

European Former Leaders Call for Recognizing Palestinian State

In 2009 the Palestinian Authority embarked on a process to complete the building of the institutions of a prospective Palestinian State. The European Union has consistently encouraged and supported this endeavor, both in terms of financial and technical assistance and with respect to the political objective.

Today the question of the recognition of this state is before us. The Palestinian Authority has identified September 2011 as the conclusion of the state-building process, and the Palestinian leadership may solicit formal recognition of Palestinian sovereignty over the occupied territories from the United Nations and its Member States.

Should this request be made, the EU should support it, coupling it with a clear expectation that an independent Palestine would be prepared to conduct negotiations with Israel based on the internationally recognized parameters.

A majority of UN Member States have already recognized the Palestinian State but an EU recognition will make the difference.

The signatories of this text see that Europe has no argument to oppose this legitimate demand of the Palestinians. Denying them recognition of independent statehood after having supported and recognized that they have successfully worked towards this objective by building a coherent system of governance and cooperated with Israel on security matters would be contradicting our own positions and policies in a direct and unacceptable manner. European states have already signed up to the declaration within the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the World Bank that Palestine is ready for independence. Backtracking from this commitment now would demonstrate inconsistency, weakness and an absence of political will. It would also be to grant a victory to the status quo forces.

A growing number of Israelis, former security officials as well as prestigious figures from civil society, have recently been adding their voices to the choir of those who have endorsed recognition of Palestinian statehood and are calling for an end to occupation.

The terms of the Palestinian reconciliation agreement signed on 3 May 2011 between Fatah and Hamas suggest that a national unity government might be formed. This should not be considered an obstacle; it might even act as an effective lever to encourage the evolution of the Hamas movement in the right direction.

The internationally agreed parameters of a peace agreement – which would lead to a secure Israel and a viable Palestine – were reiterated by President Obama in his speech of May 19. Yet no further indication was given by the United States as to how this outcome might be achieved and the bilateral process of negotiation has resulted in a stalemate.

European recognition of Palestinian sovereignty and independence, accompanied by the necessary financial support, will anchor the Palestinian polity firmly within the camp of peace and co-existence and enhance the stability of the region. At a moment when the European Union is working to redefine its relations with the societies of the region, Member states should not squander this opportunity to play a positive and meaningful role.

It is with these political and ethical considerations in mind that the signatories call upon European governments to extend recognition to Palestine in September of this year.

Hubert Védrine, chairman of the European Former Leaders Group, France*; **Frans Andriessen**, Netherlands; **Giuliano Amato**, Italy; **Laurens Jan Brinkhorst**, Netherlands; **Hervé de Charette**, France; **Uffe Elleman-Jensen**, Denmark; **Jean François-Poncet**, France; **Felipe Gonzales**, Spain; **Lena Hjelm-Wallén**, Sweden; **Lionel Jospin**, France; **Michael Lothian**, United Kingdom; **Louis Michel**, Belgium; **Andrzej Olechowski**, Poland; **Romano Prodi**, Italy; **Mary Robinson**, Ireland; **Michel Rocard**, France; **Jorge Sampaio**, Portugal; **Pierre Schori**, Sweden; **Clare Short**, United Kingdom; **Peter Sutherland**, United Kingdom; **Erkki Tuomioja** (signed before being appointed minister of foreign affairs on June 22nd), Finland; **Andreas van Agt**, Netherlands; **Hans van den Broek**, Netherlands; **Vaira Vike-Freiberga**, Latvia; **Richard von Weizsäcker**, Germany.

**Chris Patten was co-chair of the Group until his appointment as Chair of the BBC*

**Alain Juppé was a member until his appointment as Minister in November 2010*