



ENC ANALYSIS



Helping end the war in Gaza: What does the EU get?

MARCH 2026

Author
Assoc. Prof. Ebtisam Hussein

Table of Contents

About the Author

Summary

Introduction

Global Reactions: Condemnations and Humanitarian Assistance

EU Initiatives to End the War

What does the EU get out of it?

References

About the Author



Ebtisam Hussein is an ENC academic council member and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of London branch of the European Universities in Egypt. She earned her PhD in 2014 from the Free University of Berlin, where she studied as a scholar in a highly specialised program titled the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies. Her research foci comprise Egyptian politics, Post-2011 MENA political spheres, Islamism and repressive practices in the public sphere. She was awarded several international scholarships, such as the cultural exchange program in Japan in 2005, and a Fulbright grant to study US politics and thought in 2006.

Summary

The armed conflict and ensuing humanitarian crisis of the war in Gaza have consumed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians who were caught in the crossfire. Out of its overt commitment to peace and stability, the EU exerted numerous efforts towards reaching a ceasefire agreement and putting a halt to the daily brutality of the combat. Through the analysis, it will be clear the EU is currently prioritising ending the conflict over taking sides, even though its public statements seemed initially supportive of Israel. But it is the claim here that the EU is seeking more than helping out innocent civilians and that its emphasis on ending the humanitarian crisis is driven by its concern for its own stability. The protracted nature of the conflict might put pressure not only on MENA countries but also on the EU itself through refugee influx that posed a serious challenge to the EU and its member states for over a decade. Ending the war in Gaza, thus, turned into a high priority EU neighbourhood issue.

Introduction

On October 7th, 2023, the world was hit with breaking news of Hamas, a militant Palestinian group, attacking Israel, reportedly killing and injuring hundreds of civilians (BBC, 2025a). Israeli retaliation was swift but disproportionate, carrying out a large-scale military offensive with multiple attacks on civilian sites, including schools and hospitals, killing and injuring tens of thousands of civilians (Human Rights Council, 2024, 38-46). Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was killed in Iran, in an Israeli attack in July 2024 (Times of Israeli, 2024). Khalil al-Hayya, Khaled Meshaal and Zaher Jabarin, all top Hamas figures, were targeted in Qatar through another Israeli attack in September 2025, but were not killed (Ali, 2025).

According to some estimates, more than 10% of the Gaza population was either injured or killed throughout the Israeli offensive. More than a hundred health facilities were targeted and damaged, undermining patients' access to health care services. Military restrictions impeded supplies of aid from reaching affected civilians and caused famine in Gaza towards the end of 2025, according to the UN Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) (alJazeera, 2025). Today, the war is by no means over. Just a few days ago (Feb. 16), a report by the UN Human Rights Office, showed concern over ethnic cleansing in Gaza (Human Rights Council, 2026; OHCHR, 2026). After discussing global reactions to the armed conflict, triggered by the Hamas attack of Oct. 7, this analysis discusses the EU position, efforts and motives to help end the armed conflict.

Global Reactions: Condemnations and Humanitarian Assistance

The initial attack by Hamas and the ensuing large-scale and prolonged offensive by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) triggered global alarms and diverse reactions. On one hand, Hamas was condemned for initiating the combat through October 7 attack and sanctions were imposed on several of its members. Days after the attack, the US treasury imposed sanctions on Hamas members, of different functions, inside and outside Gaza with the purpose of cutting off its funds, ability to use funds or carry out further attacks (US Department of the Treasury, 2023). The UK imposed sanctions on four Hamas leaders and two financiers of the movement. The sanctions included travel bans, asset freezes and arms embargoes (Gov.UK, 2023). In a similar vein, the EU imposed sanctions on a number of individuals, affiliated with Hamas. Sanctions included asset freezes, travel bans to the EU and

prohibition of fund provision to them or for their benefit (Council of the EU, 2024).

On the other hand, Israel was often criticized for the massiveness of the destruction and the number of casualties and its plan to take control of Gaza in summer 2025 (Lukiv, 2025; Cordall, 2026; Asmar, 2026). After almost two years of the first attack, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory reported genocide was committed by Israel against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) website (OHCHR, 2025).

Grappling with the humanitarian situation, several parties took initiatives to mitigate the suffering of civilians who were caught in the crossfire. The US Comprehensive Peace Plan, announced in Sep. 2025, laid out specific terms that, if accepted by both parties, would end the war. Other countries tried to push the plan through, including Egypt, Qatar and Turkey (BBC, 2025b; CFR, 2026).

The United Nations pioneered the humanitarian effort through its different entities. In fact, it has an agency that works specifically on helping Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In addition to documenting and publishing material on the suffering of Palestinians on its website, the agency delivered several services that helped alleviate their suffering. These include health services, like vaccinations, maternal care and treatment of chronic conditions (UNRWA, 2026).

The EU was among the key actors in this global effort. On one hand, EU leaders welcomed the American initiative for a peace plan (Liboreiro, 2025); on the other hand, it undertook its own measures to help end the war. Financially, the EU and its member states are key humanitarian donors to Gaza. In February 2026, the amount of humanitarian funds dedicated to help affected civilians, since the outbreak of the war on October 7, 2023, surpassed one billion dollars. This funding is channelled through both international and local EU partners. In addition, Gaza and the region received in-kind assistance, in the form of a humanitarian air bridge with over eighty flights to Gaza and thousands of tonnes of cargo to Gaza that contained food, medicine, sanitation and hygiene items, etc. Some EU member states offered aid through airdrops (European Council, 2026).

EU Initiatives to End the War

Through a prolonged armed conflict that lasted more than two years, the plight of tens of thousands of civilians, as well as the enormous infrastructural damage, put pressure on key international and regional organisations to press the two key parties to end the war. The EU was explicitly concerned with such an effort. In September 2025, the EU Parliament not only condemned the humanitarian crisis but also called on the EU for urgent action. In fact, its statement made it clear that EU support for Israel's right to self-defence is not unconditional. It stressed that its right to self-defence does not justify indiscriminate military action and claimed that Israel was blocking humanitarian aid, causing a Gaza famine to unfold; it called for an immediate ceasefire. More importantly, it called on EU member states to “consider recognising the State of Palestine” (European Parliament, 2025).

This statement should, however, be viewed in light of the mounting pressure on the EU from multiple platforms, which made it public that the EU and its member states can exert more pressure on Israel to end the military offensive. Accusations that the EU was actually supportive of Israel could be easily spotted. In June 2025, Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) (Doctors without Borders) published a press release where it accused EU governments of being hypocritical in their effort to end the humanitarian crisis. Claiming Israel is destroying means of life and committing genocide in Gaza, MSF asserted the EU has the means to push Israel to stop the offensive (MSF, 2025).

This is not to negate that the EU has long been actively supportive of ending the Arab/Israeli conflict. Its efforts date back to the 1980 Venice Declaration, when the European Council “set out principles for initiating a Middle East peace process”. In 2002, it was a member of the Quartet, along with the US, Russia and the UN, in their effort to facilitate the negotiations of the peace process (Karacsony, 2025). More recently, in 2024, it endorsed the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution (The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, 2024).

In addition, the EU concluded agreements with MENA countries to enhance cooperation, stability and security. Its 2024 agreement with Egypt, which resulted in the latter receiving about 8 billion dollars in concessional loans, investments and assistance from the EU, covered many areas, including migration and mobility, security and political relations

(Delegation of the European Union to Egypt, 2025). This agreement is believed to be part of the EU effort to curb migration flows through Egypt's northern coast. Similar agreements, with different details, were also concluded with Tunisia and Mauritania (Werr, 2024).

What does the EU get out of it?

Before numerating the rewards awaited from ending the war, and the associated humanitarian crisis, it is important to highlight the fact that the aforementioned focus on genocide in Gaza, stressing the call for the two-state solution and condemning the indiscriminate use of military force on the part of Israel, were hardly traceable in the early weeks of this prolonged armed conflict. Internal divisions existed and resonated through EU member states' failure to issue joint statements. In fact, EU joint statements were initially more aligned with the Israeli right to defend itself regardless of the destruction inflicted, by its offensive, on Gaza. This is arguably due to the ability of EU member states that fully sided with Israel to block joint statements that contained criticism of Israeli operations in Gaza (Konecny, 2024).

Meanwhile, there is reason to believe the EU effort to end both the war and the humanitarian crisis is not solely driven by altruistic considerations. The fear of prolonged military combat and the potential for regional instability, along with a surge in migration flows from MENA towards Europe, is undoubtedly high on the EU's neighbourhood agenda. The migration crisis of 2015 left hundreds of refugees dead after about a million people sought refuge in Europe across the Mediterranean (Spindler, 2015). The staggering rise in refugee flows instigated a rift inside the EU. Some countries built fences to prevent refugees from entering their territory, and others went to the European Court of Justice to challenge the EU refugee asylum-seekers sharing plans (BBC, 2015). Concomitantly, the electoral rise of far-right parties across Europe, along with the 2016 Brexit, and similar referenda in a number of EU member states, put the regional constellation on alert for prospective threats to its own survival. The mere fact that migration flows, mainly from MENA, served to boost the chances of far-right parties in elections and gave context to holding such exit referenda meant the EU had to prioritize the exigencies of its own security and survival over humanitarian considerations. Meanwhile, regional instability in post-2011 MENA resonated in a surge of Islamist militant attacks in several EU countries, including Belgium, Germany and France (Crookes, 2016; Fuerstenau, 2020; Mihalache, 2016 respectively).

To conclude, there is no doubt that MENA geographic proximity to the EU played, and still plays, a role in the EU overt concern for political and

economic stability of MENA countries. But it is also challenging to assign relative weights. While humanitarian considerations can not be entirely eliminated, as a driver of EU neighbourhood policies, it is important to assert there is more at stake for the EU, as a regional entity, than just caring to alleviate the suffering of affected civilians. Since the refugee crisis of 2015, Brexit of 2016, the rise of the far right in electoral politics, the disintegration nightmare seemed to loom high for the EU. It is fair to say that the EU came under unprecedented pressure about a decade ago, pressure that set clear priorities of security and stability in the EU neighbourhood agenda. Although the EU and its member states were quite vocal in their support of Israel's right to self-defence, the prolonged fighting, tragic losses of civilian lives and mounting international pressure led to more balanced positions condemning both the Hamas militancy triggering the war in Gaza and the indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli Defence Forces. Today, the highest concern on the EU agenda is to stop the bloodshed and reduce incentives for civilians to cross the Mediterranean, through promoting political and economic stability of MENA countries.

References:

-Ali, M. (2025). Israel has Tried to Kill a Hamas Leaders in Qatar, Malcom H. Kerr Carnegie MiddleEast Center Sep. 10.
<https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2025/09/israel-Has-trying-to-kill-hamas-leaders-in-qatar>

-alJazeera (2025). Two years of Israel's genocide in Gaza: By the numbers, Oct. 7.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/7/two-years-of-israels-genocide-in-gaza-by-the-numbers>

-Asmar, A. (2026). Israel Needs a Fundamental Shift in its Foreign Policy, Atlantic Council, Feb.18.
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/israel-needs-a-fundamental-shift-in-its-foreign-policy/>

-BBC (2015). Migration Crisis: One Million Enter Europe in 2015, Dec. 22.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35158769>

- ——— (2025a). What is Hamas and why is it fighting with Israel in Gaza?, Oct. 14.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clv7w3gdy2o>

BBC (2025b). Trump's 20-Point Gaza Peace Plan in Full, Oct. 9.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70155nked7o>

-Cordall, S. (2026). Global pressure does little to stop Israel's anti-Palestinian policies.

AlJazeera, Feb.18.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/2/18/global-pressure-does-little-to-stop-israels-anti-palestinian-policies>

-Council of the EU (2024). Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Council establishes dedicated sanctions framework and lists six individuals, European Council, Jan. 19.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/01/19/hamas-and-palestinian-islamic-jihad-council-establishes-dedicated-sanctions-framework-and-lists-six-individuals/>

-Crookes, D. (2016). What is with Belgium and Jihadists?, BBC, March 23.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-35879155>

- (CFR) Council on Foreign Relations (2026). A Guide to the Gaza Peace Deal, Feb. 10.

<https://www.cfr.org/articles/guide-trumps-twenty-point-gaza-peace-deal>

-Delegation of the European Union to Egypt (2025). Relations with the EU: The European Union and Egypt, Nov. 24. <https://shorturl.at/jK5nb>

-European Council (2026). EU Humanitarian Support for Palestinians, Council of Europe.

<https://shorturl.at/e8lIN>

-European Parliament (2025). Parliament pushes for Gaza aid, the hostages' release and justice, Press Release, Sep. 11. <https://shorturl.at/15b5z>

-Fuerstenau, M. (2020). Berlin Islamist terror attack: A deadly story of failure, DeutscheWelle,

Dec.18. <https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-islamist-terror-attack-a-deadly-story-of-failure/a-55990942>

Gov. UK (2023). UK and US Hit Hamas Leadership with Targeted Sanctions, Nov. 14.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-hit-hamas-leadership-with-targeted-sanctions>

Human Rights Council (2024). Detailed findings on attacks carried out on and after 7 October 2023 in Israel*: Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, United Nations Digital Library, June 10.

https://digitallibrary.un.org/nanna/record/4051246/files/A_HRC_56_CRP.3-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0®isterDownload=1&version=1

_____ (2026). Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Feb. 16,

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session61/advance-version/a-hrc-61-26-auv-en.pdf>

Karacsony, E. (2025). The EU's Relevance to a Post-Conflict Region: Stabilisation after the Gaza War, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Oct 17. <https://orfme.org/expert-speak/the-eus-relevance-to-a-post-conflict-region-stabilisation-after-the-gaza-war/>

Konecny, M. (2024). The EU's Response to the Gaza War Is a Tale of Contradiction and Division, The Cairo Review of Global Affairs. <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/the-eus-response-to-the-gaza-war-is-a-tale-of-contradiction-and-division/>

Liboreiro, J. (2025). EU Leaders Welcome Trump's Gaza Plan, Urge Hamas to Accept it 'Without Delay', EuroNews, Sep. 30. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/09/30/eu-leaders-welcome-trumps-gaza-plan-urge-hamas-to-accept-it-without-delay>

Lukiv, J. (2025). Israel Rejects International Criticism of Gaza City Takeover Plan, BBC, August 8. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c207p49wrypo>

Mihalache, I. (2016). Why always France? The logic behind the surge of Islamist terrorist attacks on its territory and possible policy implications, Centre for Geopolitics and Security in Realism Studies, <https://cgsrs.org/files/files/file-1547842036.pdf>

(MSF) Medecins Sans Frontiers (2025). EU governments' hypocrisy fuelling suffering in Gaza, Press Release, June 16. <https://www.msf.org/eu-hypocrisy-fuelling-suffering-gaza>

-OHCHR (2025). Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Sep. 16. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>

———— (2026). Ethnic cleansing concerns in Gaza and West Bank amid intensified violence and forcible transfers by Israel – UN report, Media Center, Feb. 19. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/ethnic-cleansing-concerns-gaza-and-west-bank-amid-intensified-violence-and>

Spindler, W. (2015). The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis, UNHCR, Dec. 8. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis>

-The Diplomatic Service of the European Union (2024). Middle East: Opening address by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the Ministerial side event on the Peace Process and the Two-State Solution, Sep. 27. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/middle-east-opening-address-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ministerial-side-event_en

-Times of Israel (2024). Hamas Leader Ismail Haniyeh Assassinated in Tehran Strike, July 31.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-leader-ismail-haniyeh-assassinated-in-tehran-missile-strike/>

-UNRWA (n.d.). United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. <https://www.unrwa.org/#mm-2>

-UNRWA (2026). UNRWA Health Teams Continue Delivering Life-Saving Services in Gaza, Feb.13. <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/videos/unrwa-health-teams-continue-delivering-life-saving-services-gaza>

US Department of the Treasury (2023). Following Terrorist Attack on Israel, Treasury Sanctions Hamas Operatives and Financial Facilitators, Oct. 18. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1816>

-Werr, P. (2024). EU pledges billions of euros for Egypt as it seeks to curb migration, Reuters, March 17. <https://shorturl.at/w8x8Z>