

EU Aid and Development Planning in the Occupied West Bank

by Andrea Dessì



ABSTRACT

On 4 October 2017 senior diplomats, NGO experts, researchers and academics participated in an international seminar co-organized by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and GVC-Italia in Rome to address Italy's and the EU's evolving strategy towards Area C, presently comprising over 60 percent of the occupied West Bank, and highlight the primary impediments, risks and constraints impacting humanitarian and developmental projects in the area. Speakers provided detailed accounts of current and future initiatives in Area C and discussed potential strategies at the national and EU level that may help to improve long-term developmental initiatives for the area in the context of the EU's support for two states in Israel/Palestine. Particular attention was directed at efforts to enhance coordination between the EU and its member states in the context of the provision of humanitarian and development aid to Palestinian communities in Area C, as well as to the experiences and priorities of Italian Development Cooperation in Palestine.

Palestine | West Bank | European Union | Economic aid

keywords

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Comprising over 60 percent of the West Bank, Palestinian development in Area C is of critical importance to the sustainability of a two-state framework in Israel/Palestine. Yet, Israel's discriminatory planning regime is keeping the estimated 300,000 Palestinian residents of Area C in a perpetual state of de-development.¹ Building permits are denied, new energy, education and sanitation infrastructure dismantled and the activities of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) curtailed by Israel's military and administrative system of control implemented during its 50-year occupation of the Palestinian territories.

On 4 October 2017 senior diplomats, NGO experts, researchers and academics participated in an international seminar co-organized by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and GVC-Italia in Rome to discuss the legal, political and humanitarian dimensions of EU policy in Palestine. Entitled "EU Aid and Development Planning in Area C: Linking Humanitarian and Development Assistance in the Occupied West Bank" the seminar provided a venue to discuss recent developments tied to EU policy and assistance in Palestine, and to reflect on the best means to enhance these forms of assistance in the context of Israel's restrictive building and planning regime in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt).²

Experts agreed on the urgent need for the European Union to speak with one voice in supporting the humanitarian imperative of providing assistance to Palestinian communities. **Alice Panepinto**, a lecturer in international law and land law at

¹ See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - occupied Palestinian territory (UN OCHA oPt), *Under Threat. Demolition Orders in Area C of the West Bank*, September 2015, <https://www.ochaopt.org/node/7657>; Diakonia IHL Resource Centre, *Planning to Fail. The Planning Regime in Area C of the West Bank: An International Law Perspective*, September 2013, <https://www.diakonia.se/en/IHL/News-List/test>.

² For more on the IAI-GVC seminar see the IAI website: <http://www.iai.it/en/node/8185>.

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· Report of the seminar on "EU Aid and Development Planning in Area C: Linking Humanitarian and Development Assistance in the Occupied West Bank", held in Rome on 4 October 2017 and co-organized by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and GVC-Italia (Gruppo di volontariato civile-Italia).

Queen's University Belfast, stressed that international humanitarian and development activities are fully compatible with international law, although Israel claims they are contrary to the planning rules it applies in the area as the occupying power (in breach of its obligations under international law).



Dimitris Bouris, assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam and an expert on EU policies towards Israel/Palestine, emphasized that while the EU has long been engaged in state-building efforts in Palestine, such interventions necessitate concerted political action to push back against Israeli violations and ultimately promote effective de-occupation policies in Palestine. He also stressed the need for a more political approach to state-building, which although an inherently political project has been approached by the EU only from a narrow technical perspective.

Further discussion focused on the need for donors and NGOs to adopt integrated responses to the challenge of providing assistance in Palestine, particularly through the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) as a mean to encourage transitional development from a state of extreme vulnerability to increased self-sufficiency. In outlining their experiences in coordinating humanitarian relief operations in Area C, two representatives of GVC-Italia, **Dario Rossi D'Ambrosio** and **Francesco Michele**, stressed their adherence to international humanitarian principles and more recent efforts to coordinate with other international NGOs in Palestine by working closely with the EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) office in Brussels. The presence of EU-funded NGOs in the occupied West Bank does provide a degree of deterrence against Israeli practices, yet, it is also clear that advocacy, humanitarian relief, politics and diplomacy must work hand in hand if such efforts are to make a long-term difference on the ground.³

Mario Baldi, head of the Humanitarian and Emergency Aid office at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, spoke of Italy's decades long experience in supporting the activities of international NGOs in Palestine. The Italian diplomat stressed how EU member states have agreed on a common language when addressing Israeli authorities, noting how European countries will continue to provide assistance to Area C, protest against Israeli violations

³ See also Francesco Michele and Dario Rossi D'Ambrosio, "The Challenge of Long-Term Development in the Occupied West Bank: Voices from the Field", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 17|17 (October 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/8358>.

of international humanitarian law and call on Israel to allow for more building permits and development for Palestinian communities.

Introduced and moderated by two researchers from IAI's Mediterranean and Middle East programme, **Andrea Dessi** and **Daniela Huber**, the seminar provided detailed accounts of Italian and European humanitarian and developmental efforts in Palestine.



Faced with a significant spike in the construction of housing units in Israeli settlements – a 85 percent increase as of early June 2017 compared to the whole of 2016⁴ – in addition to sustained instances of Israeli demolitions, expropriations and confiscations of Palestinian and donor-funded property in the oPt, international actors and EU member states must muster the political will to forcibly push back against Israeli violations. Between January 2016 and October 2017, 1,446 structures were demolished or confiscated by the Israeli authorities, 396 of which were donor funded, mostly by the EU and its member states. Between September 2016 and September 2017, losses of European tax payer money amounted to an estimated 500,000 euros, according to UN figures.⁵

Such developments not only undermine the EU's professed goal of supporting the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian state but also weaken the EU's leverage over the sides in conflict. As the major donor to the Palestinian people and Israel's first trading partner, the EU does enjoy potential leverage that can be used to promote a win-win scenario and support coexistence between Israel and Palestine. In late 2013 the EU published a set of guidelines on trade and commercial dealings with Israeli entities active in the occupied West Bank, followed by efforts to improve the labelling of Israeli settlement products imported into the Union.⁶ Collectively such efforts have come to be known as the EU's differentiation policy and do represent small, albeit important, steps towards seeking to adopt a more

⁴ Peace Now, *Nearly Double the Housing Units in Half the Time – Advancement of Settlement Plans in 2017 in Comparison to 2016*, 8 June 2017, <http://peacenow.org.il/en/?p=28947>.

⁵ For more on EU funded structures in the oPt, see also, European Union-Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA), *Six-Month Report on Demolitions and Confiscations of EU funded structures in Area C, September 2016-February 2017*, 5 April 2017, <http://europa.eu/!Kv74Wb>; and *Six-Month Report on Demolitions and Confiscations of EU funded structures in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, March 2017-August 2017*, 4 October 2017, <http://europa.eu/!wx84jG>.

⁶ European Commission, *Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards*, OJ 2013/C 205/05, 19 July 2013, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52013XC0719\(03\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52013XC0719(03)); European Commission, *Interpretative Notice on indication of origin goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967*, OJ 2015/C 375/05, 12 November 2015, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52015XC1112\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52015XC1112(01)).

forceful approach against Israeli violations of both EU and international law.⁷ Yet, if such efforts are not backed-up by concerted political action they alone cannot serve to promote an effective de-occupation of the Palestinian territories and may even lead to an inadvertent legitimization of Israeli settlement policies.

The event provided an opportunity for a diverse mixture of experts from different fields to openly discuss these and other issues connected to EU policy in Palestine and brainstorm on potential means to improve the impact and effectiveness of these European efforts. Experts agreed that more needs to be done at a political level to ensure that EU support overcomes Israel's discriminatory planning in the oPt, and to provide effective and long-term respite to Palestinian communities who live in a legal and political limbo without effective means to provide for their sustenance and self-sufficiency.

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⁷ For more on the EU's differentiation policy see, Hugh Lovatt and Mattia Toaldo, "EU Differentiation and Israeli Settlements", in *ECFR Policy Briefs*, July 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/eu_differentiation_and_israeli_settlements3076.

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, IAI does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affarinternazionali*), two series of research papers (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Papers*) and other papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Working Papers*, etc.).

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