European Neighbourhood Watch

THE EU AND ISRAEL: CLOSE, AND UNHAPPY

Editorial | Toby Vogel

Fifty years ago, in June 1967, a brief but ferocious war between Israel and its neighbours changed the map of the Middle East and transformed both Israeli politics and its relations with the wider world, in ways that reverberate to this day.

The most immediate outcome of the Six Day War was Israel’s occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, all condemned in UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967. Israel later handed Sinai back to Egypt and withdrew from Gaza and some of the West Bank, but maintains an iron grip on both territories, which have also witnessed accelerated settlement construction under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel has not only flouted countless UN Security Council resolutions, it has also committed widespread human rights violations and war crimes, for example during the war in Gaza in August 2014.

Mutual incomprehension

Netanyahu’s terms in office – he was prime minister in 1996-99 and again after 2009 – have seen a sharp deterioration in relations with the EU. Seen from Jerusalem, the EU often appears to be siding with the Palestinians; it is the Palestinian authority’s largest donor, and some member states, notably France, were early champions of Palestinian statehood. Seen from Brussels and member state capitals, the Israeli government often appears to be doing all it can to torpedo accommodation with the Palestinian leadership and to make life miserable for ordinary Palestinians. (Contrary to Israeli accusations, the EU’s sympathy for the Palestinians does not extend to the Islamists of Hamas who control the Gaza Strip.)

The start of the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011 created a strategic environment that was even less conducive to a peace deal between Israel and Palestine and to the two-state solution that had been the basis of the Madrid conference and the Oslo accords dating back to the early 1990s. Israel’s sense of being under threat from its neighbours increased dramatically with the civil war in Syria. Syria had fashioned itself as the leader of the resistance against Israel, but both Hafez al Assad and his son Bashar acted as rational and restrained, if hostile, neighbours
to the Jewish state. (Syria’s ageing, Soviet-era hardware was also no match to Israel’s state-of-the-art armour, including, most prominently, the Iron Dome missile defence, deployed in 2011.)

By contrast, the prospect of Islamists taking control of southern Syria, or indeed all of the country, was genuinely alarming to the Israelis, who also feared instability in Jordan and Egypt. Here, too, European perceptions diverge considerably from Israeli ones: the EU’s embrace of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi, the first (and so far, only) freely elected president of Egypt, was seen in Israel as further evidence that Europeans are soft on terrorism. At the same time, the war in Syria and anarchy in Libya, a gateway for migration to Europe, made an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal less pressing, even as the war in Gaza was raging. The international community has in effect made an accommodation with the status quo in the occupied territories, albeit an uneasy one.

**The EU: still punching below its weight**

In a broader sense, the Israel-Palestine issue is an example of the EU’s inability to translate close trade and cultural relations into diplomatic clout. The EU keeps rebuilding infrastructure in the occupied territories only to see it destroyed, time and again, by Israel. It keeps buying goods from Israel – for a total of €13.2 billion last year – but has very little political influence in return. (Also, it does not buy goods produced on occupied territory.) It keeps protesting against the illegal occupation or the building of new settlements – for a sample, consult our link collection below, under heading 3 – yet its appeals leave the Israeli leadership unimpressed. Israeli researchers and students take part in EU funding programmes such as Horizon 2020, but that does not seem to temper Israeli hostility towards the EU, which is especially pronounced in the current government. At the same time, the relationship is undeniably close, and strong – just not in diplomatic terms.

The mutual incomprehension between Israel and the EU is no surprise. The EU is a community of law that uses the promotion of international law and fundamental values to reinforce itself. Israel is a fairly robust democracy domestically (albeit with illiberal tendencies), but for decades it has been flouting international law in the certainty that it would be protected by the US veto in the UN Security Council. The EU is in some respects founded on post-national principles; Israel defines itself as the state of the Jewish people and is deeply attached to its sovereignty. But beyond these incompatibilities, strong ties have grown stronger over the years, despite political disagreements, and Israel has some of the most advanced contractual relations with the EU from among the neighbourhood countries.

**Change in sight?**

It is hard to see how this fundamental dynamic is going to change, even as the Netanyahu government pursues its hardline agenda and the two-state solution is slowly being asphyxiated by the support of the Trump administration. With Israel’s domestic politics having shifted dramatically to the right over the past decade or so, a loss of power for Netanyahu’s Likud party or the prime minister’s removal over an ongoing corruption investigation would change little when it comes to attitudes towards the Palestinians, and hence relations with the EU. And the international setting, with the ongoing war in Syria, Yemen and Iraq and the low-intensity conflict in Libya, shows no sign of improving. In fact, all signs point
towards the status quo; namely the continuation of a close but unhappy relationship between Israel and the EU.

General news

Remarks by Federica Mogherini upon arrival to the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels, 17 July 2017. [Link](#)

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Statement by the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, Tbilisi, 09 August 2017. [Link](#)

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EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Vytenis Andriukaitis visits the Republic of Moldova on 5 July 2017, Chisinau, 04 July 2017. [Link](#)

EU and Eastern Partnership countries step-up cooperation on energy efficiency, Chisinau, 10 July 2017. [Link](#)
Statement by the HR/VP Mogherini and Commissioner Hahn on the amendments to the electoral legislation in the Republic of Moldova, 21 July 2017. [Link]

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Further trade concessions to Ukraine approved by MEPs, 04 July 2017


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EU – Ukraine Summit: Ukrainian reforms combined with European Union support delivering positive results, Kyiv, 13 July 2017

Remarks by President Donald Tusk following the EU-Ukraine summit in Kyiv, 13 July 2017

Ukraine: Council adopts temporary trade preferences, 17 July 2017

Statement by the Spokesperson on recent "declarations" regarding eastern Ukraine, Brussels, 19 July 2017

EU adds 3 persons and 3 companies to sanctions list over actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity, Brussels, 04 August 2017
Southern Neighbourhood

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Le Commissaire Hahn en Algérie pour réaffirmer le soutien de l'UE à la diversification économique du pays, Alger, 20 July 2017. [Link]

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Report on the state of EU-Egypt relations: engaging on shared priorities, Brussels, 17 July 2017. [Link]

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On the latest developments in and around the Old City of Jerusalem and in the West Bank, 22 July 2017. [Link]

Statement by the Middle East Quartet Envoys, Brussels, 22 July 2017. [Link]

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EU Trust Fund for Africa adopts €46 million programme to support integrated migration and border management in Libya, 28 July 2017. [Link]

EU confirms its engagement in support of Libyan institutions, Brussels 02 August 2017. [Link]

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The European Union steps up its support for investigations into war crimes and accountability in Syria, Brussels, 19 July 2017. [Link]

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2017 Western Balkans Summit – stepping up regional cooperation to advance on the European Union path, Brussels, 11 July 2017. [Link]

Western Balkans Summit 2017: delivering for the region, Brussels, 12 July 2017. [Link]

Albania

EU Ambassador Romana Vlahutin Speech at the high level discussion on the progress of the civil service reform and the EU support, 10 July 2017. [Link]

Johannes Hahn attends informal Western Balkans Prime Ministers' meeting in Durrës, Albania, Tirana, 25 August 2017. [Link]

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Federica Mogherini meets with Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brussels, 17 July 2017. [Link]

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Federica Mogherini meets with President Vučić of Serbia and Thaçi of Kosovo, Brussels, 03 July 2017. [Link]

EU in Kosovo cancels 7.8 million euro projects in North Mitrovica, 21 July 2017. [Link]

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McAllister: Serbia will join EU when it is ready, 12 August 2017. [Link]

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Statement by the Spokesperson on the detention of human rights defenders on the island of Büyükada in Turkey, Brussels, 07 July 2017. [Link]

The EU Project in Support Turkish Civil Aviation is completed in the wake of third round of negotiations for a comprehensive aviation agreement, 11 July 2017. [Link]

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EU-Turkey High Level Political Dialogue, Brussels, 25 July 2017. [Link]

Remarks by Commissioner Johannes Hahn at the press
EU-CIVCAP Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Forum, 11 September 2017

In reform we trust: improved EU-UN cooperation in preventing and responding to conflicts?

The fourth Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Forum of the EU-CIVCAP project will be held on 11 September 2017 at CEPS under the title “In reform we trust: improved EU-UN cooperation in preventing and responding to conflicts?”.

EU-CIVCAP is a Horizon 2020-funded project led by the University of Bristol analysing the EU’s conflict prevention and peacebuilding. For more information on the programme, please click here.

This edition of the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Forum will consider EU-UN cooperation in preventing and responding to conflicts, including in the EU's neighbourhood. Panelists and an expert audience will debate how a reformed EU-UN partnership can effectively cooperate with key humanitarian, development and security actors. For more information and to register, please click the button below.

An invitation-only Policy Meets Research Seminar will be held on the same day, also at CEPS, to focus on the first year of implementation of the EU Global Strategy, assessing progress vis-à-vis one of its main deliverables: the strategic approach to resilience in the EU’s external action. The second part of the seminar will be devoted to a deep dive on gender, including the role of women in the implementation of the new framework as well as the prevention and response to gender-based violence. Practitioners and experts invited to these interactive sessions will exchange views, identify key gaps and agree on research recommendations that can feed into the consortium’s research agenda.
European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, Oslo, 6-9 September 2017

Good Intentions, Mixed Results – A Conflict Sensitive Unpacking of the EU Comprehensive Approach to Conflict and Crisis Mechanisms

This panel presents the first results of the Horizon 2020-funded EUNPACK project.

The aim of the project is to unpack EU crisis response mechanisms, with the aim to increase their conflict sensitivity and efficiency. By combining bottom-up perspectives with an institutional approach, EUNPACK will increase our understanding of how EU crisis responses function and are received on the ground in crisis areas. This entails exploring local agencies and perceptions in target countries without losing sight of the EU’s institutions and their expectations and ambitions. It also entails examining the whole cycle of crisis, from pre-crisis, through crisis, and into post-crisis phase.

EUNPACK analyses two gaps in EU crisis response. First, the intentions–implementation gap, which relates to 1) the capacity to make decisions and respond with one voice and to deploy the necessary resources, 2) how these responses are implemented on the ground by various EU institutions and member states, and 3) how other actors – local and international – enhance or undermine the EU’s activities. Second, the project addresses the gap between the implementation of EU policies and approaches, and how these policies and approaches are received and perceived in target countries, what we refer to as the implementation-local reception/perceptions gap.

Our main hypothesis is that the severity of the two gaps is a decisive factor for the EU’s impacts on crisis management and thereby its ability to contribute more effectively to problem-solving on the ground. We analyse these gaps through cases that reflect the variation of EU crisis responses in three concentric areas surrounding the EU: the enlargement area (Kosovo, Serbia), the neighbourhood area (Ukraine, Libya), and the extended neighbourhood (Mali, Iraq, Afghanistan). The results of our research will enable us to present policy recommendations fine-tuned to making the EU’s crisis response mechanisms more conflict and context sensitive, and thereby more efficient and sustainable.

Read more »

Dealing with Geopolitical Flashpoints: Second and Third Order Effects that Threaten to Destabilize the MENA region, Brussels, 14-15 September 2017
This conference, co-organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean, the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, and CEPS, will consider the evolving crisis of the system of regional alliances in the Middle East, featuring sessions on Syria, Libya, and Algeria, among others. For more information and to register, click the button below.

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James Moran joins CEPS as Associate Senior Research Fellow

James Moran joined the foreign policy unit at CEPS as an Associate Senior Research Fellow on 1 September 2017. At CEPS, he will focus on the EU’s southern neighbourhood.

James was Principal Advisor on the Middle East and North Africa at the EU’s External Action Service in Brussels in 2016/17. His long service with the European institutions was spent entirely in external relations and includes wide experience in European foreign, security, trade, and development policy in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. In 2012-16, he was Ambassador and Head of the European Union Delegation in the Arab Republic of Egypt, and he headed the EU missions to Jordan and Yemen in 1999-2002. James was also the EU’s senior coordinator in Libya during the 2011 revolution.

Between 2002 and 2011, after heading the China division in Brussels, he was Asia Director from 2006-2011, and the chief negotiator for a number of EU partnership agreements with China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Earlier experience in the 1980’s and 90’s included service with the EU Delegations in Jamaica and Ethiopia and various assignments in Brussels. Prior to joining the EU in 1983 he worked for the UK government and private sector in London. A UK national, he attended Keele, Harvard and London Universities.

Gergana Noutcheva joins CEPS as Visiting Researcher

Gergana Noutcheva will join the CEPS foreign policy unit as a Visiting Researcher for the academic year 2017-18. Noutcheva is Assistant Professor in International Relations and European Foreign Policy in the Political Science Department of Maastricht University.

She holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Pittsburgh, USA (2006). She joined the Political Science Department of Maastricht University in January 2007. In 2002-2006, she was Research Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels where she published a number of articles and policy briefs on the EU enlargement policy, the EU policy towards the Western Balkans and the European Neighborhood Policy.
Gergana's areas of teaching are international relations, European foreign policy, EU democracy promotion. She coordinates the module "The EU as an International Player" in the MA programme in European studies. She also teaches a research-based course "The EU and Democracy Promotion" in the BA programme in European Studies. In the academic year 2007-2008, she co-directed the MA Programme in European Studies at Maastricht University.

Gergana's research interests focus on the EU’s relations with neighbouring countries from the Balkans, Eastern Europe the Mediterranean. Her research aims at explaining the EU's differentiated impact on the domestic structures of non-EU countries from the wider European neighbourhood. In 2008-2010, she was a Marie Curie fellow at Maastricht University working on a research project examining the normative and strategic dynamics of the EU's policies vis-a-vis neighbouring states in two policy areas - democracy promotion and conflict resolution.

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