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European Parliament Delegation denied access to Gaza in its tenth year of blockade

22-2-2017: the Israeli authorities have once again refused access to Gaza to the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Palestine. The explanation given by the Israeli authorities is that entry is permitted only for professionals performing a humanitarian role or diplomats accredited to Israel or the Palestinian Authority.

The official Delegation started its work on the ground on Monday and was set to visit Gaza today to assess the destruction caused in the 2014 conflict and the reconstruction efforts, as well as a number of important projects funded by the European Union.

"The refusal of access to Gaza by the Israeli authorities to the European Parliament on arbitrary grounds is unacceptable and this explanation is unacceptable! Denying the European Parliament entry to Gaza has become systematic despite the exception last year for a brief visit by Parliament's Budget Committee Chair," Delegation Chair Neoklis Sylikiotis said. "We had hoped that that visit had ushered in a new more cooperative era, but this has not been the case. This Parliamentary Delegation has been denied entry since 2011. What is there to hide from us? Our positions are well-known!"

"The European Parliament has called for the return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip, and we urge all Palestinian forces to resume efforts towards reconciliation without delay, building on the latest unity deal reached in January," Chair Sylikiotis said. "We call on the international community to put pressure on Israel to put an end to the blockade of Gaza".

"On the ground in Gaza our aim is to assess the reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts to which the EU is the major donor. EU aid targets the promotion of employment and the poverty in Gaza. We are working to ensure the people in Gaza have access to basic necessities including potable drinking water, food, housing, and schools," Chair Sylikiotis said.

The EU is the biggest donor to Palestine, and has recently launched the largest desalination plant being built so far in Gaza, providing fresh water to 75,000 people. This is among other humanitarian and development projects that the Delegation intends to assess.

The Delegation is led by Chair Neoklis Sylikiotis (GUE/NGL, Cyprus) and includes four other Members of the European Parliament: Margrete Auken (Vice-Chair of Delegation, Greens, Denmark), Brando Benifei (S&D, Italy), Ivo Vajgl (ALDE, Slovenia) and Angela Vallina (GUE/NGL, Spain).