Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the plenary session of the European Parliament on the US recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory and the possible annexation of the West Bank settlements

Thank you Madam President,

Today we discuss with this debate two separate issues, both originate from the war of 1967 but they are separate ones: on one hand, the decision by the US Administration to recognise the Golan Heights as Israeli territory; and on the other, the Israeli government's settlement policy in the West Bank.

So let me tackle the two issues separately during this debate. First, the US recognition of the Golan Heights. The EU has a very simple and clear position that I have had the possibility to reiterate and restate in very clear manner over time and more recently. The EU does not recognise Israeli sovereignty over any of the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967, in line with international law and with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 497. And this also applies to the Golan Heights.

On the 27th of March, I issued a declaration on behalf of all the 28 Member States, clarifying that this is the position of the European Union on the status of the Golan Heights. It has always been our position and it has not changed.

In parallel, the five EU Member States who currently sit in the UN Security Council – which are the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium and Poland – expressed this common position in New York in a joint stake-out. So we always ask the EU and its Member States to speak with one voice, this was effectively done in this case and it is not the only one I have to say. I want to thank the 5 Member States that are currently sitting in the UN Security Council because the practice of coordinating positions there, expressing these position together including with public press statements done jointly with the five of them, including meetings with me to coordinate positions of the EU Member States in the Security Council is happening more and more often. And I think this is also fulfilling a responsibility that we have as Europeans to support multilateralism and a rules-based international order in these times, more in general.

Coming back to our points on the agenda today, the second issue we discuss is the Israeli government's settlement policy. I will not comment on the potential policies of a future government that is not even established yet.

What I can say is what we are seeing in recent times: over the past months Israeli settlement construction has continued. Only last week, plans for more than 4,600 new housing units were advanced by the Israeli authorities. Right after the announcement,

we issued a statement to repeat that we consider all settlement activity illegal under international law, and that settlements erode the viability of the two-state solution.

And in fact, the two-state solution is not only fading away. It is being dismantled piece by piece.

I think it is important for us, the EU, again united in this, to say clearly that abandoning the two-state solution would bring greater chaos, not only to the Holy Land but also to the entire Middle East that is already facing a very difficult situation for the proliferation of crises we have seen in the region in the last years. The next escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine could easily spiral out of control, and it would have tragic consequences in a region as unstable as today's Middle East.

Not to mention the importance that the two-state solution – and the creation of a Palestinian State consequently – has for the entire public opinion in the Arab world, again in a region that has known relevant turmoil in the last years.

Our first duty then is to keep the two-state perspective alive, and to preserve the possibility of new negotiations toward peace to take place.

In order to be realistic and successful, any future plan for Israel and Palestine will have to start from the internationally agreed parameters, recognizing them. These include the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, and the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of the two-states. On this as well the EU has been united and very clear all over these years and we will continue to do so.

The EU will recognize changes to the pre-1967 borders only if and when agreed by the parties, including with regard to Jerusalem.

This is a principled position, but it is also based on a realistic assessment of the situation on the ground. Because the two-state solution is first and foremost essential for peace but it is also essential for security, starting with the security of Israel, it is essential for democracy both in Israel and in Palestine. It is essential to guarantee a truly sustainable economic growth for both Israelis and Palestinians.

And let me add, most importantly even it is essential for peace, security and economic growth for the entire region, starting from the neighbouring countries.

If the situation does not improve, it will get worse. That is the reality we have seen in these years and in these difficult times. I believe that keeping this perspective alive can be the most courageous and the most fruitful contribution we can do, and the best service to peace, stability and security in the region.

This is what the EU will continue to do in the coming months with all those who are ready to engage towards a just, lasting and sustainable peace, starting from our Arab partners. Let me say that in the last few months we have had the chance of meeting

with the leadership of the Arab League countries, both in the first ever EU-League of Arab States Summit in Egypt and with my participation – the third in a row – to the Summit of the League of Arab States just a few weeks ago.

And I can tell you that this position of the EU on the two-state solution but also on the Golan Heights has been probably one of the main elements of discussion and is probably one of the main elements that bring together the Europeans and the Arabs in these difficult moments, in our common difficult region. So I'm very much looking forward to continue working together with them on this specific issue that is so much important for the security and peace in the Mediterranean.

Thank you.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-171607

Closing remarks

Let me restate clearly what I think I have said already several times in this hemicycle. The EU sees Israel and Israelis as partners and friends, sees the Palestinians and the Palestinian authorities as partners and friends, and we continue to also see our American friends in the United States as our partners and friends.

This does not mean that our position or our policies are determined elsewhere. Our positions are determined on the basis of the conviction of what we believe is in the best interest of peace and stability in the region – which is also our European region – and on the respect of international principles and international law. This does not change.

Reaffirming clearly and in a united manner our position does not mean being hostile to interlocutors or partners that in the meantime might change their position. It means being self-confident on the fact that we have always believed and we continue to believe that 'Might makes right' is not a good principle on which to base foreign policy. The idea that you can change borders with the use of military force is a dangerous one in Europe, in the Middle East, elsewhere.

And this is why our position on the Golan Heights has been so clear, because we believe that international rules, international law and international standards must be upheld and that this is a principle that is in the interest of everybody to uphold in a very consistent and coherent manner. If you think of the situation in the Middle East but also if you think of the situation in Europe or elsewhere, international law affirms it very clearly: borders cannot be changed by military force. And this is a principle behind which the EU will continue to firmly stand and in a united manner.

This unity and this clarity together have made us relevant in upholding a principle and a situation in very difficult circumstances. The image I have in my mind in this moment

when I think of the Middle East – where you actually do not have a process at all, it is not that the process is stuck, you do not have a peace process currently. The image I have in my mind is – I don't know if this is an English expression but an Italian would say it – 'put your feet in the door to avoid that it bangs'. It does not mean opening the door wide, it does not mean being able to restart the peace process.

To tell you the truth, to start a peace process that is consistent today we would need to have an international and regional consensus on the parameters, on the need to have a two-state solution and you would need to have political will on the two sides and also in Washington. On the European side it is fully clear.

What we have to avoid today together with our partners from the region starting from the Arab countries and I think in particular of Egypt that has such an important role both in the Arab League but also on Gaza; and of Jordan that has such an important role on the holy places. [We have] To avoid that this trend continues, consolidates and becomes irreversible to a point where the two-state solution becomes impossible. [We have] To avoid that the dismantling of the two-state solution gets to the impossibility of achieving it whenever the political will will be there.

I know this is a minimal approach but you have to be pragmatic and realistic when dealing with foreign policy and I remember that when started my mandate my first visit was in Israel and Palestine and I was saying back then, 4 years and a half ago: this conflict can be solved. And it is true; I still believe it because the international parameters are clear. But without the political will of the parties and without international consensus – that we do not have at the moment on those international parameters – I do not see this process to produce an outcome in terms of a two-state solution.

And we Europeans know very well, if it is not going to be a two-state solution then it is not going to be a solution, and Israelis know that perfectly well. Palestinians know it perfectly well and the region knows that perfectly well.

So I believe that as friends of Israel, as friends of Palestine, as friends of the region – and let me also refer to the Arab initiative that I consider to still be a good basis for negotiation – the EU is convinced and will continue to be united and clear on this conviction that is in the interest of the Israelis, the Palestinian and the region, to continue to have in mind a two-state objective, a two-state solution. That it is vital also for the security of Israelis and of Israel as such.

Thank you

Link to the video:

https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-171608