



Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President
European Commission

Brussels, 25 March 2022

Re: Conditionality to the EU's financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority

Dear President,

We, as the leaders of the S&D, Greens/EFA, and The Left political groups in the European Parliament, are writing to you to express our concerns about the initiative to condition the disbursement of an annual EUR 30 million from the European Union's financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority on the adjustment of the content of Palestinian school textbooks.

While we condemn in the strongest possible terms all acts of anti-Semitism, racism, or incitement to violence or hatred in all their manifestations, we also strongly believe that any such initiative and decision - based on unfair allegations - would only be counterproductive and create unnecessary tensions among EU institutions.

When this initiative was first presented by Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi to the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Committee of the Council in December 2021, it was met by significant criticism and opposition by the Member States. When it was recently re-submitted, with only minor changes, in the same Committee, an even higher number of Member States voted against it, or abstained.

As you know, the European Parliament also rejected, in the framework of the Union's annual budgetary and discharge procedures, initiatives aimed at conditioning the Union's financial assistance to Palestine or to actors involved in Palestine on the adjustment of Palestinian textbooks in the past years.

Nevertheless, we understand that a proposal along the line of Commissioner Várhelyi's above mentioned initiative is now expected to be submitted for approval in the College of Commissioners soon, potentially leading to a decision that would contradict the positions expressed by the Member States in the Council and by the European Parliament, as the co-legislator institutions of the Union.

As a matter of fact, the study prepared and presented, on the European Commission's request, by the Georg Eckert Institute in June 2021 concluded that Palestinian textbooks adhered to UNESCO standards, while it identified a few exceptions that could be improved, and also acknowledged the positive changes in the editions for the academic year 2020/21. These dynamics should be encouraged, instead of hampered, in order to secure progress towards the goal of eliminating hate speech and incitement on both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the same time, depriving the Palestinian Authority of financial assets aimed at financing the salaries of teachers would not only have a negative impact on the right to education of the Palestinian youth but may also be counterproductive, by opening up new opportunities for extremist groups, from the perspective of the ambition to finding a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Moreover, it might also be worth noting that while Palestinian textbooks have been scrutinised against UNESCO and other international standards by EU institutions, which is a justified move, no similar initiative has been taken, to our knowledge, to assess the content of Israeli textbooks against the same standards.

On the basis of all these, we strongly believe that any proposal and decision resulting in an unjustified stigmatisation of Palestinian textbooks, and through them the Palestinian educational system at large, can only further cement the existing prejudice that Palestinian antagonism towards Israel stems from Palestinian culture and education rather than from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the decades-long occupation of Palestinian land.

In the light of these considerations, we do hope that we can count on your support for securing that any proposal in the College of Commissioners that would make any part of the EU's financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority be conditioned on a reform of Palestinian textbooks will be dismissed.

We also count on your support in order that any pending EU financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority which is suspended on the same ground be unlocked without delay.

We thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

MEP Iratxe García Pérez
President of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament

MEP Philippe Lamberts
Co-President of the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament

MEP Manon Aubry
Co-President of The Left in the European Parliament

MEP Martin Schirdewan
Co-President of The Left in the European Parliament