



By: TA | AP Insight

Mideast crisis divides Europe as it grapples with policy toward Israel



Buoyed by the election of a new leader in Hungary, Europe's top diplomats are meeting in Luxembourg to forge plans of action on multiple crises from the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian hybrid attacks, and economic instability as the war in Iran drives up **energy prices** worldwide.

But it is the European Union's policy toward Israel — and how to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as security deteriorates in the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the occupied West Bank, as well as in Lebanon — that is dividing EU members, stymieing strong action, and frustrating many in the 27-nation bloc.

Israel disagreement hobbles EU action

The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said there was no clear political agreement in Luxembourg to ramp up pressure on Israel.

"We didn't see that today, but these discussions will continue," she said.

One of the loudest voices within the EU blocking sharper pressure on Israel is shortly leaving office — Hungary's outgoing Prime Minister **Viktor Orbán** routinely obstructed EU action on issues ranging from support for Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion to sanctions on Israelis accused of violent extremism.

Kallas said that Orbán's defeat by pro-European opposition leader Péter Magyar in Hungary's recent election could accelerate action.

"A lot of issues ... have been blocked" by Hungary, she said. "We are reopening the discussions and hope that we get a positive result."

The EU has an **Association Agreement**, signed in 2000, that regulates trade and cooperation with Israel.

Spain, Slovenia and Ireland have proposed completely suspending it, a move that doesn't have the required unanimous support among EU nations.

However, a partial suspension targeting just the trade aspects could have enough political support, said Spanish Foreign Minister José Albares.

"The European Union has to say today very clearly to Israel that a change is needed," he said.

The attacks on the values that underpin that agreement are now too serious to ignore - Maxime Prevot

The EU has found indications Israel had violated the agreement with the bloc in its military campaign in Gaza.

"The attacks on the values that underpin that agreement are now too serious to ignore," said Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prevot, adding that Belgium would support at least a partial suspension of the deal.

Irish Foreign Minister Helen McEntee said the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Israel's recent adoption of the death penalty for some Palestinians, and ongoing fighting in Lebanon should push EU nations to ramp up pressure on Israel.

"We need to act. We need to make sure that our fundamental values are protected," McEntee said.

Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard said France and Sweden have brought forward a plan to curtail trade with Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

EU diplomats call for extending ceasefires in Lebanon and Iran

Lebanon's Prime Minister Nawaf Salam spoke

at the meeting in Luxembourg about the fragile ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, difficulties in disarming the Hezbollah militant group, and the need for EU assistance for the war-torn nation.

“Lebanon today needs its European partners more than ever,” Salam posted on X on Tuesday.

While now mainly headquartered in Brussels, EU institutions are also spread out in northern Europe like the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany and the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. Lawmakers, diplomats and officials regularly move between the cities for meetings.

The Luxembourg meeting comes a day after 60 nations sent representatives to a **Palestinian peace conference** in Brussels with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohamed Mustafa and Bulgarian diplomat Nikolay Mladenov, who heads the Board of Peace set up by U.S. President Donald Trump.

The EU diplomats gathered in Luxembourg called for diplomacy on Iran as a ceasefire struck between Tehran and Washington that began April 8 was to expire Wednesday.



Iran should now take this outstretched hand in the interest of its own people - Johann Wadephul

Kallas, the foreign policy chief, warned that if the fighting resumes, "it will come at a very large cost for all."

She also announced that EU foreign ministers agreed Tuesday on new sanctions on Iranian

officials responsible for obstructing freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf.

“Freedom of navigation is non-negotiable. Daily U-turns where the Strait of Hormuz is open or closed, are reckless. Transit through the strait must remain free of charge,” Kallas said.

She did not elaborate on the sanctions or name the targeted officials.

Germany’s foreign minister called on Iran to send negotiators to Islamabad to meet with U.S. negotiators.

“Iran should now take this outstretched hand in the interest of its own people,” Johann Wadephul said.

The war in Iran has throttled global oil and gas markets and rattled the EU as a major importer of energy.

Also Tuesday, EU transportation ministers discussed in a video conference how to protect consumers at home and at the pump after the head of the International Energy Agency warned that Europe has “ **maybe six weeks** ” supply left of jet fuel.

Since the latest war in the Middle East started, fighting has killed at least 3,375 people in Iran and more than **2,290 in Lebanon**.

Additionally, 23 people have died in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Fifteen Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and 13 U.S. service members throughout the region have been killed.