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Israel

# European Union/Israel: Time to choose on trade agreements

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**On 20 May 2025, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU (European Union) decided to revise the Association Agreement with Israel. On 23 June, a damning report confirming the accusations against Israel of several international crimes was presented calling into question these agreements.**

Trade treaties with Israel are not recent and began as early as the 1970s with the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) agreements, when the EU sought to expand new trade partnerships to countries outside Europe (this was the case with Turkey as well, despite the military regime and the repression of the Kurdish people).

The state of Israel is even an associated state with the EU, governed by the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean.

## Tax exemption and colonialism

An agreement, which came into force on 1 June 2000, means that Israeli products benefit from the same tax advantage as an EU product. Nevertheless, in December 2008, following the mobilisation of civil society, the EU blocked exports from the settlements – whereas in December 1996, oranges “originating” in Israel had been given a special agreement to compete with oranges from southern Europe. These products always have an unclear origin and can still come from settlements when it comes to products from the West Bank.

A first campaign for the suspension of this agreement had led to the European Parliament's vote in 2002 to suspend the agreement, but this was never ratified by the Council of Europe. According to the BDS website, a third of Israeli exports come from the settlements (\$2 billion), despite Article 2 of the cooperation agreements which stipulates that relations between the EU and Israel “are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles”.

The various governments of Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon and Netanyahu have never respected this article. However, the agreements have not stopped.

## A privileged partnership

The European Union is Israel's largest trading partner. It is not ready to be deprived of more than €20 billion in resources, scientific exchanges around the Galileo satellite positioning system, technological innovations in telephony and, above all, the gas pipeline project under the Mediterranean.

What is exceptional is not that the EU is revising its agreement, but that it did not do so as early as 2003 and the first massacres of civilians in Jenin after the implementation of these agreements in 2000. Israel does not recognise either international or European law, but we can also see that the EU itself does not respect its own texts.

The Spanish state, whose Prime Minister Sanchez has announced that he “does not do business with a genocidal state,” nevertheless continues to have more than 40 contracts in force, whether via the state itself or via private companies.

The 27 EU member states have somewhat hardened their position in the face of the worsening situation in Gaza in recent months, but the review concludes that there are “indications of violations” of human rights commitments. A minimal and highly cautious analysis, carried out by the EEAS (European External Action Service).

# Continuing the mobilization

To be clear, even if it is a step forward, the position of the EU foreign ministers is not a guarantee. Israel's ambassador to the EU, Haim Regev, said that the Foreign Ministry was “working and conducting an intensive diplomatic campaign” to ensure that the agreement is not suspended but re-examined with the support of 10 of the 27 member states. The total suspension would require the unanimity of the 27. However, some aspects can be suspended by qualified majority, such as trade or energy exchanges.

While continuing the pressure on MEPs, like the BDS campaign, it is through mobilizations, boycotts, denunciations, that we can affect the Israeli economy.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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