



By: TA | AP Insight

# EU seeks greater sway in the Middle East



Europe turned its attention to the Palestinians on Monday as the election defeat of Israel ally **Viktor Orbán** in Hungary gives new momentum to efforts addressing Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

More than 60 nations sent representatives to Brussels for talks with Palestinian representatives on stability, security and long-term peace.

The European Union has largely been on the sidelines in the Middle East despite being the **biggest provider** of aid to the Palestinians and backing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A majority of EU member countries now recognize an independent Palestinian state after many expressed outrage over Israeli actions in Gaza.

The 27-nation bloc is also Israel's top trading partner and a major buyer of Israeli weapons.

But the EU had no role in negotiating the October **ceasefire in Gaza** that took effect after two years of war. And European moves to condemn or sanction some Israeli actions frequently had been vetoed by Orbán.

Now Hungary's next leader, Péter Magyar, is indicating he will act differently from Orbán on Israel.

And some leaders critical of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, like Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, are pushing for decisive action.

## Challenging Europe's agreement with Israel

Magyar has said he would seek "pragmatic relations" with Israel but also rejoin the International Criminal Court, which issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu over Gaza.

Orbán defied that warrant while **hosting Netanyahu** in 2025, then started the process of

**Hungary leaving** the world's only court for war crimes and genocide.

Magyar also said he might not continue Orbán's policy of vetoing actions on Israel — a stumbling block that EU leaders critical of Israel have failed to overcome over the past three years of conflict in the Middle East.

After the Brussels meeting, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said that without Orbán's veto action could be coming soon, such as imposing sanctions on violent Israeli settlers.

"We have 27 countries and 26 countries want to put violent settlers sanctions in place," she said. "The one who doesn't want the sanctions on violent settlers has gotten their upper hand. Now, this country had elections, and we'll have a new government."

The Spanish prime minister wants the EU to suspend its long-standing Association Agreement with Israel and has said Spain will make a formal proposal at an EU foreign ministers' meeting on Tuesday.

**Ongoing attacks by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and continued devastation in Gaza, have dimmed the prospect for a two-state solution - Maxime Prévot**

However, a suspension seems unlikely because countries such as Austria and Germany tend to back Israel.

The agreement in force since 2000 sets out the legal and institutional framework within which the bloc and Israel conduct trade and cooperation.

The EU has found **indications** Israel had violated that agreement in its military campaign in Gaza.

Other action, such as targeted sanctions on Israeli settlers in the West Bank, could be approved if a "qualified majority" — 15 of the 27 nations representing at least 65% of the EU's population — agree.

Ongoing attacks by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and continued devastation in Gaza, have dimmed the prospect for a two-state solution, said Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot ahead of Monday's meeting.

“The two-state solution is being made more difficult by the day,” Prévot said. “But Belgium and many European and Arab partners continue to believe that this remains the only realistic path to a lasting peace, for Israelis, for Palestinians and for the stability of the entire region.”

## Palestinian prime minister calls for unity

Gaza requires “one state, one government, one law and one goal,” Palestinian Prime Minister Mohamed Mustafa said in Brussels.

“Our common objective of achieving one security structure under the legitimate authority should guide the effective coordination between the International Stabilization Force, the Palestinian Authority, security institutions and other international actors. Security must not be fragmented,” he said.

He also called for “the gradual and responsible collection of arms from all armed groups and also the full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.”



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The disarmament of Hamas is a major challenge in next steps for the ceasefire in Gaza.

In the **West Bank**, Palestinians say Israel has used the cover of the Iran war to tighten its grip over the territory, as settler attacks surge and the military imposes additional **wartime restrictions** on movement, citing security.

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But the bloc is eager to not be sidelined in diplomacy in the Middle East, just across the Mediterranean.

During the Brussels meeting, Mustafa said he had met for the first time Nikolay Mladenov in the Bulgarian diplomat's role as the Trump-appointed director of Board of Peace.

He said he pressed Mladenov on ongoing Israeli military action in Gaza, increasing humanitarian assistance and security in the coastal enclave. “We see eye to eye on many things, and I think that we will be meeting again in the near future,” Mustafa said.