



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Council Conclusions

Strengthening of the European Union's bilateral relations with its Mediterranean partners

*2915th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 8 and 9 December 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"1. The Mediterranean region is of crucial strategic importance to the European Union. Further to the February 2008 conclusions on **strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**, significant progress has been made on reinforcing bilateral cooperation with all Mediterranean countries on the basis of the key principles underpinning the **ENP**, namely partnership, joint ownership, differentiation and tailor-made assistance, in full compliance with its single, inclusive, balanced and coherent policy framework.

2. The Council thus welcomes the completion, at the Association Council meeting on 13 October, of discussions on **Morocco's** advanced status with respect to the European Union, which reflects the common willingness of the Kingdom of Morocco and the European Union to establish an increasingly close and mutually beneficial partnership, covering all aspects and at all levels, in order *inter alia* to consolidate the reform and economic and social modernisation process in that country. The Council intends to give practical expression to the guidelines identified on that occasion.

3. The Council welcomes the prospects for reinforced EU relations with **Tunisia** and **Jordan** further to the interest expressed by these countries for a stronger partnership with the European Union. It confirms its willingness to work actively with these countries towards that goal in 2009.

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4. The Council also welcomes the willingness expressed by **Algeria** to fully implement the EU-Algeria Association Agreement, as demonstrated with the organisation of the first Association Committee meeting in Algiers on 16 September 2008.

5. The Council welcomes the start of negotiations with **Libya** aiming to achieve the rapid conclusion of a Framework Agreement providing for dialogue on foreign and security policy and cooperation in key areas of common interest (free trade agreement, energy, transport, migration, justice and home affairs, environment, education, health, etc.).

6. The Council welcomes **Egypt's** requests to strengthen its relations with the EU and has started a thorough examination of future measures, in compliance with full implementation of the Action Plan.

7. The Council welcomes the forthcoming initialling of the Association Agreement with **Syria**.

8. The Council welcomes the deepening of relations between the EU and the Palestinian Authority, the recent political dialogue held at ministerial level between **the EU and the Palestinian Authority**, and the setting-up of four specialised subcommittees tasked with following up the bilateral Action Plan.

These developments demonstrate both parties' commitment to exploring various avenues towards achieving deeper and broader bilateral relations in the light of the joint efforts aiming to create a Palestinian State. That stronger partnership will provide a framework for deepening relations, taking into account the full range of resources and instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and in particular more frequent meetings and exchanges at all levels, including the possibility of organising a summit.

With this in mind, the EU will work on the practical implementation of the Interim Association Agreement concluded with the PLO, pending the conclusion of a full Association Agreement.

9. In accordance with the political commitment made on 16 June 2008 at the 8th Association Council meeting between the European Union and **Israel**, the Council reaffirms its determination to upgrade the level and intensity of its bilateral relations with Israel within the context of the adoption of the new instrument which will replace the current Action Plan from April 2009. That building-up must be based on the shared values of both parties, and particularly on democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, good governance and international humanitarian law.

The building-up should also be conceived and viewed in the context of the full range of our common interests and objectives. These include, *inter alia*, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through implementation of the solution based on the coexistence of two States, the promotion of peace, prosperity and stability in the Middle East and the search for joint answers to challenges which could threaten these goals. With this in mind, the EU will encourage Israel to contribute to developing economic, financial and cultural relations at regional level. Israel will also be invited, for its part, to improve the daily life of the Palestinian population in accordance with the roadmap, facilitate the practical implementation of the association agreements concluded by the EU with the other countries in the region, in particular the Interim Association Agreement concluded on 17 February 1997 between the European Community and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and continue its active participation in the three-way dialogue started with the EU and the Palestinian Authority.

The building-up will itself contribute to expanding the range of interests and objectives common to the two parties, and will impart to relations between the EU and Israel a degree of trust and proximity similar to that which the Member States and Israel already enjoy in their respective bilateral relations. It will also contribute to reinforcing the EU's involvement in promoting peace in the Middle East.

It therefore complements the cooperation framework established by the 1995 Association Agreement between the EU and Israel, and builds on the experience acquired by both parties during the implementation of the first Joint Action Plan established under the European Neighbourhood Policy.

With a view to practical implementation of the political dimension of this building-up, and in the light of these conclusions as a whole, the Council adopted the guidelines set out in the Annex.

The Council also welcomes the joint examination by the European Commission and Israel of the usefulness and modalities of closer involvement by Israel in the Community's main measures and programmes.

Annex: Guidelines for strengthening the political dialogue structures with Israel

1. Holding meetings on common issues at the highest level

The EU and Israel will consider holding a summit at the level of Heads of State and Government, on an *ad hoc* basis, in order to maintain the specific nature of the partnership between the two parties, reflect the importance they attach to their relations and discuss all of their common interests and objectives at the highest level with the aim of taking them forward.

2. Broadening the scope of ministerial consultation

(a) At Foreign Minister level

Henceforth, Israel and the European Union will, in principle, hold three meetings a year at Foreign Minister level: (i) within the framework of the Association Council; (ii) in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly; and (iii) within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean. The EU is represented by the troika in the two latter cases. Furthermore, informal meetings between the Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister and his European counterparts could be organised on an *ad hoc* basis, when deemed useful by the parties.

(b) At the level of other ministers

The parties will also be able to engage in consultations in a troika format, on an *ad hoc* basis and when they deem it useful, in the margins of Council meetings other than the General Affairs and External Relations Council, to discuss the sectoral cooperation which could take place further to the building-up in bilateral relations.

3. Giving Israel more frequent access to the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC)

Each Presidency could invite the Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry to one of the meetings held during its term of office for consultations, on an *ad hoc* basis, taking into account the priorities of each party.

4. Providing for hearings of Israeli experts by Council working parties and committees

High-level Israeli experts, whether official representatives or leading figures from the academic and research communities and NGOs, could be invited, on an *ad hoc* basis, to working group meetings dealing with issues such as the Middle East peace process, human rights, combating terrorism and organised crime, cooperation in multilateral fora, the CFSP, the ESDP, the Millennium Development Goals and arms control.

At the beginning of each Presidency, Israel would be invited to put forward a list of official experts available for presentations to one or more of these bodies. The Presidency could then, if it wishes, invite these experts to specific meetings, in accordance with their agendas. The hosting working parties or committees would discuss the items on their agenda after having heard these experts and without them being present.

5. Organising systematic and broader informal strategic consultations

The EU and Israel agree to hold an informal dialogue between officials responsible for policy planning within the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry and the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union at least once a year, alternately in Israel and Brussels.

In addition to international questions identified as being strategic, the discussions could cover the European Union's action in the Middle East; in such cases, the delegation would be expanded to include the relevant officials and experts.

The discussions could also, in the presence and with the participation of the European Union Special Representative for the Middle East peace process and of the Commission, touch on all the measures taken by the two parties to strengthen the Palestinian Authority with a view to the creation of a Palestinian State, to support the peace negotiations and to contribute to a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflicts.

6. Intensifying exchanges on specific themes, notably human rights and antisemitism

The EU and Israel will endeavour to increase the range, frequency and level of their informal exchanges by building on all the possibilities offered by the subcommittees already set up under the Association Agreement.

The EU and Israel also agree to replace their informal working group on human rights by a subcommittee on human rights which will examine matters of common interest relating, *inter alia*, to fundamental freedoms, the rights and protection of minorities, the fight against racism and xenophobia – including islamophobia and antisemitism – and the commemoration, education, monitoring and supervision measures that fight entails.

7. Encouraging Israel to remain in line with the common foreign and security policy (CFSP)

The EU will invite Israel, on a case-by-case basis and every time that is in the common interest, to bring its foreign policy positions in line with those contained in the declarations, démarches and common positions adopted by the European Union in the context of the CFSP, in accordance with the arrangements determined by the Union within the framework of the strengthened Neighbourhood Policy.

8. Enabling cooperation on the ground in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

The EU will consider the possibility of inviting Israel to take part in the civilian missions conducted by the Union in the context of the ESDP, in particular as regards capacity-building, in compliance with internal European procedures. Invitations will be issued on a case-by-case basis and when they are in the common interest.

9. Encouraging Israeli integration and involvement in multilateral fora

The effort to normalise Israel's status within the institutional system of the United Nations will be continued. To this end, the relevant Member States will examine the possibility of Israeli participation, for voting purposes, in the WEOG, on a temporary basis and within the appropriate bodies. The Council notes Israel's commitment to seeking full membership of the Asia Group.

10. Intensifying inter-parliamentary dialogue

Given the quality of the dialogue already established between the European Parliament and the Knesset, these two institutions could intensify it, for instance by setting up, if appropriate, an inter-parliamentary committee."