

## SVEN KOOPMANS

European Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process

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### INSTITUTIONAL ADDRESS\*

Thank you very much for the warm welcome.

Actually, Mr. Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union, should have been here. But he will join you later this evening. And he will address you, tomorrow.

I am very grateful to Senén Florensa and to the European Institute of the Mediterranean, and to all of you for having this opportunity. I propose that I would with you about the terrible crisis that we have right now in the Middle East.

Of course, I say we, but it is really the people there of which I know that many are also represented here, who are really in this crisis, who have really lost family members and friends, who are in a terrible situation of so little hope. And I will speak a little also about what the European Union, with the support, of the Foreign Minister of Spain sitting here, and also the Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean, with their active involvement, what we are trying to do, and, of course, I see my friend and predecessor, Mr. Moratinos, who, as the Secretary-General of the Alliance for Civilizations, is also working very hard.

We are now seeing **unimaginable suffering in the Middle East, in Gaza**. Let me start there.

First, of course, we had the terrible attacks of the 7th of October, and I visited some of the kibbutzim where these attacks happened. The stories of the killings and hostage takings are just atrocious. But when you're there, you hear the explosions, the rockets falling on Gaza. And now we know that there are at least 42,000 people killed in Gaza, out of which everybody agrees, everybody

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knows that the vast majority are innocent civilians. Innocent civilians are being killed and with no end in sight and by now, almost all of them have been displaced several times, moving from rubble to rubble, without food, without medical support. The situation is absolutely unimaginable and atrocious.

Then, of course, we have now **the war in Lebanon**. And yes, some 60,000 people in Israel were unable to go home over the last year since Hezbollah started attacking Israel. Also now more than a million Lebanese have had to flee their homes. And we have seen more than 2,000 deaths already in Lebanon. And there seems to be no end there yet. And of course, we have the terrible **violence in the West Bank**, and the continuing of occupation.

We have the situation between **Israel and Iran**. And we have all seen the news, of course. And let's not forget what is happening in Yemen and the Houthis attacking, ships, holding people hostage. And the situation in Syria, the crisis, the conflicts, the wars in the Middle East are so enormous. We all have a responsibility to contribute to ending it. Of course, the International Court of Justice, the United Nations Security Council, have said what they said about illegality, the need for a ceasefire, and the need for humanitarian aid to come through. We have all been very clear, about that. Not everybody said the same thing, but from the European Union side, we all say there needs to be a ceasefire right now, a ceasefire for Gaza, a ceasefire for Lebanon, and of course also for Israel.

While this is ongoing, there seems to be so little hope. And I want to recall here that High Representative Borrell and also the commissioner general of UNWRA, the refugee agency, which on behalf of the UN takes care over decades of millions of Palestinians, have called also now for a separate temporary truce, so that at least in Northern Gaza, where now the crisis is at unimaginable numbers of deaths, at least some aid, some food can come through. But there seems to be no response to that call, neither from the Israeli side nor from Hamas side. And of course, neither for the parallel situation in Lebanon. While we see these crises broadening, deepening and running into the abyss, the European Union tries to contribute to de-escalate. We collectively, the European Union institutions in Brussel with its Member States, the major, the biggest

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humanitarian donor, partially also through the UN organizations that are essential. We are the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority. We have been for decades. We are also the largest trading partner for Israel. We care very deeply about the fate, about the security, about the prosperity of Israelis and Palestinians. All of us in the European Union, whether you are in Spain, if I dare say so, in the presence of the Foreign Minister, or in Romania, or in Lithuania or in Malta, will care very deeply about Israelis and Palestinians, their security, their future, their freedom. And we see that we as Europeans have a role to play, to contribute to that future, for their sake, but also our own.

So, while we try to stop those wars and we try to act against terrorism and we try to prevent the rise that we see right now of anti-Semitism and of anti-Muslim hatred and of hatred all around, we see the dangers also for our own societies of a terrorism inspired by this conflict, violence, hatred, and, let's face it, also, the enormous potential of new illegal migration.

We need to focus not just on ending these crises, but also addressing the fundamentals of the conflict that underlies it. And whether you want to define that as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the Israeli-Arab conflict or wider one because Iran is, of course, also involved, I would say that all of us are involved. It is also a European conflict in a way.

So we also have a responsibility to move forward. I want to emphasize that the **top priority, for the EU, is to see an end to the suffering right now, to see an end to the fighting, an end to the hunger and to the despair.** Yet we also see that we have a responsibility **to address the root of the of the problem.** And there I am glad to say that just a few weeks ago, during the United Nations General Assembly High-Level week, also with the support of Spain, High Representative Borrell, flanked by the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia and the Foreign Ministers of many other countries, including of Jordan - I see Her Royal Highness Princess Rym here -but also Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, Indonesia, Türkiye, Norway and many others, we launched the **Global Alliance for the implementation of the Two-State Solution.**

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The Global Alliance aims not to plead for the Two-State Solution, because that we've done enough, it aims to actually prepare for the Two-State Solution, because, well, we may say that this party or that party is not ready for it or maybe doesn't even want it, that doesn't mean that we do not have a responsibility to work on getting there. There is only one solution to this conflict, and this is the Two-State Solution. Some may say, well, we're heading for one state. Yes, that may be the one state reality, but it is not the one state solution. So, we need to work on the Two-State Solution, and in this Global Alliance, we have said we are going to prepare everything that we can prepare in terms of security for the Israelis and for the Palestinians, economic integration, security integration, mapping out the future of an integrated region where Israel lives in peace with Saudi Arabia and Algeria and Kuwait, and all Arab States. And also that Palestine is recognized by all countries of the world because as a free and sovereign State.

We will actually, in a few days, have the first practical implementation meeting in Riyadh. And then we will have it in a few more weeks' time, under the chairmanship of HRVP Borrell in Brussels, and then we will move on to other capitals in the region and in the world, because we see that it is our responsibility also in the midst of this crisis, to prepare for the solution that underlies it.

Yes, this is an effort that may fail. But you are **civil society representatives**. You work on things where you know the chances of success are limited. But we have to try. Because to those who say, well, this is not the time for the Two-State Solution, I would say, well, when was it the time for the Two-State Solution? And how successful were we then? And for those who say, well, it is not the time, let's wait for when circumstances are better, I would say: How many people need to die before you think it is the time? The time to prepare for the Two-State Solution is right now. Now it is a responsibility for governments, including for the European Union, but it is also a responsibility for the people.

Of course, the fundamental responsibility is for the Israelis and the Palestinians and their immediate neighbors. We cannot replace them. We can only help them. But it is also a responsibility for the people more broadly. And this is

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where I look at you. You are here gathered under the wonderful title of ‘shared humanity’. But I would believe that we don't need the discussions here among us to convince each other that we need to stand up for shared humanity.

So, I would ask you not just to focus on the discussions that you have today and tomorrow, but also to focus on the discussions that you will have when you go out of here. Because as civil society representatives, I think you have a special role, special connection to the people in the societies of the Middle East and of Europe and from wherever else you may be, to actually lay the groundwork for solving these conflicts, fundamentally.

There is a special role that you have. And I think it's a special privilege for me to be able to represent High Representative Borrell here and speak to you. Thank you very much.

\* This document is a transcription of the speech as it was delivered. While it has been slightly edited to correct any transcription errors, it remains an informal record of the spoken remarks and may retain some of the original conversational tone.