European Commission (presscorner) — 2026-04-24

Press point by President von der Leyen with Middle East partners

Thank you, dear Nikos, for hosting us here today,

Together with my friend António Costa,

President Aoun,

President al-Sharaa,

We had a very good meeting. We welcome the prolongation of the ceasefire between the United States and Iran. And the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. Our shared goal is now to negotiate a lasting end to the war. This includes restoring full and permanent freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz without tolls. It is equally clear that any peace agreement will have to address Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programme. The events of the last 7 weeks have shown the real danger that a nuclear Iran would pose to the world.

My main messages today to our partners were twofold: First, I wanted to reaffirm our absolute solidarity with our partners in the region. A key lesson of the past weeks is that security is indivisible. You cannot have stability in the Middle East or the Gulf while Lebanon is in flames. So, we call for the respect of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. A temporary pause is not enough. We need a permanent path to peace. And on the way, we will continue to support the Lebanese people. 6 EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flights have delivered over 250 tonnes of aid, as part of 100 million euro in humanitarian assistance.

This solidarity among partners is mutual. I want to praise the leadership of Egypt and Jordan. Both are leaving no stone unturned to find diplomatic solutions to conflicts that affect us all. And I want to thank the Gulf States, for their support in bringing EU citizens home safely. Europe will remember this.

My second message is that in times of crises, bonds grow stronger. Because we are not just partners in managing crisis. We are partners for the future. This is why we held recently our first ever summits with Jordan and Egypt and are reinforcing our Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships. We have big investment packages underpinning them. And I look forward to our first EU–Jordan Investment Conference later this year. Then, when President Costa and I were in Damascus in January, we announced a new Political Partnership with you President al-Sharaa, with Syria. Earlier this week, we have proposed resuming the EU-Syria Cooperation Agreement. And in two weeks, we will host

the first High Level Political Dialogue between Syria and the EU. Paving the way for a possible future Association Agreement. We will keep supporting the revival of Syria's economy. And the reconciliation of its society.

Turning to the Gulf countries. Last week Secretary-General Budaiwi, of the GCC, and I agreed that our partnership needs to become a broader geopolitical partnership. The EU-GCC Summit later this year gives us the opportunity to do exactly this. We are also ready to team up with the Gulf countries to diversify export infrastructure away from solely the bottleneck of the Hormuz Strait. And now is the time to advance promising connectivity projects like the IMEC - the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor.

Finally, the events of the past month have taught us a hard truth. Our security is not just related; it is intrinsically linked. A threat to a merchant vessel in the Strait of Hormuz is a threat to a factory, for example, in Belgium. So today I propose that we move beyond reactive crisis management. First, we could consider expanding the scope of missions like Operation ASPIDES, evolving from mere protection to a sophisticated joint maritime coordination. Second, the threat of mass proliferation of drones and missiles is sadly a shared reality. We should set up a structural cooperation of scaling up defence production. So together, let us build a region where peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of a secure and prosperous future for all our citizens.

Thank you very much.

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