European External Action Service (EEAS)

MEPP: Press remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell after meeting with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal Bin Farhan Al Saud and the League of Arab States Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit

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Check against delivery!

It is a great pleasure to be here with both of you.

We have had a very good and productive meeting with the Secretary General of the Arab League [Ahmed Aboul Gheit] and with the Saudi Foreign Minister [Faisal Bin Farhan Al Saud].

We discussed in detail the Middle East Peace Process or - unfortunately, I have to say - the absence of the Middle East Peace Process. At the moment, there is no such a thing. And we have been discussing how we can work together to help revive, let’s say, the peace efforts.

We met in this format already last September in New York during the UN General Assembly because we are very much worried about the developments in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Over the recent weeks, there has been an increasing number of victims of violence and terror attacks, and continued settlement expansion and demolitions.

This only underlines how the situation on the ground is constantly deteriorating. Again, yesterday, the Israeli government announced the legalisation under Israeli law of nine settlement outposts, and I condemn this decision.

This is unfortunately a tendency for years now.

In this context, we did not just share our worries and concerns. We feel that it is necessary for all of us, and for the key international partners, to explore ways to revive and safeguard the prospect of the Two-State solution and to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace by building on the Arab Peace Initiative, United Nations resolutions and established international peace parameters.

This is not against anyone. It is good for both parties, and we do this for both sides.

We decided that we have to try new approaches to see how we can produce more impact. We discussed, in that regard, the potential of a comprehensive regional approach.

We agreed to establish a trilateral Working Group to develop proposals for the comprehensive regional approach by identifying what contributions the participating governments and international organisations would make to a comprehensive peace, if and when an Israeli-Palestinian final peace agreement could be reached.

This Working Group will report to us shortly, on the basis of which we will reach out, and we will get in contact, certainly, with international partners and our Member States.

With this endeavour, we want to demonstrate that we need peace in the Middle East. And for that to happen, there must be peace between Israel and Palestine.

We want to demonstrate that a path to that necessary, just and lasting peace still exists.

Q&A

Q. Did you discuss either on a bilateral level, or trilateral level, the dramatic situation in Syria and what the European Union can do more? Because there are a lot of critics regarding what happened in the dramatic situation in Syria. Saudi Arabia is providing assistance but does not have relationship – or relations are not normalised – with Damascus. The European Union is providing a lot since 2011 but still, it is very criticised these days. Did you discuss the dramatic situation and what all of you can do?

On Syria, we know the dramatic situation in Syria – as in Turkey. The first thing that I have to clarify is that our sanctions against the Syrian regime do not affect the humanitarian support, the food and medical assistance. It has been said that it is our sanctions that prevent us from supporting Syria – that is not the case, these sanctions do not cover humanitarian aid, food and medical assistance.

Secondly, let me remind [you] that the European Union is on the side of the Syrian people since ever. We are the biggest donor, our sanctions were imposed on the Syrian regime – to the Assad regime and its supporters - and we will do everything we can in order to support the affected part of the Syrian citizens [affected] by this earthquake. We are doing that, and we will continue doing that.

Q. You spoke about your concern about the situation of the Middle East Peace Process since last September. Since then, we have a new and the most extremist government in Israel. Are you supported by the United States in this attempt or initiative that you are trying today? And will the European Union and Arab countries can use their leverage to bring those in Tel Aviv to be convinced that the Two-States solution is the best one for all the region?

About the [Middle East] Peace Process, you know, as I said, and I think everybody [here] agrees: there is no such thing as a Peace Process today. What we want to do is to make peace efforts. Peace efforts in order to revive a dynamic that could go out of the current stalemate, in order to build peace when possible and start building – if I may say – with little steps, by engaging with as many people willing to contribute to get out of this situation.

Link to the video: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-237288

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/mepp-press-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-after-meeting-saudi-foreign_en