



## Truce or no truce, Lebanon deserves more EU support

by Megan Ferrando, 9 July 2026

**The EU was unable to play a constructive diplomatic role in achieving a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. But it is not too late to match its humanitarian and state-building support for Lebanon with more active regional diplomacy.**

After four months of conflict between Israel and the Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah, a tripartite framework agreement was signed between Lebanon, Israel, and the US on June 26<sup>th</sup>, designed to end the state of hostility between Lebanon and Israel. The deal largely brought to a close the latest eruption of violence, which started on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and saw the Israeli forces occupy parts of southern Lebanon, while carrying out extensive attacks and destruction across the country. It is the most promising attempt to secure a lasting ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah since the first fragile, US-brokered deal on April 16<sup>th</sup>, after which attacks from both sides continued.

The latest agreement has received mixed reactions. Supporters laud the fact that an agreement was reached despite the tense political context, and that it resulted from the first direct diplomatic talks between Israel and Lebanon [since 1993](#). Critics argue that the agreement makes Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon conditional upon the full demobilisation of Hezbollah. This condition legitimises Israel's illegal occupation of the 10-kilometre swathe of Lebanese territory, and demands the near-impossible from the Lebanese government – the demobilisation of Hezbollah – before Israel will allow displaced Lebanese citizens to return to the occupied regions. Importantly, Hezbollah, as one of the key parties to the conflict, has [categorically rejected the deal](#), raising questions about the extent to which the agreement can be implemented.

### The EU's limited response to the conflict

Despite its interests in the region and its strong ties with both Lebanon and Israel, the EU and its member-states have played virtually no role in these diplomatic developments. They have largely failed to provide Lebanon with a counterweight to balance the more powerful Israel and its American ally – which has also acted as the sole mediator in the negotiations since April. France, because of its close

relationship with Lebanon, has been particularly vocal in its diplomatic support for Beirut, but it was sidelined by the US early on, after the Israeli government made clear that it did not want Paris to be involved in the talks. This has left the EU and its member-states largely confined to acting in two less politically sensitive areas: humanitarian support and state-building.

### **The humanitarian dimension: Europe's comfort zone**

When it comes to humanitarian assistance, the European Commission has provided emergency support to Lebanon from a [€1 billion financial aid package](#) agreed in 2024, mainly aimed at curbing irregular migration and strengthening state and security institutions in Lebanon. Since March, the Commission has supplemented this with an additional €100 million in humanitarian aid.

This support is essential, not least given the scale of destruction and displacement, and the likely impact of the conflict on livelihoods, food security and environmental resources. Since March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Israel's attacks have killed over 4,319 people in Lebanon, wounded over 12,203, and displaced over 1.2 million – 20 per cent of the population. On the Israeli side, 37 Israeli soldiers and one contractor have been killed. Israel has said that it is exclusively targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon, but its strikes have also hit civilian areas across the country, including attacks on journalists and medical personnel.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has accused Israel of using a “scorched-earth policy” to prevent local populations from returning to their homes. The Israeli army has destroyed entire villages as well as roads, bridges, and key water infrastructure. In the past four months, 22.5 per cent of Lebanon's agricultural land has been rendered unusable, primarily in the south. This follows the destruction of land in southern Lebanon by Israel in 2024 and 2025, which the Lebanese Minister of Environment [has recently described as “ecocide”](#) – acts deliberately committed while knowing that they may cause widespread or long-term damage to the environment. Beyond direct impacts, this destruction has put further pressure on Lebanon's already suffering economy and its fragile food security situation.

As the world's biggest humanitarian and development co-operation actor, the EU and its member-states together provided [42 per cent](#) of global development assistance in 2024 – a figure that has probably risen even further since the effective closure of USAID last year. The EU will probably continue to leverage this leadership position in international co-operation in support of Lebanon, including during reconstruction efforts.

### **State-building and disarming Hezbollah: Good intentions meet reality**

The second area of EU engagement is support for Lebanese state-building and the disarmament of Hezbollah. Disarming the group is a central Israeli demand, and was the most contentious issue in the Lebanese-Israeli negotiations. While the Lebanese government had made some progress on this issue after the previous ceasefire agreement in November 2024, Israel has stated that it does not trust the Lebanese state's ability to disarm Hezbollah, and that its invasion of Southern Lebanon is therefore necessary to protect itself from the armed group.

For its part, Hezbollah points to Israel's ground incursion, [the seventh on Lebanese territory since 1978](#), as evidence that Lebanon needs Hezbollah to shield it from Israeli expansionist ambitions. It rejects the ongoing talks, does not consider itself bound by its outcomes and, though militarily weakened, still has the capacity to sustain a prolonged confrontation on the ground.

The EU and individual member-states have been providing capacity building support to the Lebanese government and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), in the hope that a stronger Lebanese state might offer a

credible security alternative to Hezbollah. In June, EU ministers agreed to allocate [€100 million from the European Peace Facility](#) to provide the LAF with military equipment and training. The European External Action Service also shared a plan with EU member-states to set up a possible military and civilian CSDP mission in Lebanon to support its Internal Security Forces, the national police force. This would take place in the context of the phasing out of UNIFIL, the UN's peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, whose mandate expires at the end of 2026. These measures are necessary steps towards giving the Lebanese state a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and will, over time, contribute to the disarmament of Hezbollah. They rely, however, upon a lasting ceasefire and a sustainable political process, both of which remain uncertain.

### **Diplomacy: Europe's weak point**

A sustainable political process requires diplomatic pressure. This is where the EU has been weakest. The EU and its member-states' limited role in the diplomatic talks between Israel and Lebanon, and in the US-Israel-Iran negotiations, is partly a result of the US and Israel deliberately sidelining European actors. But it also reflects the EU's own inability to agree internally on its stance towards these conflicts, above all because the bloc of 27 member-states is divided over policy towards Israel. Since 2023, the EU has failed to articulate a coherent, unified response to Israel's actions in Gaza, in the West Bank, and elsewhere across the region – though it has been more vocal in condemning Israeli violence against Lebanon than against the Palestinians. Although these statements often begin by emphasising that [“the responsibility lies with Hezbollah”](#), they have in recent months been more forceful in calling out Israel's actions against Lebanon than they have ever been in relation to Palestine.

EU member-states are trying to balance competing interests. Many have close political, security, economic, historical, and cultural ties with Israel and the US, although relations with Washington have further eroded under the second Trump administration. At the same time, the EU, as an actor claiming to uphold the rules-based international order, cannot credibly ignore Israel's continual violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Despite mounting pressure within Europe to condemn Israel's actions – including large-scale public protests across the EU since October 2023, and a [letter signed by over 350](#) former European ministers, ambassadors, and senior officials last April – the EU has not taken significant action against Israel. In April, Ireland, Spain, and Slovenia put the possible suspension of some trade provisions of the EU-Israel Association Agreement on the agenda of the April 21<sup>st</sup> Foreign Affairs Council, but no consensus was reached amongst EU member-states. There was no progress either at the subsequent Council meetings on May 11<sup>th</sup> and June 15<sup>th</sup>. Although Kaja Kallas, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has insisted that suspension of the Agreement remains on the table, the EU's inability to agree more concrete collective responses to Israeli actions in Lebanon has contributed to Brussels being stuck on the diplomatic sidelines.

### **Why the EU needs to act more decisively**

While the EU's actions demonstrate its support for a stable and safe Lebanon, they also reveal a preference for what is politically feasible over what is strategically necessary. There are three reasons why the EU and its member-states should take a bolder approach.

First, a full cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah remains unlikely, at least in the short term. The recently signed framework agreement between Israel and Lebanon states that Israeli forces will

withdraw from the south once Hezbollah is completely disarmed and the LAF is deployed. Hezbollah, which completely rejects the agreement, has made peace conditional upon Israel withdrawing from Lebanese territory first. Despite this deadlock, the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah appears to be holding to some extent in this initial phase, although Israeli strikes and gunfire have still killed dozens of civilians since the framework agreement was signed. But attacks are likely to resume, as both sides remain ready to break the fragile ceasefire in response to either a perceived or actual threat from the other. Far-right members of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government have further escalated tension with incendiary comments, including national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir's [recent tweet](#) arguing that "all of Lebanon must burn" and "you don't win with measured responses and restraint – you need to go berserk. To obliterate. To crush the terror."

The EU's current actions in Lebanon, in the form of humanitarian support and security sector reform, are important to lay the groundwork for peace, but they do not put the necessary diplomatic pressure on the conflicting parties. Civilian deaths, mass displacement, and the destruction of critical infrastructure, agricultural land and environmental resources will continue unless a permanent ceasefire holds. To make its political investment in peace in Lebanon credible, the EU should scrupulously monitor and condemn violations by both sides in the conflict, and at all costs avoid an approach that discriminates between Hezbollah's and Israel's violence and violations of international law.

Second, the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah is inseparable from Israel's violence towards Palestinians, and this will continue to have destructive spillover effects if a sustainable solution is not reached. This cannot be achieved by repeatedly calling for a two-state solution while refusing to take decisive action against blatant Israeli breaches of international law. If Israel, Iran, and Hezbollah are committing comparable war crimes, the EU should condemn all of them to a similar degree.

Suspending the EU-Israel Association Agreement remains the EU's most promising point of leverage and avenue for action, not least because the EU is Israel's largest trading partner, accounting for [32 per cent of Israel's total global trade in goods](#). But the EU can and should also focus on other measures, including restrictions on research and development co-operation under the Association Agreement, and imposing visa bans and sanctions against members of the Israeli government and illegal settlers. EU Foreign Ministers [have already taken action against some of the latter](#) in the Foreign Affairs Council. As a next necessary step, they should suspend at least parts of the Association Agreement.

Despite previous failures to agree this step, there may now be a window of opportunity to reach consensus. Two previous opponents of suspension, Italy and Hungary, have become more critical of Israel. Italy has suspended the renewal of a defence agreement with Israel, after a series of disputes involving Catholic leaders' access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and after Israel's defence forces fired at a humanitarian convoy with Italian UN peacekeepers in Lebanon. Hungary's new Prime Minister, Péter Magyar, has signalled a more case-by-case approach to questions involving Israel, rather than the unquestioning support by his predecessor Viktor Orbán.

Third, taking a stronger stance against Israel would help the EU to rebuild its damaged reputation as the most important supporter of the rules-based international order. Ignoring major violations by key partners has undermined the EU's credibility, both at home and abroad. [Recent Arab Barometer polls](#) show that most people across West Asia and North Africa have a more favourable opinion of China than of the EU, and that most believe the former is more committed to upholding international law. The Vatican has also [accused](#) the EU of double standards in "[imposing] economic sanctions on one

country, and [sending] financial aid and weapons to another.” Indeed, the EU has been widely criticised for condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its attacks on civilian targets whilst failing to condemn similar actions by Israel in Lebanon and by the US against Iran. One reason for the EU’s inability to call out Israel alongside other actors, such as Hezbollah and the Iranian regime, has been Europe’s continued alignment with the US. Most European leaders refused to describe the US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February as violations of international law, but rushed to condemn Iran’s retaliatory response. This issue goes beyond Lebanon, and even the US-Israel-Iran war: it will define the EU’s standing in a changing world order in which it can no longer rely on the US for political, security, and economic backing.

The EU needs a more comprehensive approach, both to help end the fighting and to protect its own interests. As Europe is redefining its priorities and developing a new ‘[Middle East Strategy](#)’, it needs to act with the understanding that its stance on Lebanon, and its stance towards Israel’s impunity more broadly, will have long-term consequences for its partnerships in the region and beyond.

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