

**INTERPARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE FOR
THE COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AND
THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY**

Senate of the Republic, 5-7 November 2014

The Mediterranean and the crisis at the external borders of the European Union.

Regional and global challenges: the Middle East

The Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) that was held in Athens on 3-4 April this year under the Greek Presidency included a workshop dedicated to events in the Middle East.

In its Conclusions, the Conference expressed “*its concern for the emergence of an arc of instability stretching from Ukraine to North Africa*” and urged, among other things, “*more strategic foreign policy coordination at Union level [to enable] the EU to address the growing number of threats and challenges on the periphery of the EU’s external borders.*”

Since last April, the unstable situation has been made worse by the unfolding events in the **Middle East**, namely: the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict**, which culminated last summer in the launch of rockets from Gaza into Israel and the latter’s offensive; the worsening civil war in **Syria** and its repercussions on neighbouring countries; the advance of ISIS in **Iraq**; the situation in **Libya**, where the climate of instability and fragmentation in which various armed groups are vying for control of territory is further undermining the difficult process of democratic transition, with significant political-institutional, economic and humanitarian ramifications.

1) The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The death toll from last summer is very high. The UN estimates that more than two thousand Palestinians were killed and more than 11 thousand injured. The same estimates indicate that 18 thousand houses were destroyed in Gaza, leaving more than 100,000 people homeless¹. After the failure of the first truce signed in mid-July and several humanitarian ceasefires, on 26 August, thanks to the mediation of Egypt, a deal was reached in Cairo that seems to pave the way towards a lasting truce², although tensions persist.

¹ The data are provided by OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

² The agreement is for:



The resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for the European Union, which has always supported a **two-state solution** entailing the recognition of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. This position has been reiterated at the various institutional meetings of the EU, as well as internationally. In keeping with this principle, the EU has recently condemned the construction of 2,600 new housing units by Israel in the Jewish quarter of Givat Hamatos in the occupied and annexed part of East Jerusalem.

As may be read in the [Conclusions](#) of the Special Meeting of the **European Council** held on 30 August, the Heads of State and Government, confirming the EU's commitment to a comprehensive solution that ensures the well-being of both Palestinians and Israelis, declared: *“Only a final agreement based on the two-State solution will bring durable peace and stability.”* The statement continues: *“The European Council therefore encourages both parties to re-engage in negotiations to this end. The Gaza Strip shall be part of a future State of Palestine.”* The EU leaders welcomed the ceasefire organised by Egypt and urged the parties concerned to respect it. *“All terrorist groups in Gaza must disarm. It is therefore urgent that the Palestinian consensus government exercise its full responsibilities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip”*.

Also at a previous meeting, which was held in extraordinary session on 16 July, the day after the outbreak of war, the Heads of State and Government came out in favour of the two-state solution and renewed the *“offer to both parties of a package of European political and economic support and of a Special Privileged Partnership with the EU in the event of a final peace agreement”³.*

The **“Foreign Affairs” Council of the European Union** has also concerned itself many times with the situation in the Gaza Strip and with the peace process in the Middle East. At its meeting of 15 August last year, the Ministers reaffirmed the EU's commitment to a comprehensive peace agreement providing for the coexistence of two democratic states with secure and recognised borders. As stated in the [Conclusions](#), the European Union has pledged to take action on several fronts, including: humanitarian relief, post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, the reactivation and strengthening of the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM)

- an easing of the Israeli blockade against the Gaza Strip, with the opening of several crossing points along the border to give the population to better access to food, medicines and the materials needed for reconstruction;
- granting the Palestinian Authority progressively more control of the borders of the Gaza Strip, now mostly run by Israel;
- the transfer of control of the reconstruction in the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority;
- the broadening of the boundary within which fishing is permitted for boats and ships from the Gaza Strip from 3 to 6 miles from the coast, with the possibility of further extensions in the future.

³ For more details, see the [Conclusions](#).

Rafah⁴ and EUPOL COPPS⁵ missions, and the training of the staff and customs police of the Palestinian Authority.

A long and thorough discussion of the peace process in the Middle East was also held on 22 July. In the [Conclusions](#) to that meeting, Ministers, confirming their support for the US-led peace efforts, set out the parameters on which to base the peace negotiations: border agreements with possible land swaps agreed between the parties; agreements on security for both populations; a solution to the issue of refugees; and fulfilment of the aspirations of the two sides to have Jerusalem as the future capital of both states.

The **European Parliament** has also recently expressed its opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In [Resolution of 18 September on Israel-Palestine after the Gaza war and the role of the EU](#), MEPs, as well as expressing their condolences for the victims of war and condemning human rights violations in the area, welcomed the ceasefire and urged the EU to contribute effectively to the urgent humanitarian aid effort and to the reconstruction of Gaza, and to participate fully in the International Donors Conference of 12 October 2014 in Cairo.

The aforementioned **Donors' Conference**, organised by Egypt and Norway, was held on 12 October in Cairo⁶. At the Conference, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Policy announced the allocation of **€450 million** for reconstruction in the Gaza Strip, as may be seen from the [Declaration](#) issued during the Conference⁷. The Conference, which was co-chaired by Egypt and Italy, was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini who, as of 1 November, has taken over the post of High Representative for EU Foreign Policy. In her speech she spoke of the Conference as offering "*an opportunity to give new impetus to the peace process and open real dialogue between the parties in a conflict that has lasted too long.*" She also stressed the importance of a common and realistic commitment to the objectives of the Conference, which were to consolidate the ceasefire of 26 August, mobilise international funding for reconstruction and ensure that the Palestinian Authority has full responsibility for Gaza and for the reconstruction of Strip. **Italy's** contribution to the reconstruction will be **€18.7 million**. The funds will be allocated as follows: €3.7 million for humanitarian emergencies (with particular

⁴ Assistance mission to the Palestinian Authority for the management of the Rafah crossing linking Gaza with Egypt.

⁵ European Union police mission in the Palestinian territories to assist the Palestinian Authority set up the institutions of the future State of Palestine.

⁶ Delegates from 50 countries and 20 international and regional organizations took part. Among those present was the Secretary General of the UN, Mr Ban Ki-moon.

⁷ It should be noted that on 12 October, the post of High Representative for the CFSP was still held by Catherine Ashton.

regard to women, children and the elderly) and for UNRWA (the UN agency for Palestinian refugees); €2.5 million for humanitarian projects implemented by Italian NGOs; €200 million for a de-mining project in an area of Gaza, as requested by the UN; and €15 million to fund social housing.

During the Conference, as reported by the Foreign Minister of Norway, aid in the amount of **\$5.4 billion** was offered, a figure in excess of the Palestinians' request for \$4 billion. Half the sum is earmarked for reconstruction work.

2) The civil war in Syria and its repercussions

The deteriorating situation in Syria is continuing to cause concern in the Middle East and keeps shifting the regional and global balance. Recent events, the substantial failure of the Geneva II Peace Conference⁸ and the violent repression of the Syrian people by the government have exacerbated a humanitarian crisis, which is increasingly affecting surrounding areas as well. According to the UN, the number of victims exceeds 190,000, of whom about half are civilians⁹. There are also about 6.5 million Syrians displaced inside the country, more than half of whom are children, and 3 million more have fled to other countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq¹⁰. These countries are paying the considerable social, political and economic costs of the conflict.

Ever since the outbreak of demonstrations in Syria in 2011, the **European Union** has strongly condemned the violent repression perpetrated by the regime of Al-Assad, and as long ago as May 2011 responded by **freezing negotiations for an Association Agreement with Syria** and by halting the **bilateral cooperation programmes that form part of the European Neighbourhood Policy**. Since 1 June 2013, **restrictive measures** have been in place to deter the regime. The measures include a ban on imports of oil and weapons from Syria, a ban on investments in the oil industry in Syria and a ban on participation in the construction of new nuclear power plants. They also include a travel ban and the freezing of the assets of a list of

⁸ This is the second international peace conference organized by the UN in Geneva. It was held on 23-31 January 2014 and a second round of negotiations took place on 10-15 February 2014. The main objective was to achieve a political solution to the Syrian crisis and to the growing humanitarian emergency. The Conference was also attended by the delegations of the Syrian government and the Syrian national coalition, the main opposition political organization. The negotiations ended in a heated atmosphere of a mutual recrimination and without any agreement.

⁹ See the [Updated Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic](#) commissioned by the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Human Rights.

¹⁰ See the [Declaration](#) published last August by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

individuals and entities deemed responsible for the violent repression of the civilian population and for supporting the regime. This list has been progressively expanded by the “Foreign Affairs” Council of the EU, most recently on 20 October when the number of persons and entities subject to restrictions was brought to 211 and 63 respectively. On the same date, the Council reached a political agreement to prohibit the export of aviation fuel and its additives to Syria because of their use in launching indiscriminate air attacks against civilians. The agreement now has to be transposed into legislative provisions¹¹.

As far as support for the people of Syria is concerned, the EU has to date allocated around **€843 million in humanitarian aid** which, together with contributions from Member States, brings the contributed total to €1.3 billion.

The EU has always actively supported the peace process. In this spirit, the EU took part in the Geneva II Peace Conference on 2 January last. At the Conference, the EU reiterated the importance of **a political solution to the conflict**, and its position was made clear in the [Remarks](#) of the High Representative for Foreign Policy Affairs.

As far as the European Union's response to the recent evolution of the Syrian crisis and its repercussions on neighbouring states is concerned, at a special meeting of the **European Council** on 30 August, the Heads of State and Government, as indicated in the [Conclusions](#) to the same, condemned the violence of ISIS¹², and called for “*coordinated action by countries from the region*” to counter the advance of ISIS, and urged Iraqi leaders “*to form a truly inclusive government as a first political response to the present crisis*”. They also stressed that “*a lasting solution urgently requires a political transition in Syria.*” Expressing the belief that the creation of an Islamic Caliphate and the export of terrorism was a threat to Europe, the EU leaders declared their determination to resist it.

They therefore asked the EU Council to “*consider a more effective use of the existing restrictive measures, in particular to deny ISIL the benefits of illicit oil sales or sales of other resources on international markets.*” In order to stem the flow of foreign fighters to ISIS and to

¹¹ For more details, see the [Conclusions](#) of October 20 relating to the strengthening of sanctions against the Syrian regime.

¹² In the attached document ISIS is referred to as ISIL.

facilitate the exchange of information, they asked the European Parliament to finalise work on the proposal for the introduction of an EU Passenger Record Number (PRN)¹³.

The “**Foreign Affairs**” Council of the EU has also addressed the situation in Syria and Iraq on several occasions. At a recent meeting on 20 October, the Ministers focused on the threat posed by ISIS and other terrorist groups. In the [Conclusions](#), the Ministers condemned above all the atrocities and human rights violations committed by ISIS and other groups, as well as by the Syrian regime. According to the Ministers, it is crucial for peace and stability in the region that Syria undergo a political transition and that an inclusive political government be instated in Iraq. They reaffirmed the Union's commitment to these processes, as well as to combating terrorism. They further declared that in the fight against ISIS the European Union would not align itself with the Assad regime, because of the latter's policy of repression, repeated human rights violations and systematic obstruction of democratic reforms. The Foreign Ministers added that for the purposes of fighting ISIS, **military action was a necessary but not sufficient condition**, and should form part of a broader programme that included political and diplomatic actions, measures to block terrorist financing, and measures to favour humanitarian aid and communication. To this end, the Council, as already noted above, tightened its sanctions against the Syrian regime and called on Member States to step up efforts at a national level to choke off the revenue stream to ISIS from the illegal sale of oil and other goods. The Ministers expressed deep concern at the advance by ISIS on Kobane. Appreciative of the efforts made by Turkey to take in refugees, the Ministers called on it to open its borders to aid convoys.

At the special meeting of 15 August to discuss the situation in Iraq, the “Foreign Affairs” Council of the EU declared itself in favour of activating the EU Civil Protection Mechanism¹⁴ and of organising a humanitarian airlift into Iraq, and its position is reflected in the relevant [Conclusions](#). The same meeting agreed on the need to respond positively to the call by the Kurdish regional authorities to provide military material as a matter of urgency, in accordance

¹³ In response to this invitation, the EU Council of Justice and Home Affairs, which met on 9 and 10 October last, conducted an in-depth discussion on the issue of foreign fighters and external border controls. The Ministers invited the European Parliament to conclude work on a proposal to introduce a Passenger Record Number system so that negotiations might begin as soon as possible with the Council to finalise the work by the end of the year. As for external borders, the Council agreed on the need to improve control activities within the existing legal framework and decided to return to this issue at its next meeting in December. For more details, see the [Conclusions](#).

¹⁴The Civil Protection Mechanism is a tool designed for an active and effective response to emergencies both inside and outside the European Union's territories, and is deployed in cases of acts of terrorism, man-made emergencies and natural disasters.

with the capabilities and national laws of Member States, and with the consent of the Iraqi national authorities¹⁵.

On 18 September, the **European Union** also addressed the situation in Iraq and Syria and the persecution of minorities by ISIS. It adopted a [Resolution](#) forcefully condemning the indiscriminate killing of civilians and hostages, the violation of human rights and the persecution of minorities. It rejects the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate and calls for a tightening of restrictions to prevent ISIS from obtaining revenues from the sale of oil. The Resolution also urges the parties in the conflict in Syria to ensure the protection of the civilian population and adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights laws. The Resolution also praises Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey for receiving refugees. It expresses concern at the rising phenomenon of transnational foreign fighters, including nationals of Member States, who have joined ISIS, and calls on Member States to take appropriate measures to prevent the outward travel fighters, to develop a common strategy for monitoring and controlling jihadists and to exchange information in the fight against terrorism.

3) Libya

Libya's geographical position, economic importance and the role it plays in the transit of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa make it strategically important.

Three years after the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in October 2011, the situation in the country has become characterised by extreme factionalism between the various militias that had formed the coalition of rebels. Likewise, great rifts exist between various different actors (cities, tribes, regions, large families, Islamists and secularists). Lacking in any national vision, these groups are in their turn divided internally between moderate and radical revolutionaries.

A series of clashes is currently taking place as the various factions strive for control of the territory. Islamic militias control Tripoli, where they have established an "illegitimate" parliament and government. The secular parliament elected last June is located in Tobrouk. Benghazi is disputed between the extremist Islamist militia Al-Sharia, which proclaimed an "Islamic Emirate", and the troops of the regime of General Haftar. Swelling the ranks of the Al-Sharia militia in the civil war are ISIS fighters from Syria and Iraq who are now beginning to arrive in Libya.

¹⁵ In response to the decisions of the Council and developments in Iraq, the Third Standing Committee (Foreign Affairs, Emigration) and the Fourth Standing Committee (Defence) of the Senate jointly adopted a [Resolution \(in Italian only\)](#) on 20 August committing the government to giving effect to the recommendations of the Council and to responding to the requests for humanitarian aid and military equipment from the regional Kurdish authorities.

The fighting raging through the country is claiming more and more civilian casualties and forcing a growing number of people to flee. According to UN figures¹⁶, the newly displaced over the past few weeks number 100,000, bringing the total to 290,000. The increasing number of displaced people is overwhelming the receptive capacity of local communities, causing a humanitarian emergency that is compounded by the difficulties of aid workers in gaining access to the cities where armed conflict is ongoing.

The climate of disorder and anarchy in Libya has facilitated the trafficking of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers from sub-Saharan Africa and from some countries in the Middle East (recently also from Syria) seeking passage to Europe. The rising tide of migration presents an increasingly pressing emergency that affects Italy and Malta most of all, as they contain the main landing points for the boats from the Libyan coast and are often the scene of tragic events.

Compounding the already bad situation of the country is a serious economic crisis that affects the energy industry especially, as the various militias fight for control of the petroleum market¹⁷.

In a [Declaration on behalf of the European Union on the situation in Libya](#) issued by the High Representative for Foreign Policy on 24 May last, the **European Union** stresses the importance of **constructive political engagement and an inclusive political dialogue**, invites all parties to refrain from using force and condemns all forms of terrorism. The Declaration also highlights the central role played by the UN in coordinating international efforts to support the political process in Libya.

The “**Foreign Affairs**” Council of the EU, at its meeting of 20 October, declared that there was no military solution to the conflict, and that only politics could lead to peace and stability in Libya. In the [Conclusions](#) adopted, the Ministers condemned the ongoing violence and violations of human rights, and called on all parties to observe an “unconditional ceasefire.” Reiterating the need for a strong government of national unity, the European Foreign Ministers called on the Libyan government and members of the elected Parliament to engage in constructive and inclusive political dialogue. The Ministers also reiterated their support for the mediation efforts led by the United Nations, and urged all parties to pursue political dialogue and respect the agreements made. They stressed that the European Union recognises the House of Representatives as the sole legislative authority in Libya, and does not recognise any parallel authority or entity

¹⁶ The data comes from the UNHCR.

¹⁷ In June 2013, some militia groups in charge of power plants imposed, for different reasons, a blockade on infrastructure, causing the collapse of Libyan exports.

outside the legal and democratic framework. The European Union, continues the Declaration, stands ready to implement UNSCR 2174 that will sanction those who threaten Libya's peace and stability. Further, in order to counter the threat posed by instability in Libya in the form of terrorism, increase illegal migration and the trafficking of illicit goods, the EU reaffirms its commitment to supporting Libya in sectors such as security, migration, civil society, the protection of vulnerable groups and the promotion of human rights.

On 18 September, the European Parliament approved a [Resolution on the situation in Libya](#) that condemns the ongoing violence against civilians and institutions, and calls on all parties to observe a ceasefire and engage in political dialogue for the creation of a state based on democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The Resolution also asks all neighbouring countries to *“refrain from actions which might exacerbate current divisions and undermine Libya's democratic transition,”* and urges them to strengthen their border controls. Referring to UN Resolution 2174 (2014), which broadens the international sanctions on Libya, the Resolution calls on the High Representative for the CFSP, the European Union and its Member States to look into the possibility of applying similar restrictive measures on individuals threatening the prospects for peace and democratic transition in Libya, and to draw up a list of those responsible. With respect to the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) that is supposed to provide assistance on EU borders but has been closed for security reasons, the Parliament invited the High Representative to review the EUBAM mandate to take into account the changed situation in Libya, especially with regard to the urgent need for state-building, the strengthening of institutions and security sector reform. With regard to the problem of immigration, the Resolution invites the EU *“to follow up on the priorities identified by the Mediterranean Task Force and launch a political dialogue on migration issues with the Libyan government.”* Finally, the Resolution ***“calls on the EU and the Member States to effectively help and support Italy in its laudable efforts to save lives and to tackle the spiralling migration flows from North Africa, particularly from Libya.”***