives of the European Parliament and experts.

1. EU and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before October 7

The European Union has been one of the most involved international actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1980s, supporting the two-state model as the most adequate solution for both sides. The EU's activity in recent years has remained limited compared to its potential and was criticized as ineffective.² Since 2016, the European Council has failed to issue a joint statement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to opposition from member states with an explicitly pro-Israel political line, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic or Austria.³ The responsibility for communicating and presenting the EU's position on issues such as Israeli human rights violations and the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories fell on the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, a function performed by Josep Borrell. Dialogue between the EU and Israeli authorities also remained limited as the internal situation within Israel worsened and the Netanyahu government's reforms targeted sensitive areas of minority rights and the rule of law. Changes to the increasingly outdated Association Agreement between Israel and the EU remained dependent on political developments. A short-lived improvement during the Bennet-Lapid government of 2021-2022 did not lead to more profound changes. In the Palestinian context, the most visible and emphasised aspect was the role of the EU as a donor, primarily as the financial support provider to the Palestinian Authority structures and aid programs for the Palestinian people, including UNRWA. At the same time, there was growing resentment in the EU institutions – reinforced by the voices of some member states – against funding the inefficient and corrupt Palestinian structures controlled by Fatah.⁴ On the other hand, some experts underlined that the strict no-contact policy with Hamas limited EU options regarding the situation in the Gaza Strip.⁵

EU policy remained reactive to significant developments influenced by other actors, including the announcement of Trump's peace plan and the normalization process⁶ between Israel and the Arab states. For some member states, the EU level remained a convenient forum for taking a more critical stance towards Israel than through bilateral relations. Some member states, on the other hand, used their strong stance during the deliberations to steer the shaping of the EU foreign policy according to their national positions and interests. An example of this approach was the attempt to introduce labels for articles produced in the Jewish settlements, contested for example by Hungary.⁷ The EU's overall approach to the situation was also influenced by the proximity and severity of other regional conflicts in Libya and Syria and, from 2022 onward, the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In the context of the crisis in the Gaza Strip, states in the Global South and civil society organizations juxtaposed policy responses from the European countries to the war in Ukraine and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and pointed it out as an example of double standards and hypocrisy.⁸

² S. Akgül-Açıkmeşe, S. Özel, *EU Policy towards the Israel-Palestine Conflict: The Limitations of Mitigation Strategies*, *The International Spectator* 2024, vol. 59, no. 1, 59–78.

³ E. Soler i Lecha, *Cracks in EU Foreign Policy: Exposing Divisions over Palestine and Israel amidst the Gaza War*, *IEMED Yearbook* 2024, 16.09.2024, www.iemed.org.

⁴ Interview with representative of the expert community.

⁵ Interview with an EU diplomat.

⁶ M. Asseburg, S. H. Henkel, *Normalisation and Realignment in the Middle East*, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 28.07.2021, www.swp-berlin.org.

⁷ M. Wojnarowicz, Sz. Zaręba, *Court of Justice of the EU Ruling on Products from Territories Occupied by Israel*, *Polish Institute of International Affairs*, 14.01.2020, www.pism.pl.

⁸ D. Kuttub, *As West rallies around Ukraine, Palestinians see double standard*, *Al-Monitor*, 7.03.2022, www.al-monitor.com.

Partly in response to these accusations, the Peace Day Effort was presented in September 2023 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, a joint plan by the EU and Arab states.⁹ The initiative focused primarily on creating incentives for participants in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to implement a peace agreement once it is reached while maintaining the paradigm of a two-state solution within the framework of direct negotiations between the parties.¹⁰ The event was accompanied simultaneously by European officials' sober reflection regarding the slim chances of reactivating talks between the parties. Just a few weeks after the initiative was announced, the circumstances of the conflict changed dramatically.

2. Reactions and policy action after October 7

The first reactions from the EU after October 7, 2023, were unequivocal. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen condemned the attack by Hamas and called for solidarity with Israel. Josep Borrell, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, and several commissioners and chairs of the Euro parliamentary groups spoke similarly.¹¹ Israeli flags were displayed on the European Commission's building, as in other EU capitals. President von der Leyen and President Metsola visited Israel on October 11, reiterating their support for the country. In the opinion of some experts, the EU's first actions and the failure – at least through official channels – to indicate boundaries on Israel's response to the Hamas attack or to express clear opposition to the actions announced by Israeli decision-makers against the people in the Gaza Strip, was perceived by the Israeli government as granting operational freedom and acquiescence to unlimited military action against Hamas.¹² As a result, the beginning of the war created an unfavourable image of the EU in the MENA countries and other partners in the Global South. From the beginning of the escalation, the conflict had a strong influence on the EU countries, their media and public space through demonstrations, solidarity manifestation, acts of anti-Semitism, and disinformation. For some EU countries, one of the aspects influencing their perception of the conflict was the share of their citizens among those killed and taken hostage by Hamas and those exposed to further hostilities in the region.¹³

At the political level, the fundamental message from the EU and member states was a call for condemnation of Hamas' October 7 actions, a ceasefire and the release of hostages, and ensuring that civilians in the Gaza Strip – where the Israeli ground operation began in late October – have access to the humanitarian aid.¹⁴ The EU's framework of three "yes" and three "no" was presented by Borrell at a meeting with the Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. A "no" to the displacement of the Palestinian population from Gaza, a "no" to territorial changes, and a "no" to the separation of the Gaza issue from the broader Palestinian problem. The "yes" related to the return of the Palestinian Authority to the governance of the Gaza Strip, greater involvement of the Arab states and greater participation

⁹ MEPP: *The European Union, Saudi Arabia, the Arab League, in cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, launch the Peace Day Effort for Middle East Peace, and invite the world to join*, 18.09.2023, www.eeas.europa.eu.

¹⁰ J. Magid, '100% carrots': Arab states, EU unveil plan to entice Israel, PA to sign peace deal, Times of Israel, 19.09.2023, www.timesofisrael.com.

¹¹ M. Pollet, *EU condemns Hamas attack on Israel as 'terrorism in its most despicable form'*, Politico, 7.10.2023, www.politico.com.

¹² P. Shankar, *EU staffers criticise von der Leyen's 'uncontrolled' support of Israel*, Al-Jazeera 20.10.2023, www.aljazeera.com.

¹³ V. Gera, *Diplomatic crisis erupts between Poland and Israel following killing of Polish aid worker in Gaza*, Associated Press, 5.04.2024, www.apnews.com.

¹⁴ *Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on humanitarian pauses in Gaza*, 12.11.2023, www.consilium.europa.eu.

of the EU itself in the Palestine state-building process for Palestine.¹⁵ The EU also supported the UN Security Council resolutions relating to the war, including launching the EUNAVFOR ASPIDES naval operation to protect shipping from the Yemeni Houthi attacks under UNSC Resolution 2722.¹⁶ As the conflict deepened, the division between President von der Leyen and High Representative Borrell became clear. The latter became the most resonant voice on the conflict, strongly criticizing Israel for its hostilities in Gaza, contributing to the humanitarian catastrophe, war crimes or crimes against humanity. The topic has been a constant theme in talks held with countries in the region, such as Jordan and Egypt, at the Arab League Summit.¹⁷ However, the position of the member states remained consistent, and there was no rupture of the political dialogue with the Israeli side, as advocated for by the High Representative, nor was there any revision of the Association Agreement (described by one interlocutor as the "nuclear option").¹⁸ Among the initiatives promoted by the EU diplomacy have been plans for a peace conference proposed in early 2024¹⁹ and the Global Alliance for Two-State Solution launched on September 26, 2024, referring to the Peace Day Effort.²⁰ In regard to the use of other tools, diplomats pointed to advanced talks at the Committee of the Permanent Representatives (COREPER) level and the readiness of EU member states to reactivate the EU BAM Rafah mission²¹, monitoring and supporting activities at the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt as other possible instruments.²²

The EU institutions' positions were also affected by actions from international judicial bodies that have become involved in addressing emerging violations as the situation developed.²³ These included most notably the International Court of Justice proceedings to investigate allegations of genocide charges brought by South Africa and the International Criminal Court's investigation of the Israeli and Hamas leadership for war crimes and crimes against the population – as part of which it issued arrest warrants in November for Benjamin Netanyahu, Joav Gallant and Mohammed Deif (deceased)²⁴. These issues have proven to be among the most divisive for EU member states, particularly the question of the ICC warrants implementation, which some member states have contested in various forms.²⁵ Experts also pointed out that despite official positions,²⁶ there has been a lack of more vigorous declarations and reaffirmation of principles stemming from the jurisprudence of the international judiciary, primarily on the illegality of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.²⁷

¹⁵ *Palestine: Press remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell after his meeting with Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority Mohammad Shtayyeh*, 17.11.2023, www.eeas.europa.eu.

¹⁶ *About the Operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES*, 20.02.2024, www.eeas.europa.eu.

¹⁷ *Middle East: The voice of reason must prevail on the voice of hate*, 20.11.2024, www.eeas.europa.eu.

¹⁸ *EU foreign ministers reject move to freeze dialogue with Israel over Gaza war*, Reuters 19.11.2024., www.reuters.com.

¹⁹ M. Psara, J. Liboreiro, *Revealed: Josep Borrell's 10-point peace roadmap for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, 19.01.2024, www.euronews.com.

²⁰ *Israel/Palestine: Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution announced in the UNGA margins*, 26.09.2024, www.eeas.europa.eu.

²¹ www.eubam-rafah.eu.

²² Interview with an EU diplomat.

²³ H. Lovatt, *Unlawful practices: How Europe can challenge Israel's presence in Palestine*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 23.07.2024, www.ecfr.eu.

²⁴ Israel killed Mohammed Deif in airstrike in July 2024, Hamas confirmed his death in January 2025 – the unconfirmed status in the months between allowed ICC to issue warrant against him.

²⁵ M. G. Jones, *Fact check: Where do EU countries stand on ICC's arrest warrant for Netanyahu?*, Euronews, 3.12.2024, www.euronews.com.

²⁶ *Israel/Palestine: Statement by the High Representative on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice*, 20.07.2024, www.eeas.europa.eu.

²⁷ Interview with a representative of the expert community.

The divisions between member states in their approach to the Israel-Hamas war have been reflected throughout every institutional level within the EU. In an interview, a representative of one of the parliamentary factions of the European Parliament pointed out how much energy and time it took to develop a common position (e.g. for issuing a short statement related to current events) regardless of whether it pertained to political groups on the right or the left. Although the situation in the Gaza Strip and the Middle East was the subject of regular deliberations, interpellations and resolutions of the European Parliament (e.g. on the issue of ceasefire²⁸ and hostages²⁹), observers noted that the topic had little presence in the election campaign ahead of the June 2024 European elections.³⁰

A significant novelty in the community's approach was the EU Council's decision³¹ to impose sanctions on representatives and organizations of the radical Israeli right, primarily associated with the West Bank settlement movement. It was the first such action against Israel – described in one interview as "breaking the psychological barrier" – where unanimity of member states was achieved.³² The decision was primarily political rather than practical because it included a relatively small group of perpetrators under sanctions which included asset freeze, blocking their funding and banning their entry to the EU. The process itself was not free from the standard problems of reaching unanimity, but it was an essential expansion of the EU's instrumentality, further strengthened by similar decisions by individual member states (such as France) and allies (the United Kingdom and the U.S.).³³ Less controversy and problems in reaching unanimity concerned the sanctions imposed on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.³⁴

Due to its donor role, financial tools have played a significant role in the EU policy.³⁵ In this context, one of the first controversies of the EU's approach after October 7 was the statement from Olivér Várhelyi, former Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement from Hungary, regarding the suspension of funding for all Palestinian entities in response to the Hamas attack.³⁶ It was quickly dismissed, but at the same time, the European Commission announced a review of financial support directed to Palestine (particularly the third sector), excluding humanitarian aid.³⁷ The issue has been the subject of debate and controversy.³⁸ One of the more severe blows to the EU's image in the region followed the decision to withdraw EU funding for some NGOs due to their reactions (e.g. on social media) to the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories, according to experts.³⁹ In January 2024, the Commission conducted an audit of funds for UNRWA in response to accusations by Israel that the Agency and its employees had

²⁸ *Israel-Hamas war: MEPs call for a permanent ceasefire under two conditions*, 18.01.2024, www.europarl.europa.eu.

²⁹ *Parliament calls on Israel to open all crossings to Gaza for humanitarian aid*, 14.03.2024, www.europarl.europa.eu.

³⁰ Interview with a representative of the European Parliament.

³¹ *Extremist Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as violent activists, blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza: five individuals and three entities sanctioned under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime*, 15.07.2024, www.consilium.europa.eu.

³² Interview with a representative of the expert community.

³³ When asked about Hungary's lack of obstructionism, the interlocutors rejected the *quid pro quo* option. Instead, they suggested Hungary wanted to "clear the pre-field" before starting presidency in June 2024.

³⁴ *Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Council adds six individuals and three entities to the sanctions list*, 28.06.2024, www.consilium.europa.eu.

³⁵ *Prospects of reinvigorating the Middle East Peace Process: a possible joint EU-US undertaking?*, 2.12.2022, www.europarl.europa.eu.

³⁶ J. Liboreiro, *Commissioner Várhelyi went solo with suspension of EU funds for Palestinians, prompting U-turn*, Euronews, 10.10.2023, www.euronews.com.

³⁷ *The European Commission announces an urgent review of its financial assistance for Palestine*, 9.10.2023, www.ec.europa.eu.

³⁸ *Civil society urges EU to reassess funding for Palestinian and Israeli NGOs*, 28.11.2023, ishr.ch

³⁹ Interview with a representative of the expert community.

cooperated with Hamas.⁴⁰ Eventually, following the favourable outcome of the audit, the financial support was resumed and increased.⁴¹ Humanitarian aid transferred to the Palestinians after October 7 amounted to more than 1.26 billion euro, of which more than 1 billion euro was additional aid transferred by member states (713 million euro) and from the EU budget (303 million euro) immediately after October 7, 2023.⁴² Most of the humanitarian support was allocated to specialized organizations. Direct but short-lived action was the Almathea Initiative, a corridor for delivering humanitarian aid by sea.⁴³

EU financial support was a key leverage in relations with the Palestinian Authority. The war and actions taken by Israel – withholding work permits for Palestinians and blocking the transfer of funds under the Oslo Accords – hit the stability of financial structures, creating a 1.8 billion dollar hole in the Palestinian budget.⁴⁴ An additional factor was the change of government in Palestine with Mohammed Mustafa becoming the Prime Minister. However, as in the previous reshuffles, the changes were not structural and did not alter the balance of power within the political elites of Fatah.⁴⁵ The EU pledged cooperation in aiding public finances and has begun to transfer funds for this purpose since July 2024. At the same time, conditionality was introduced, including – among other aspects – administrative and institutional reforms and changes in the social benefits system and education.⁴⁶ The conditions focused primarily on the Palestinian Authority's implementation of two significant Israeli demands. The first concerned reforms of benefits paid to Palestinians imprisoned by Israel (including those on terrorism charges) and their families. The second was related to changes in textbooks from which provisions critical of Israel or glorifying political violence would be removed.⁴⁷ The implementation of both conditions would have come at a huge political cost to the Palestinian Authority, damaging their already very low regard among Palestinians and supporting accusations of capitulation to Israel amid their warfare, ongoing human rights violations and settlement expansion. Some interlocutors called it outright blackmail calculated to take advantage of the critical situation of the Palestinian Authority.⁴⁸ In contrast, other voices pointed to the need to meet the EU member states' requirements to break through the "financial drip" status of the EU, stressing that the changes had been declared earlier by the Palestinian Authority representatives anyway and would improve their negotiating position vis-a-vis the U.S.⁴⁹

3. New EU institutional cycle and future prospects

A year of war in Gaza has overlapped with changes at the top level of the EU representatives following the June 2024 European elections. The new European Commission began its term on December 1, 2024. According to most respondents in the interviews conducted for the purpose of this analysis, the electoral success of the centre-right parties and Ursula von der Leyen's continuation in office precluded far-reaching policy changes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ European Commission Statement on UNRWA, 29.01.2024, www.ec.europa.eu.

⁴¹ The Commission will proceed to pay EUR 50 million to UNRWA, 1.03.2024, www.ec.europa.eu

⁴² Factsheet: EU support to Palestinians, 22.01.2025, www.ec.europa.eu.

⁴³ Joint Statement from the EC, Cyprus, the UAE, the US, and the UK Endorsing the Activation of a Maritime Corridor to Deliver Humanitarian Assistance to Gaza, 8.03.2024, www.enlargement.ec.europa.eu.

⁴⁴ 1.8-billion-dollar hole in the Palestinian budget, Middle East Monitor, 19.07.2024, www.middleeastmonitor.com

⁴⁵ M. Wojnarowicz, *Gaza War Poses a Quandary for the Palestinian Authority*, Polish Institute of International Affairs, 25.03.2024, www.pism.pl.

⁴⁶ The European Commission and the Palestinian Authority agree on emergency financial support and the principles for a recovery and resilience programme, 19.06.2024, www.ec.europa.eu.

⁴⁷ G. Pacchiani, *European Parliament condemns incitement in Palestinian, UNRWA textbooks*, Times of Israel, 17.04.2024, www.timesofisrael.com.

⁴⁸ Interview with a representative of the expert community.

⁴⁹ Interview with an EU diplomat.

⁵⁰ Interview with a representative of the European Parliament.

They highlighted as an important factor, among other things, the change of the High Representative, with former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas replacing Josep Borrell. Her position and program statement were interpreted as the aim to focus primarily on threats emanating from the EU's Eastern flank related to the Russian aggression in Ukraine and less involvement in the Middle East than by the outgoing Borrell. There was also an ambiguous response among the interlocutors to the new European Commission portfolio dedicated to the Mediterranean, led by Commissioner Dubravka Šuica.⁵¹ The broad portfolio, incorporating a part of the former European Neighbourhood Policy and Energy sections, covers relations with the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf and includes issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In particular, DG MENA is responsible for the EU Middle East Strategy related to the recovery of Gaza after the cessation of the war and for promoting the two-state solution and a financial program for the Palestinian Authority.⁵² The interviewees stressed that von der Leyen herself would keep the deciding vote on such sensitive issues. They noted the deliberate policy of overlapping portfolios of the various Commissioners which positions President von der Leyen as a peacemaker between the Commissioners. In the interviews, the context of inter-institutional rivalry between the different EU institutions was also raised, particularly between the Council and the Commission, with Middle East policy being one of the most affected spheres.⁵³

After October 7, 2023, the EU's approach was rather conservative and limited due to several factors. Although the positions of many EU countries evolved significantly over time (including the decision to recognize Palestinian statehood by Spain, Ireland and Slovenia),⁵⁴ the level of divergence among member states remained significant. These differences have made any compromise on positions at various levels (EP factions, COREPER) challenging, not to mention actions that would fundamentally change the EU's policy such as an Association Agreement revision. Some interviewees pointed out that the awareness of divisions and entrenchment in existing positions discouraged the initiation of new EU actions. The Middle East crisis was another aspect of the discussion about the potential revision of the principle of unanimity in the EU Council decisions in favour of a qualified majority voting (QMV).⁵⁵ This argument is especially relevant in the context of Donald Trump's return to power, whose policies favoured the Israeli position in the conflict and declared actions directly conflicting with the EU position.

According to the interviews, the EU's response was primarily rhetorical, with inconsistent strategic communication.⁵⁶ Hence, after a year of war, the EU is left with a worsened image, accused of insufficient engagement, bias and double standards.⁵⁷ This will impact the effectiveness of the EU's cooperation with the region, as its previous conditionality regarding issues such as respect for human rights will be less accepted by the countries and previously engaged actors. The position of the EU's top leadership, especially Commission President von der Leyen, was perceived as pro-Israeli and providing a "free hand" for the Israeli government's actions in Gaza. The activity of High Representative Borrell, sharply attacked by Israeli diplomacy, was seen in this context as an attempt to address the image costs incurred by the EU internationally.⁵⁸ At the same time, the attempts to "repackage" the EU's fixed policy paradigms into new initiatives were evident in comparing the Global Alliance for Two-State Solution to the Peace Day Effort.

⁵¹ Interview with a representative of the expert community.

⁵² Kaja Kallas - Mission letter, 17.09.2024, www.commission.europa.eu.

⁵³ L. O'Carroll, *EU states expressed 'incomprehension' at Tunisia migration pact, says Borrell*, The Guardian, 18.09.2023, www.theguardian.com.

⁵⁴ M. Wojnarowicz, *A Year of War: Palestinian Authority Stable but Facing Multi-Layered Crisis*, Polish Institute of International Affairs, 29.10.2024, www.pism.pl.

⁵⁵ Interview with a representative of the expert community

⁵⁶ Interview with an EU diplomat.

⁵⁷ *Letter to the EU and EU Foreign Ministers on Israel and Palestine*, Human Rights Watch, 19.07.2024 www.hrw.org.

⁵⁸ Interview with a representative of the expert community

There was an apparent desire to shift the political burden to the post-conflict aspects rather than the day-to-day operations, over which the EU's influence remained limited. Despite the criticism towards the Union, one EU diplomat pointed out that "our policy being rebuked at the same time by both sides [of the conflict] means that we are probably doing something right."⁵⁹

A key aspect of the EU's future approach will be the sustainability of the ceasefire concluded in January 2025 and the U.S. policy toward the conflict. The divergence between the EU and the U.S. under Donald Trump's leadership is extensive (e.g., on the ICC issue and the territorial integrity of Palestine), with the potential to trigger (another) crisis in transatlantic relations. Opportunities to prevent the crisis from emerging are offered by an enhanced dialogue with the Arab states that are also working closely with the U.S. However, this does not mean abandoning the dialogue and the pressure put on the parties directly involved, especially the Netanyahu government. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict at this stage is again "too big to overlook" and directly affecting member states. The situation which will require the EU to do more to demonstrate the effectiveness of its policy towards the region and improve its image.

⁵⁹ Interview with an EU diplomat.

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