

BASIS Request CAB GABRIEL/2883

Bilateral meeting with Sven Koopmans on the Middle East Peace Process

11 January 2023

1. SCENE SETTER

On the 11 January 2023, you will have a bilateral meeting with **Mr. Sven Koopmans, the European Union Special representatives for the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP)**, to explore possible synergies between the initiatives under your portfolio's remit and the external relation policies to revive the MEPP.

On 29 April 2021 the Council appointed Mr. **Sven Koopmans** as the EU's Special Representative (EUSR) for the MEPP, from **1 May 2021 to 28 February 2023**.

The mandate of the EUSR for the Middle East Peace Process is to provide an active contribution to the **final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict** based on a **two-state solution**, in line with the UNSCR 2334 (2016). The EUSR will maintain close contacts with all parties in the peace process as well as with the United Nations and other relevant organisations such as the League of Arab States.

The EUSR will also support the work of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, on this issue and maintain an overview of all EU regional activities linked to the Middle East Peace Process.

In 2021 Mr. Koopmans setup the informal 'Friends of the Peace Process' group to bring together the various arms of the EU institutions, to enhance information sharing and strengthen coherence of action. **The platform has been meeting three times to date, allowing the various EU institutions to exchange information on each other's activities, priorities and plans; to develop an overview of the EU's engagement with each of the parties; and to take stock of developments in the MEPP.**

On 29 December 2022, the Israel's Knesset voted to ratify a new Israeli government under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (it consists of his Likud party, two ultra-Orthodox parties, and three far-right religious factions).

It is important noticing that, the new government's line vis à vis the regional cooperation may be less open and positive, compared to Yair Lapid's government.

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This, in turn, may require **the adaptation of the format for new science diplomacy or regional dialogue initiatives**, as for example, the expert talks organised by the EU Delegation to Israel and the Peres Center, which for the past two years could count on a government more supportive of the "Two State Solution" and on the normalisation of Israel's relations with Arab countries.

Palestine (PA) and Israel are both members of the **Union for the Mediterranean- UfM**. As members of the Union for the Mediterranean, they participate actively in the Policy Dialogue platform for Research and Innovation (R&I) that recently adopted, at the UfM Ministerial Conference on R&I on 27 June 2022, three R&I Roadmaps on climate change, renewable energy and health, as the basis for future cooperation in the coming years.

The Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2024, published in early December 2022, includes for the first time a 'Mediterranean Initiative' - 37 topics for calls for proposals with an EU investment of over 300 million euros under Calls for Proposals that aim at transforming the jointly agreed political priorities into specific actions, encouraging the participation of Mediterranean entities to the framework programme.

Both countries also participate in the Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East-SESAME.

On 30 January 2023, in Cairo, Egypt, the European Commission is organising in collaboration with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an event on *International Cooperation in R&I for Mediterranean resilience: Launch of Mediterranean Initiative: Horizon Europe WP 2023-2024*. All members of the UfM Platform on Research and Innovation, including focal points for Israel and Palestine have been invited. Both Israeli and Palestinian representatives confirmed their attendance.

This event aims to present Horizon Europe and explain its different elements, with a specific focus on the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2024 and opportunities for cooperation under the Mediterranean Initiative. The event is targeting universities, research organisations, businesses, NGOs, policy-makers, practitioners, funding institutions; thus, giving participants an opportunity to network in view of applying for Horizon Europe's calls for proposals already opened or planned for the coming 2 years.

Back to back on 31st of January, a half day roundtable will be held to discuss synergies and complementarities to achieve common goals among the relevant R&I funding/support instruments in the region. All national Focal Points of the UfM Regional Platform on Research and Innovation are officially invited.

2. OBJECTIVES

- To inform Mr. Koopmans of the ongoing and future initiatives, under your portfolio, which have been enabling closer research, education and cultural cooperation in the Middle East, contributing thereby to advance the peace and normalization dialogues.
- Profile the participation in Horizon Europe, and Erasmus+ programmes, as a tool of Science Diplomacy in action, able to contribute effectively to the external policies of the EU (e.g. promoting the geopolitical dimension the European Green Deal, Digital and Energy transition, global health and post-COVID recovery).
- To position Science Diplomacy as an instrument of soft power in EU foreign policy in the region, which is progressively gaining momentum, and to stress the leading role of DG Research and Innovation in steering and implementing Science Diplomacy initiatives both in Europe and the MENA region.

3. LINES TO TAKE

Science and Innovation diplomacy

- Stress that, more than ever, in the current challenging geopolitical times, it is imperative to foster synergies between science and the traditional diplomatic dialogue **and to build new partnerships on stronger research, education and innovation foundations, grounded on academic freedom and on scientific excellence.**
- **Science can bring the best out of the human cooperation.** Under the previous Research Framework Programmes, we have seen how people come to work together, **putting their differences aside, driven by their shared challenges, curiosity and will to excel.**
- Research and innovation cooperation can play a key role in **building mutual trust and interdependent relationships bilaterally but also multilaterally.** In the case of the MENA region, can serve as a catalyst for stronger dialogue and hopefully lead to greater political stability in the longer term.
- The EU Regional cooperation in R&I, will continue to be guided by **the New strategy with the Southern Mediterranean region (February 2021) and the Global Approach to Research and Innovation adopted in May 2021, that sets out the EU's vision for future R&I cooperation and prioritises the Mediterranean Region.**
- In the specific case of Israel and Palestine, the key objectives of the R&I Global Strategy will be pursued within the platform of **the Union for the Mediterranean.**
- Furthermore, since many years, the **participation in the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Programme, offers a solid framework to seamlessly work with our MENA partners, to progress on our sustainable green, digital and health transitions, while promoting the EU values. Israel is closely associated to the Programme since more than 25 years and is one of its most successful users. It remains a very significant positive channel of engagement with Israel for the EU.**

- Currently **researchers from both sides, Israel and Palestine, already work together within EU R&I funded Programmes.**
- To give one example of such cooperation the **Israeli company MEKOROT WATER and PALESTINIAN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH CENTER cooperated efficiently** in the framework of the project: **Combined solar power and desalination plants: technical-economic potential in Mediterranean Partner countries.**
- **The new Mediterranean Initiative in the current Horizon Europe** work programme aims at enhancing, in the years to come, the opportunities for researchers from both sides to continue to participate together in EU funded R&I projects and initiatives.
- In addition, we will promote **the participation of both Israel and Palestine to other initiatives that will contribute to our regional Research Roadmaps, such as:**
 - the **European Partnership for a climate-neutral, sustainable and productive Blue Economy;**
 - the new Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” with the development of a **“Mediterranean Lighthouse”.**
 - the **Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area – PRIMA;**
 - **Mission Innovation** (a global initiative on research, development and demonstration to make clean energy affordable, attractive and accessible for all); includes a mission on clean hydrogen to reduce cost of producing clean hydrogen and support to scaling up innovative solutions to market
- In terms of concrete deliverables, **the R&I Section of the EU Delegation to Israel and the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation have worked together at the organisation of three, first of its kind, Regional Science Diplomacy Roundtables on climate related matters.** This initiative's outcome was inclusive and impactful, both in terms of topics' relevance (for the region) and participation, **with about 70 stakeholders from 15 different countries. The outcome of these workshops (building on the Abraham Accords) has been regularly shared within the Friend of the Peace**

Process Group's meetings, chaired by Mr. Koopmans. This DG R&I initiative has been praised by the relevant regional stakeholders, the other Commission services and the EEAS as one of the few EU impactful and concrete initiatives, gathering Israelis and Arab countries around common regional challenges.

- Through brainstorming and knowledge sharing, science and policy experts contributed to cross-border dialogue and ideas on pressing issues pertaining to climate change and environmental sustainability. Participants included experts in academia, government, policy, business and innovation from **Bahrain, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Monaco, Morocco, Palestine, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.**
- **Moreover, last September, the R&I Section has further cooperated with the Peres Center, the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, Microsoft Israel, Microsoft for Startups, and The InnovationCenter at Ben Gurion University, at the organisation and moderation of a regional conference in Jordan, which successfully gathered participants from all across the MENA region (Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya).**
- The Regional Conference was the capstone event of the **Peres Center's "Starting Up Together programme"** which aims to **cultivate the technical and leadership skills of emerging young entrepreneurs from across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region**, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and networks which they need to succeed in the high-tech sector.
- Leveraging on these positive achievements, in the upcoming year, **the R&I Section of the EU Delegation, together with the Peres Center and in collaboration with the Arava Institute, the EIT and StartUp Nation Central** is planning new science and innovation diplomacy initiatives, **focussing on the role of the green and food tech to address the climate-water-energy nexus common challenges affecting the MENA region.**

The EU Delegation's to Israel support to the European Investment Bank and Ecopeace regional cooperation on climate and energy.

- **Building on past EIB's renewable energy cooperation projects in the region** (N.B. a very active regional EIB office has been established recently in Jerusalem) **and on the Eco-Peace Green Blue Deal, a series of cross boundary projects** (also introduced to **President von der Leyen** during her visit to Israel in June 2022), the R&I Section to the EU Delegation to Israel and DG NEAR together with the EIB and the EU Representation Office in Jerusalem, are **exploring new cooperation strands with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and Gulf countries to support a Regional Climate Initiative.**

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Erasmus+ and Higher Education in the MENA region

- The good participation rate of **both Israel and the Palestinians in Erasmus+** and other programmes is an important **contribution to the Middle East Peace Process, and to reinforcing the EU's role in it.**
- Youth cooperation projects, particularly youth exchanges, are reason for optimism. **Many projects involve NGOs from both Israel and the**

Palestinian territories. Such encounters usually happen in third countries, i.e. neither in Israel nor in Palestine. Therefore, coming together seems more feasible in a larger, non-bilateral setting, where smaller, more flexible organisations are involved (Youth NGOs versus universities).

- It is therefore essential **to keep our programmes not only open, but also very active, both with Israel and the Palestinians.** Nonetheless, it is also important to make sure that our cooperation takes place in compliance with the EU legal framework, including the territoriality clause.
- We are also intensifying our policy cooperation with the Southern Mediterranean. **In 2023, DG EAC will co-organise the first-ever Ministerial Conference of the Union for the Mediterranean on Higher Education, which Morocco will host.** We intend to work on a positive agenda focused on issues of interest for all, including both Israel and Palestine, **such as the internationalisation of higher education in the Mediterranean.**

4. BACKGROUND NOTES

4.1 The Middle East Peace Process

The Resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a fundamental interest of the EU. The EU's objective is a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The EU has consistently expressed its concerns about developments on the ground, which threaten to make a two-state solution impossible. In our view, the only way to resolve the conflict is through an agreement that ends the occupation which began in 1967, that ends all claims and that fulfils the aspirations of both parties. [REDACTED]. A lasting solution must be achieved on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the Roadmap, agreements previously reached by the parties and of the Arab Peace Initiative. If an agreement to finally end the conflict were to be reached, the door would open to a deepened and enhanced cooperation among all the countries of the region.

The EU is willing to work with its partners to re-launch peace negotiations, based on the following parameters:

- [REDACTED]
- Security arrangements that, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty and show that the occupation is over; and, for Israelis, protect their security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with security threats, including with new and vital threats in the region.
- A just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee question.
- [REDACTED] A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states.

To that end, the EU undertakes a range of activities – both political and practical – and is the largest donor to Palestinian state-building efforts aiming at a Palestinian state based on the rule of law and respect of human rights. It has also consistently called for intra-Palestinian reconciliation and holding of democratic elections.

The EU – with the UN, the US and the Russian Federation – is a member of the '**Quartet**' which in 2002 launched a 'road map for peace' aimed at resolving the conflict. The EU has welcomed the Arab Peace Initiative as a significant contribution from the Arab countries.

[EU positions on the Middle East peace process](#)

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process

The EU's objective is a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours. The EU's long-term policy asserts that negotiations remain the best way forward.

EU positions on "final status issues"

- **Borders:** The EU considers that the future Palestinian state will require secure and recognised borders. These should be based on a withdrawal from the territory occupied in 1967 with minor modifications mutually agreed, if necessary, in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1402 and 1515 and the principles of the Madrid Process.
- **Israeli settlements** in the occupied Palestinian territory: the EU has repeatedly confirmed its deep concern about accelerated settlement expansion in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. This expansion prejudices the outcome of final status negotiations and threatens the viability of an agreed two-state solution. The EU considers that settlement building anywhere in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law, constitutes an obstacle to peace and threatens to make a two-state solution impossible.
- **Jerusalem:** The EU considers that the peace negotiations should include the resolution of all issues surrounding the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. The EU will not recognise any changes to the pre-1967 borders including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties. The EU supports institution building work in East Jerusalem, notably in the areas of health, education and the judiciary.
- **Palestinian refugees:** The EU supports a just, viable and agreed solution on this question. We will respect an agreement reached between the two Parties on this point. Since 1971 the EU has been providing significant support to the work of agencies providing vital services to the Palestinian refugees (UNRWA). It is committed to adapting this support as appropriate, in pursuit of a just and equitable solution to the refugee issue.
- **Security:** The EU condemns all acts of violence which cannot be allowed to impede progress towards peace. The EU recognises Israel's right to protect its citizens from attacks and emphasises that the Israeli Government, in exercising this right, should act within international law. Through its EUPOL COPPS mission, the EU supports the reform and development of the Palestinian police and judicial institutions. EU-Israel cooperation on the fight against terrorist financing and money laundering or other aspects of soft security as well as on security research represents a non-negligible practical EU contribution to Israel's security. Security arrangements should, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty and show that the occupation is over, and, for Israelis, protect their security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with new and emerging threats.

The EU's overarching political position on the Middle East Peace Process has been set out in multiple **Council conclusions**, including for example, those of [22 July 2014](#).

EU political support for the Middle East peace process

- The EU has strong political and economic relations with partners in the region including Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. These are underpinned by "Association Agreements" and by European Neighbourhood Policy "Action Plans".
- The EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/"Union for the Mediterranean" serves as a forum for regional dialogue and remains the only multilateral context outside the United Nations where all parties to the conflict can meet and work together on a range of issues.
- The EU participates in the Middle East Quartet, together with the United States, United Nations and the Russian Federation.

- The HRVP also engages in regular consultations with our partners in the region, including both parties, key countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE and the Arab League on the issues involved.

EU practical & financial support for the Middle East peace process

The EU is the largest donor to the Palestinians. In recent years, the combined contribution of the European Commission and EU member states has reached almost €1 billion per year. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is the main framework to develop political as well as economic relations of the EU with both [Israel](#) and [Palestinian Authority](#). Commission programmes targeted at ENP partner countries have been implemented mainly through a common financial instrument: the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The EU's development assistance is managed by the Commission's Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR). The Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) oversees humanitarian assistance. On the ground, the assistance is managed by the Office of the EU Representative for the West Bank and Gaza Strip in East Jerusalem. The humanitarian assistance is managed by the ECHO office in Jerusalem.

The EU has taken a leading role in the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), established in 1993, which is a 15-member body serving as the principal policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Palestinian people. The AHLC is chaired by Norway and co-sponsored by the EU and the US. The United Nations participates together with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The EU High Representative/Vice President hosts the Spring Sessions of the AHLC in Brussels.

EU assistance is intended to foster the conditions for peace, stability and prosperity in the region, notably by advancing the Palestinian state-building process, promoting good governance and encouraging economic recovery with a view to enhancing the viability of the future Palestinian state.

4.2 The EU Delegation to Israel Climate Diplomacy Workshops initiative:

Following the signature of the **Abraham Accords**, subsequently to the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (the Israel–United Arab Emirates normalization agreement), new opportunities have opened up in research and innovation (R&I) cooperation between Israel and UAE, under the steer of the EU in areas of mutual interest.

Leveraging on this key historical moment, the R&I Section in Israel has been putting in place various initiative on **science for diplomacy to help achieving the goals of EU foreign and security policies in Middle East**, and thus supporting public diplomacy efforts in the region.

As of June 2021, a series of round tables are being organised in cooperation with the **Peres Centre for Peace and Innovation** to foster the regional cooperation on R&I among several countries in the region (Jordan, Egypt, Palestinians and now UAE, etc.). These round tables have a twofold purpose, namely (i) bringing together high-level speakers from different countries to discuss about common policy objectives and priorities in the region (**climate, renewable, energy, water, agriculture**) and (ii) identifying projects involving several countries under the EU umbrella.

The workshops have contributed to strengthen the alignment between national, regional and EU priorities in R&I, with a direct impact on identified global challenges; **this is the case of the geopolitical dimension of the European Green Deal but also the wider security implications and links with critical infrastructures and utilities.**

Read Sea Ecosystem: 21 June 2021: the first roundtable explored the challenges linked to Climate Change in the Red Sea Ecosystem and saw the participation of experts from the European Commission, Bahrain, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Jordan, Monaco, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (thanks to the EU Del in the UAE), and the United Kingdom. The European Commission presented the relevant calls for proposals (on marine research, which are open to international cooperation) of Horizon Europe Work Program for 2021/22, published few days ago.

Food Security in the Face of Desertification: 16 November 2021: the second roundtable focussed on climate innovation, this time discussing food security amid desertification. The roundtable included experts from the EU, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Germany and Morocco. Among the experts were academics, government officials and members of the private sector. The topic in question is especially relevant, as desertification has worsened in recent years due to climate change, reducing rainfall and making air hotter and drier. As the panel discussed, there are two main steps: prevention and preparation. The first step deals with stopping climate change as much as possible right now, while the second deals with preparing for the future while taking into account society, nations and future generations.

Renewable energy and water desalination. 24 March 2022: the third roundtable addressed the challenges and opportunities related to the topic: How to combine renewable energy and water desalination for a more environmentally, economically and politically feasible approach? Water scarcity is a growing environmental threat globally, but much more so in dry, deserted areas. Water desalination offers a way to create potable water from brine and sea water but is a highly energy intensive process.

4.3 The Starting Up Together Programme

"Starting Up Together" programme, implemented by the Peres Center for Peace and Innovation, in partnership with the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, Microsoft Israel, Microsoft for Startups, and The InnovationCenter at Ben Gurion University, was established in order to help motivated and passionate aspiring MENA entrepreneurs obtain the skill set necessary in order to turn their dreams into reality. First of its kind, this multicultural program is focused on impact entrepreneurship, and aims to make the innovation ecosystem more accessible for young entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa region. The programme runs in two tracks:

Israeli Track:

The flagship program methodology, the Israel program track brings together culturally diverse Israelis (Jewish, Arab, Druze, Bedouin, religious, and secular, with emphasis on those from underrepresented communities and the social and geographic peripheries) to cultivate technical and leadership skills to enable integration into the entrepreneurial sector while promoting cross-cultural partnership and collaboration. The Israeli Track is intended to be implemented in-person, with virtual adaptations for COVID-19.

Regional online track:

A new, online track has transformed the core program methodologies into high-quality online content that enables full virtual implementation, expanding access to the program to aspiring young entrepreneurs from across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This track is based on the foundations of the Peres Center's "YaLa Young Leaders" program framework, and builds on the burgeoning potential of the Abraham Accords to promote cross-border initiatives that foster cooperation and dialogue between diverse peoples of the Middle East.

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- [REDACTED]

4.4 Figures on participation of Palestine in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe

Palestine and the R&D landscape

Palestine's R&D expenditure per inhabitant ranks on position 73rd. Its R&D intensity is 0.49% of GDP which is below the EU-27 average of 2.20%; Palestine receives a total EU contribution to research & innovation of EUR 0.3 million; Palestine has 519 researchers per million of population which is below the EU-27 average of 4,231 and ranks 69th place;

HORIZON 2020 and FP7 - Key data for Palestine

H2020	€0.3m	8	9	3
FP7	€2.6m	22	23	1
	of EU contribution	grants signed	participations	MSCA beneficiaries

4.5 Palestine in Horizon 2020

Palestine is in 64th position in participations and 83rd in budget share in H2020 compared to 44th in participations and 44th in budget share in FP7 among third countries;

The success rate of applicants from Palestine is 10.29%, which is below the EU average of 15.25%;

9 participations come from organisations based in Palestine, which is 0.13% of the overall participation in the Horizon 2020. There were 23 participations in FP7 from Palestine, which represented 0.46% of the overall participation among third countries;

4.6 Performance of Palestine in H2020 priority areas

Palestine has most participations in the Europe in a changing world - inclusive, innovative and reflective societies (4 participations) and Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Actions (3 participations);

Palestine in Horizon Europe

For a total of 11 applications, 3 projects have been retained for a total of 396.049,00 Euros making a quite high success rate of 18.2 % (above the EU average, which is 15.25 %;)

The list of the 3 projects:

Topic	Project Acronym	Project Title	Organisation	Type	Budget
Culture, creativity and inclusive society	EMBRACE	EMBRACing change: Overcoming obstacles and advancing democracy in the European Neighbourhood	PAL-THINK FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES	BENEFICIARY	100000
Health	END-VOC	ENDING COVID 19 VARIANTS OF CONCERN THROUGH COHORT STUDIES: END-VOC	ARAB AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PRIVATE STOCK COMPANY	BENEFICIARY	296049
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)	MOEBHIOS	Multi-attribute values' OntologiEs to improve Built Heritage InformatiOn assessment in cluStered territories	AL-QUDS UNIVERSITY	ASSOCIATED_PARTNER	0

4.7 Union for the Mediterranean Regional Platform in R&I

- The EU and Mediterranean are engaged in a very active policy dialogue in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Platform in Research and Innovation (R&I), with the main objective to make recommendations for the joint implementation of research policy priorities bringing together 42 member states (27 EU Member States and 15 third Countries);
- 8 R&I Roadmaps on climate change, renewable energies and health, have been elaborated by a group of experts from all participating countries in 2021 as the basis for future EU-Mediterranean cooperation in research and innovation
 1. Healthy, resilient, inclusive and secure Euro-Mediterranean societies
 2. Overview of RE scenarios, harmonized RE smart database
 3. Modernization of the electric power systems (Smart grid, smart cities and local RE generation)
 4. Distribution system modernization (Energy loss management)
 5. Advanced Technologies | Green hydrogen production, storage- and infrastructures implementation
 6. Impact of water scarcity and drought in Rural Areas
 7. Sustainable agricultural production
 8. Biodiversity in Changing Climate

4.8 The Mediterranean Initiative

- The so-called "Mediterranean Initiative" includes various encouragements for the participation of the Mediterranean countries to calls following the WP 2023-2024;
- List of topics have been identified to be particularly suitable for cooperation with the Mediterranean and in line with the 8 R&I Roadmaps on climate change, renewable energies and health;
- We expect to have an overall of 37 topics for a total EU investment of more than 300 Million Euros for the Mediterranean Region;

4.9 The Partnership on Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA)

The Partnership on Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) is an initiative created under Horizon 2020 based on Article 185 TFEU, which enables the EU to participate in research programmes undertaken jointly by several Member States. The main objective of the initiative (2018-2028) is to devise new R&I approaches to improve water availability and sustainable agriculture production in a region heavily affected by climate change, urbanisation and population growth. Most importantly, the initiative is based on co-creation, co-funding and co-ownership.

The programmatic period is scheduled to run from 2018 until 2024. Full information about the PRIMA calls and other activities on the website: <http://prima-med.org>.

The partnership currently consists of 19 participating countries: Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey. [REDACTED]

4.10 The SESAME Project

Israel and PA are both members of the Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME). Thanks to the PV plant funded by the EU, SESAME is the only accelerator in the world that is 100% supplied by renewable energy.

4.11 Israel and Horizon 2020

The agreement on Israel's participation in Horizon 2020 was signed on 8 June 2014. EU funding received during the course of Horizon 2020 amounted to €1.22 billion. Israel participated in 1,596 signed agreements involving more than 1,946 participants¹. Israel's excellence has been especially notable in the European Research Council (ERC) Marie Skłodowska Curie (MSCA) grants. This is followed by participation in collaborative projects on ICT, INNOSUP, Health, FET, Secure Societies, Food, Transport, Research Infrastructures, Climate)². Israel's top main 5 collaborators were Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and the UK. Tel Aviv University ranks second in Israeli universities participating and receiving Horizon 2020 funding.

4.12 Israel and Horizon EUROPE

The EU – Israel R&I partnership **has been consistently evolving generating win-win benefits along the way**. In return to giving Israel access to a vast international research network the European Research Area **has benefited from Israel's high levels of excellence as well as outstanding innovation capacity**.

In Horizon 2020, Israeli entities have participated **around 2000 times in over 1600 research & innovation projects across collaborative, MSCA, ERC and SME Instrument actions of Horizon 2020**. They received €1.2 billion in direct EU contribution. **This is a significant increase from €861 million received in FP7**.

Amongst the Associated Countries, Israel ranked 3rd in terms of participation, 2nd in the EIC Pilot and 1st in the SME instrument. **499 SME participations in H2020 (215 participations in FP7)**.

Israel's excellent performance in Research and Innovation **is being confirmed also under our new R&I framework program, Horizon Europe**. For the **first ERC calls under Horizon Europe**, researchers from Israel met the high expectations, reaching a 20% success rate.

At the beginning of May 2022, the **European Research Council announced the winners of its 2021 Advanced Grants competition**. The funding, worth in total **€624.6 million, will go to 253 leading researchers across Europe and Associated Countries, including 12 from Israel**.

Moreover, the city of Eilat was selected **to take part in the EU Mission for climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030**. The **city mission program is directed to support, promote and showcase 100 European cities in their systemic transformation towards climate neutrality** by 2030 and to make these cities innovation hubs for all cities.

¹ [H2020 Country Profile - Key Figures - Israel | Sheets - Qlik Sense \(europa.eu\)](#)

² [H2020 Country Profile - Participation in Programmes - Israel | Sheets - Qlik Sense \(europa.eu\)](#)

In August 2022, the State of Israel gained the first place among all European countries in the "Cancer Mission. Israeli researchers [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], are the first to obtain a grant of 15 million Euros to develop advanced technological solutions and cancer research.

4.13 State of play of Israel's and Palestine's participation in EAC programmes

Both Israel and Palestine perform well in Erasmus+, particularly if we compare them with other, bigger countries in the Southern Mediterranean. However, there are differences based in their respective strengths and needs.

For instance, when it comes to higher education mobility to and from the EU (students and staff exchanges), Israel is extremely successful. Over 15,000 exchanges took place between Europe and Israel between 2014 and 2020. Obviously, EU universities have a great interest in exchanges with Israeli universities, as many of them have world-class standards.

Palestinian participation is more modest. Less than 4,000 exchanges took place in the same period. However, it is still in line with other countries in the region.

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[REDACTED] Over the last programme, Israel absorbed about 25% of it. This cap seeks to better spread the benefits of participation in Erasmus+ across the region, in line with the objectives of the New Agenda for the Mediterranean.

At the same time, Erasmus+ also finances capacity-building projects in the fields of higher education, vocational education, training and youth. In this case, Palestine is much better represented in the selected projects. This is consistent with the bigger capacity-building needs of Palestinian establishments.

In relation to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) – the part of Horizon Europe which deals with the mobility and training of researchers – Israel, as a third country associated to Horizon Europe, is one of the best performing countries. The MSCA are also open to Palestine, as a medium-income economy, but their participation is very modest. For instance, during the 2014-2020 period, only three Palestinian organisations benefitted from the MSCA. Furthermore, to date, Palestine has failed to nominate an MSCA National Contact Point, which would be essential to boost its participation in the actions.

In sum, our cooperation with both Israel and Palestine is of high interest for both parties and the EU, as its results and our contacts at all levels reveal. However, there are differences between both parties. On the one hand, the cooperation with Israel is closer to the one that the EU could have with an industrialised country. In addition, the country has the benefit of sitting in the EU Neighbourhood. This offers many opportunities given the importance allocated in all our programmes to the Neighbourhood countries. Still, this cooperation is not exempt from friction related to the conflict. On the other hand, the cooperation with Palestine is similar to the one that the EU could have with any medium-income country in the Neighbourhood.

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Upcoming plans

With the ongoing deployment of our new generation of programmes, DG EAC plans to intensify its policy work with the Southern Neighbourhood, to also deliver on the New Agenda for the Mediterranean.

However, as we know, regional policy dialogue is often a challenge when Israel and Palestine (and other Arab countries) have to sit in the same room. This is one of the reasons for shifting towards cooperating more closely with the region through the Union for the Mediterranean, in line with general EU policy as well, which offers a vehicle that is accepted by all parties and works on matters of shared interest.

In this respect, in 2023 DG EAC will co-organise the first-ever Ministerial Conference of the Union for the Mediterranean on Higher Education, which will be hosted by Morocco. Our intention is to work on a positive agenda focused on issues of interest for all, including both Israel and Palestine, such as the internationalisation of higher education in the Mediterranean.

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