Speech by FM Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis on behalf of High Representative Catherine Ashton on the MEPP

European Parliament/Strasbourg

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Honourable Members,

As you will have seen, on Monday the Foreign Affairs Council issued conclusions on the Middle East peace process.

No-one can have any doubts about the EU’s position on this crucial issue. This is clear both in this week’s Council conclusions, but also in the Declaration on behalf of the EU issued on 29 November.

The resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, without delay or preconditions, is what the EU wishes now to see. Clearly this will require bold and concrete steps by both parties. But now, more than ever, direct and substantial negotiations are needed to achieve a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ending all claims. Clear parameters outlining the basis for negotiations are key elements for a successful outcome. The EU is ready to work with the US and other international partners, including within the Quartet, with the common aim of substantive peace efforts in 2013. The EU will also work with all those who are willing to join in such a quest for peace, stability and prosperity. The Arab Peace Initiative, in particular, provides regional support for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

All parties must avoid acts which undermine confidence and the viability of a two-state solution. Since its 1980 Venice Declaration, the EU has held that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace.

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1 Check against delivery.
It should therefore come as no surprise that on Monday the EU expressed its deep dismay and strong opposition to Israeli plans, announced after the UNGA resolution of 29 November, to expand settlements in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and in particular plans to develop the so-called E1 area. The E1 plan, if implemented, would seriously undermine the prospects of a negotiated resolution of the conflict by jeopardizing the possibility of a contiguous and viable Palestinian state and of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. The EU stated that it would closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and act accordingly.

In other words, the EU has never been clearer than it was on Monday: Implementation of such plans would not only have an impact on the prospects of a Palestinian state; it would also have an impact on EU-Israel relations.

In the same spirit, the EU expressed its commitment to ensure that - in line with international law - all agreements between the State of Israel and the European Union must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. It also reiterated its commitment to ensure continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products.

The EU also called on Israel to avoid any step undermining the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority. Contractual obligations, notably under the Paris Protocol, regarding full, timely, predictable and transparent transfer of tax and custom revenues have to be respected.

Finally, the EU called on the Palestinian leadership to use constructively the new status of non-member observer State granted to Palestine in the United Nations and not to undertake steps which would deepen the lack of trust and lead further away from a negotiated solution.

Honourable Members,

Just three weeks ago we discussed the latest hostilities between Gaza and Israel which ended with a ceasefire later that night. Monday was also the first opportunity for the Foreign Affairs Council to take stock of the ceasefire and discuss potential EU support to ensure it is sustainable. The ceasefire has held well so far. It is vital that all parts of the ceasefire agreement continue to be implemented. The EU is committed to facilitating the social and economic development of the Gaza Strip. Equally, the issue of smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip must be immediately and effectively addressed. Fully recognising Israel's legitimate security needs, the European Union reiterates its call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from the Gaza Strip. We have expressed our readiness to make use of its instruments in support of the parties’ efforts, including the possible reactivation, in the appropriate way, of the EUBAM Rafah mission.

The European Union has repeatedly reiterated its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel, including with regards to vital threats in the region. The European Union will never stop opposing those who embrace and promote terrorism and violence.

The European Union has repeatedly reiterated its call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011, as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian state and for reaching a two-state solution. Such reconciliation would also have a direct impact on the situation in Gaza, which is unsustainable as long as it remains politically and economically separated from the West Bank.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to the resolution that the European Parliament will adopt tomorrow.