

Israel-Hamas war

EU seeks 'consequences' for Israel over opposition to Palestinian statehood

Bloc's foreign ministers step up pressure on Netanyahu to reverse his resistance to two-state solution



Benjamin Netanyahu over the weekend doubled down on his insistence that Israel should maintain 'security control over the entire area west of Jordan [river],' territory that encompasses besieged Gaza and the occupied West Bank © Kobi Gideon/GPO/dpa

Henry Foy in Brussels YESTERDAY

The EU has urged member states to impose “consequences” on Israel if its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to oppose Palestinian statehood, as Brussels looks to step up pressure on the premier to advance efforts towards long-term peace.

The proposed threat, to be discussed at a meeting of EU foreign ministers on Monday, underscores rising unease at Israel’s stance among many of its western allies, as the civilian death toll from its [war against Gaza](#) mounts, stoking [instability](#) across the Middle East.

In a document circulated to capitals ahead of Monday’s meeting and seen by the Financial Times, Brussels proposed that EU member states should “set out the consequences they envisage to attach to engagement or non-engagement” with their proposed peace plan. The plan includes statehood for Palestine and mutual sovereign recognition — the so-called two-state solution.

This weekend Netanyahu doubled down on his insistence that Israel should maintain “security control over the entire area west of [the river] Jordan”, territory that encompasses besieged Gaza and the occupied West Bank. He reiterated that position after a call with US President Joe Biden, who had earlier said Netanyahu could be open to compromise.

UN secretary-general António Guterres said on Sunday that the refusal to accept a two-state solution and “the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people” were unacceptable. “The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state must be recognised by all,” he said.

The [EU's](#) long-term stated position is a two-state solution, a demand that the bloc's leaders have repeated since the October 7 attack by Hamas that prompted the invasion of Gaza. More than 25,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, according to officials in the territory.

At least 1,200 people were killed in the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel that sparked the war, according to Israeli figures.

While the EU's leverage over Israel is significantly weaker than that of the US, it does have an association agreement that grants it preferential trade and investment benefits, a status that has made the EU Israel's largest trade partner.

One senior EU official said: “We're proposing some ideas to member states. And part of these ideas . . . is how we will use our conditionality in the future to see how we can bring about . . . the two-state solution.”

“There are incentives and disincentives” for Israel, the official added, citing the benefits the EU currently offers Israel under the association agreement.

A second EU official said the proposal reflected significant anger among many of the bloc's 27 members at Israel's refusal to engage with the two-state plan, but cautioned that Monday's discussions were “preliminary” and that any action would be “a few steps down the line”.

“It is hard to impose on Netanyahu,” the second official said. “But he may not be around forever.”

The EU's demands laid out in the document include “an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, in peace and security, with full normalisation and substantive development of security and economic co-operation”.

“An essential element of the Peace Plan should be the development of robust security assurances for Israel and the future independent State of Palestine, conditional upon full mutual diplomatic recognition and integration of both Israel and Palestine in the region,” it added.

Israel Katz, Israel's foreign minister, is set to join the foreign ministers' meeting on Monday, according to the official programme. His Palestinian counterpart Riyad al-Maliki will attend separately. Representatives from Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and the secretary-general of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, will participate over lunch.

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