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Press statement

Recognise Palestine to preserve the two-state solution, European Parliament Delegation says

The viability of the two-state solution is at a critical juncture and the EU and its Member States must recognise Palestine as a state to protect and preserve it.

"The EU and the European Parliament are strongly in favour of a two-state solution as the only way to achieve peace in the Middle East. There cannot be a two-state solution without two states. The EU and its Member States must recognise Palestine as a state. We as the European Parliament have done our part," Neoklis Sylikiotis, Chair of the Delegation for relations with Palestine, urged at the end of a fact-finding mission of the Delegation to Palestine.

2017 will mark 50 years of occupation.

"After half a century of occupation it is evident that the policies we have are not working to end this conflict and finally have peace. The international community must now implement UN Security Council Resolution 2334, distinguishing between the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967," Chair Sylikiotis said. "This Delegation will continue working to ensure the EU steps up its diplomatic efforts, effectively implements its labelling guidelines with regard to settlement products, and builds a fully-fledged policy of differentiation in all its dealings with Israel, respecting international law which is the cornerstone of EU policy in this matter. The EU must not only make statements, it must act fully in respect also of our own laws".

The regularisation bill has now made manifest Israel's intent to move to the annexation of parts of Palestine, the Delegation noted, stating its strong opposition to the expansion of settlements and demolitions.

"Settlement building and expansion are increasing exponentially, and there is a clear correlation of demolitions of houses and schools, some of them funded with EU aid, with the expansion of settlements in the E1 Area," Chair Sylikiotis said. "Over 300 people have already been displaced due to demolitions, confiscations and evictions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem so far this year. We remind Israel that forcible displacement is a crime under international law".

The Delegation witnessed the scale of the settlement economic activity which contributes to the de-development of the Palestinian economy. MEPs called on European companies to comply with international human rights standards and warned against the legal, political and reputational consequences of engaging with and in settlements.

Jerusalem Palestinian neighbourhoods are being threatened by settler takeovers, plans for Israeli touristic activity at the expense of Palestinian homes and intentionally discriminatory planning processes making it close to impossible to build legally, leaving families with no choice but to move away or build illegally.

The Delegation witnessed the increasing feeling of hopelessness of Palestinian youth, the creeping annexation now becoming blatantly open annexation in Area C of the West Bank, and heard the pleas for aid of communities whose homes are under imminent threat of destruction and their people at risk of forcible displacement in Khan al-Ahmar and Sateh al-Bahr.

The Delegation visited the Ofer Military Court where children as young as 13 and young men were being brought up in court on charges ranging from throwing stones, political activism, to social media posts, on the day of the visit. There is a lot of procedure but very little justice in the military courts, human rights groups and lawyers told the delegation, as MEPs walked through the barbed wire-topped metal bars and pre-fabricated cages that constitute the Ofer military court, meeting mothers and fathers waiting long hours for the sight of their children across a court room.

"After what we've seen to the Ofer court, we cannot but urge the EU to put justice and fair trials high on the agenda of any dialogue with Israel," Chair Sylikiotis said.

The Delegation discussed Palestinian reconciliation and urged the implementation of the new unity deal reached in January in meetings with Prime Minister Hamdallah, Foreign Minister Riad al-Malki and other Palestinian Authority officials and Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

The Delegation supported holding elections to enable the political participation of Palestinians, particularly for the younger generation that is increasingly losing faith in the two-state solution. The Delegation insisted on the need for the EU to observe the forthcoming elections.

EU-funded projects assessed on the mission included a school for special needs children in Bethlehem, rehabilitation projects in the Old City of Jerusalem and services in refugee camps.

Israeli authorities once again refused the Delegation access to Gaza, where the European Parliament has not been allowed in since 2011."This is unacceptable," Chair Sylikiotis said, calling for an end to the Israeli blockade the Strip which is now in its tenth year.

The Delegation for relations with Palestine began its fact-finding mission on Monday. It 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).