



Can Europe overcome its paralysis on Israel and Palestine?

by Beth Oppenheim

26 February 2020

President Donald Trump's so-called deal of the century flies in the face of international law and decades of EU and US policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The EU can still play a leading role in promoting a just resolution to the conflict, but the Union's foreign affairs chief, Josep Borrell, will need to make full use of trade, aid and other tools at his disposal. That is the key message in a new Centre for European Reform paper, '[Can Europe overcome its paralysis on Israel and Palestine?](#)' which examines the EU's approach to this intractable territorial dispute and how the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy could promote a peaceful resolution.

The EU often resorts to statements of condemnation instead of tangible action on Israel-Palestine. But this declaratory diplomacy has had a negligible impact on the ground. Emboldened by the unconditional support of the Trump administration, Israel has continued to build settlements in the occupied West Bank, and to impose severe restrictions on Gaza, in violation of international law. The EU has denied itself leverage by deepening relations with Israel and providing financial assistance to the Palestinians without attaching sufficient conditions. And the Union has been constrained by internal divisions on the conflict. Some member-states welcomed Trump's peace plan while others, alongside Borrell, were more critical. Hungary blocked a unanimous statement by the EU-27 that would have condemned the US initiative.

The new CER paper recommends several ways the EU could strengthen its influence on the Middle East peace process, including: defending internationally agreed principles against the Trump administration; pushing for recognition of a Palestinian state; finding ways to circumvent the need for EU consensus, for instance by empowering smaller groups of member-states to act; strengthening the policy of 'differentiation' which excludes the settlements from the benefits of the EU-Israel bilateral relationship; making any further deepening of relations with Israel conditional on progress on the peace process; ensuring proper conditions are attached to EU assistance to the Palestinians; and ending the no-contact policy with Hamas.

"Donald Trump's 'deal of the century' is an assault on international law and the rules-based order. This means the European Union must now assume a more assertive role in the Middle East peace process. But to influence events on the ground, the EU will need to go beyond paper-thin statements and use trade, aid and other tools. Without EU intervention, the one-state, unequal reality in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories will harden. It is time for Europe to come out of hibernation", said Beth Oppenheim, CER research fellow and author of the paper.

Note for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with Beth Oppenheim, please contact Nick Winning in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 207 976 3429 and +44 (0) 7714 256241.

The Centre for European Reform is a think-tank devoted to making the EU work better and strengthening its role in the world. The CER is pro-European but not uncritical. Follow us on Twitter: [@CER_EU](https://twitter.com/CER_EU) and the author on [@BethOppenheim](https://twitter.com/BethOppenheim).