

Ad Hoc Liaison Committee**HRVP's remarks**

Welcome back to Brussels, for our second meeting in this same room in only seven weeks. As you know, last January we decided to set up the first-ever extraordinary meeting of this committee, because of the **gravity** and **urgency** of the situation, in particular in Gaza.

What is at stake is the viability of the State of Palestine – that is, the viability of the two-state solution. What's at stake is the possibility of peace, security and human development for both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

In recent days, we have been reminded of the many spoilers in this conflict. First the continuing violence, including against civilians, as well as the attack against the convoy of Prime Minister Hamdallah in Gaza, then three Israelis were killed in two attacks over the weekend in the Northern West Bank and in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Our presence here is the best possible reaction. Preserving the two-state solution is the best answer to the spoilers and the enemies of peace.

Seven weeks ago, I said that we should make full use of the time between these two meetings, in January and today. To work together, both the two parties and the international community, and to translate the political will into concrete progress on the ground. Quite a few things have happened between then and now.

As a result of our discussion here in January, **two important meetings** took place in the meantime, in Cairo and in Washington, with a focus on how to improve the situation in Gaza. I would like to thank our Egyptian and American friends for hosting these meetings. Thanks to these discussions, we now have a better understanding of the needs, the funding gaps, and the obstacles on the way to implementation.

We have now a **work plan for Gaza** that will allow us to be specific about *who* needs to do *what*, on each and every of the different projects in the pipeline.

But let me be clear: this is a **collective responsibility**

We in the international community can only help if there is also responsible leadership on the ground. Israel will need to do its part to make this work. But we also need the Palestinian leadership to assume their responsibilities in Gaza and for the people of Gaza. Egypt has made important efforts in recent months to promote Palestinian unity and to bring the Palestinian Authority back to Gaza. Unfortunately, not enough progress has been made, and the latest news from the ground is not reassuring. We expect *all* Palestinian factions to step up their efforts to continue on the path of reconciliation, to defy the spoilers and to hand the control of Gaza, and I mean real control, to the Palestinian Authority. The lack of unity harms Palestinian interests, and it harms the interest of peace which we all share.

Security is key and this cannot be ignored. Yesterday's speech in Ramallah shows how fragile the process is. I would hope that this will not halt the process further, when we should be looking for ways to take it forward.

We can only advance if the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Egypt and the international community work in sync.

Whether it is major infrastructure works on the water network and the electricity grid, or small-scale interventions with immediate impact, such as solar panels for hospitals, many different pieces must come together: money, imports of dual-use material, planning work, technical capacity to install and operate, commercial contracts, and so on.

This is exactly what we have been trying to do in the last weeks, and I firmly believe we must continue in this way: to bring everyone around the table, so we can advance together.

Some say that this approach means leaving **politics** at the door, for better or for worse. But all of our work, as technical as it may be, has a profound political dimension.

Actually, it is even more than that: if we succeed to implement specific progress on the ground, this will become a powerful political factor.

Being practical can be the best way, in the current context, to achieve our shared political objectives – of bringing the Palestinian Authority back to Gaza and building a viable Palestinian state.

So, on practical issues. We have been looking at **key sectors** where improvements have a **multiplier effect** on everything else in Gaza. Energy, water, humanitarian and health issues, and crossings.

Unlocking the economic potential of Gaza remains imperative, if we are to make sustainable progress. The question of how to boost imports to and exports from the Gaza Strip is essential. Supporting businesses in Gaza is another important aspect.

We have been looking at things we can implement this year, with an **immediate impact**, and projects that will take several years, but are not less important.

This morning we had a donor conference for the **Gaza Central Desalination Plant**, which will solve the issue of drinking water for Gaza. And while it will still take a few years to build the plant, the project will also have immediate impact – because there are many smaller associated projects which will start increase drinking water capacity this year already.

I would like to thank the European Commission for constantly pushing this project forward over the past years, together with all those who are participating and who may still decide to participate.

Commissioner Hahn will say a bit more about the range of activities the European Union is engaged in, and the projects that will be launched in 2018, also in the fields of energy and job creation.

But I would like to make one specific point on movement and access: I hope we can soon make progress on a **regularised opening of the Rafah crossing**. This would be a game-changer for the people of Gaza. Of course there are security challenges, but there are also solutions available. The EU is ready to lend its full support to a new framework to open Rafah – both through equipment and manpower, including deploying a third-party presence through our border assistance mission (EUBAM Rafah).

Let me also add how essential is the work done in Gaza by the UN Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East – UNRWA. We had a good meeting last Thursday in Rome, to try and address the funding crisis that the Agency is facing. Whoever wants to help improve the situation in Gaza cannot ignore the importance of UNRWA in providing essential services. Let's talk about reforms and efficiency, but cutting funds is simply not the right way to go.

A lot of our focus today will be on Gaza, but **we must not forget the West Bank and East Jerusalem.**

I am glad to see that there is dialogue between the Palestinian Authority and Israel on fiscal issues, on customs authorities, on trade, water and energy. We know how difficult these negotiations can be, but it is important that they continue and that they deliver.

There is a lot of untapped potential not only to **improve the fiscal situation** of the Palestinian Authority, but also to **empower it** to assume greater control over Palestinian affairs.

In **Area C**, which is the main land reserve of a future Palestinian state, we want to see more **access** for Palestinian development, agriculture and construction.

We must also continue to work together to keep alive the aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians on Jerusalem, as a capital for both States – and a symbol of peace for all humanity.

The West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza belong together. **There is no State of Palestine without Gaza, nor with Gaza alone.** We expect all Palestinian factions to make a clear, firm and smart choice: not to harm their own people through further violence and disunity but to choose the path of peacefully building that state together.

Israel, too, can do more, and should do more, in particular on access and movement. That is possible without compromising on security, and it would help creating conditions for building an independent, democratic, sovereign and viable Palestinian state, alongside a more secure State of Israel.

The **Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the two-state solution are two sides of the same coin**. And the two-state solution remains the only viable path towards peace, security and human development in the Holy Land.

We Europeans have no doubt about it – and we will continue to support every effort to reach our common goal, of a State of Israel and a State of Palestine finally living side by side.

Thank you.