



By: TA | AP Insight

Without Orbán's blockade, EU sanctions Israeli settlers



The European Union reached a unanimous political agreement Monday to issue new sanctions on Hamas leaders and the Israeli settler movement, top European diplomats said, after years of deadlock and growing popular pressure sparked by the carnage in Gaza.

EU's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said in a social media post after a meeting in Brussels on Monday of the 27-nation bloc's foreign ministers that extremism and violence should carry consequences. "It was high time we move from deadlock to delivery," she said.

The group failed to endorse even stronger measures pushed by some European governments and did not immediately release details of the new measures, but French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said the ministers had decided to sanction Hamas leaders and both leaders and organizations in the Israeli settler movement in the West Bank.

"The European Union is sanctioning today the main Israeli organizations guilty of supporting the extremist and violent colonization of the West Bank, as well as their leaders. These most serious and intolerable acts must cease without delay," he said in a post Monday on social media.

"It is sanctioning the main leaders of Hamas, responsible for the worst antisemitic massacre in our history since the Shoah during which 51 French people lost their lives, a terrorist movement that must imperatively be disarmed and excluded from any participation in the future of Palestine," Barrot said.

A turning point in the EU's Israel policy

Palestinians, rights groups and international observers are increasingly warning about the worsening violence in the **West Bank**, where young Palestinian men are being killed with increasing regularity amid a broader climate of arson, vandalism and the displacement of farming communities near settlements and

outposts in the occupied West Bank.

At least **40 Palestinians have been killed** since the start of the year, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, including a record 11 by settlers, two more than in all of 2025.

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The unanimous EU vote is a sign of the political possibilities unleashed by the ouster last month of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán after 16 years in power in Budapest.

A staunch supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Orbán had repeatedly vetoed earlier attempts to sanction Israeli settlers for actions in the West Bank.

But Orbán was defeated in an election in April by Péter Magyar, and the approval Monday of the new EU sanctions "validates the notion that Orbán was blocking them single-handedly," said Martin Konečný, head of the Brussels-based European Middle East Project.

The sanctions could signal a turning point in the EU's Israel policy. Criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government's actions in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Iran had pushed many European governments, led by Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands, to seek such penalties.

"You can't just turn a blind eye," Luxembourg Foreign Minister Xavier Bettel said ahead of the meeting.

Stronger actions to pressure Israel still pending

However, EU diplomats failed to agree on stronger actions to pressure Israel like banning products from Israeli settlements in

the West Bank or suspending a **key trade agreement**.

“There’s so much that you can and should be doing, and so to get stuck in this question of adding a few more settlers is missing the big picture,” said Hugh Lovatt, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. “The EU’s narrowed the scope of action now to individuals and to a few entities, and in doing that it’s ignoring the far more systemic issues at play.”



Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said that his government needed more time to study a French-Swedish proposal to sever West Bank settlers from EU markets

Claudio Francavilla, Human Rights Watch associate EU director, said the sanctions were “a step in the right direction, but so many more needed for the EU to comply with international law.”

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said before the meeting in Brussels that his government needed more time to study a French-Swedish proposal to sever West Bank settlers from EU markets, effectively withholding support for the plan from Italy despite **mounting popular political pressure**.

Individual nations could ban settlement goods on their own if the process stalls in Brussels, Dutch Foreign Minister Tom Berendsen said.

The EU's next Foreign Affairs Council later in May will be focused on trade.

“We have been talking about measures for too long,” said Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares Bueno in Brussels. “Let’s move

on to a vote and stop saying that there is no qualified majority for it. Let’s see how many of us are in agreement and who is not.”