



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions Middle East Peace Process

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

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"1. The Council reiterates its support for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process under way since the Annapolis Conference.

Even if this negotiating process has not yet realised its full potential in terms of results, the political momentum it has set in motion is irreversible. The European Union reaffirms its commitment to the role of the Quartet in the process. It supports the commitment of the parties to pursue vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations in order to reach a peace agreement providing for the creation of a Palestinian State, comprising the West Bank and Gaza, that is viable, independent, democratic and sovereign, living in peace and security alongside Israel within secure and recognised borders.

The Council reiterates its commitment to a comprehensive and regional approach to the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. It commends the indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria under the auspices of Turkey and encourages the two parties to open direct talks. It supports all the efforts deployed to achieve stability, peace and security in the region.

2. The European Union calls for a major change in the situation on the ground, in accordance with the undertakings given in the context of the roadmap, in order to build mutual trust. The political momentum has contributed to real progress in terms of security, governance and rule of law. The results achieved by the Palestinian Authority, in particular in Jenin, Nablus and Hebron, should be commended in this connection and its efforts continued.

P R E S S

3. The European Union condemns all forms of violence, especially in Gaza, as well as the firing of rockets at the civilian population, which must stop completely; the fight against terrorism must continue unabated. Corporal Gilad Shalit must be unconditionally released.
4. The EU continues to be deeply concerned by the recent acceleration in settlement expansion. Settlement activity, including natural growth and settlements in East Jerusalem, must end as a matter of urgency. It is contrary to international law and compromises the creation of a viable Palestinian State. Obstacles to movement to and within the Occupied Palestinian Territories must be lifted, in particular to support economic development. The humanitarian situation in Gaza must urgently be alleviated by continuing the truce, reopening crossing points and supplying goods and services to the population. The ability of relief agencies, particularly UNRWA, to supply aid must be safeguarded. Palestinian prisoners should be released in greater numbers, with priority being given to minors.
5. The European Union supports Egypt's mediation efforts for inter-Palestinian reconciliation. The EU is prepared to support any government which respects the PLO's commitments, resolutely supports the peace negotiations with Israel, and pursues policies and measures that reflect the Quartet's principles.
6. The EU is determined to work towards a stronger monitoring role for the Quartet on the ground, jointly with the United States and the other members of the Quartet. In order to foster a lasting settlement, the European Union, while neither intervening in the negotiations nor prejudging their outcome, reiterates its willingness to assist in the implementation of a final peace agreement, when the time comes. The Council takes note of the discussions under way at the General Secretariat of Council and the Commission in this respect.
7. The European Union is convinced that any lasting peace must be comprehensive, and reiterates its support for resolution of all aspects of the Israel-Arab conflict, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, in particular land for peace, and with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Quartet's roadmap. The EU reiterates the importance of the Arab partners' sustained, broad and constructive commitment. In this respect, it considers that the Arab Peace Initiative offers a solid and appropriate basis for peace in the Middle East to which all parties should give their consideration."