EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

The bigger picture

Civilians bear the brunt of the Hamas attack and Israeli response during the largest escalation of hostilities in the region.

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Dot the i's and cross the t's

Tracing back from the emergence of Zionism in the late nineteenth century to the latest outbreak of violence between Israel and Hamas, *NRC* attempts to answer ten key questions to help readers grasp the historical and geopolitical context of the ongoing fighting as well as map out the actors involved. To begin with, the first clashes between the Jews, who started actively migrating to the area that is now Israel and Palestine, and the Arabs, who comprised the majority of the local population, took place even before the United Nations' 1947 proposal to divide the territory into two states. The violence that followed the establishment of Israel left 700,000 Arab residents expelled from their homes to end up in the Gaza Strip. With every concomitant altercation, Palestinians were increasingly isolated, with Israeli forces occupying and settling in the West Bank and Gaza. In the late 1980s and from 2000 onwards, they challenged the occupation by staging large-scale revolts during the so-called intifadas. When Hamas, an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and a fundamentalist movement for the restoration of Palestine to its ancient borders, seized power in the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israel responded to that takeover by hermetically sealing Gaza off from the outside world. According to the UN, it is the Palestinian civilians who carry the brunt of the fighting with more than 5,000 dead and 150,000 injured in the last fifteen years. When contemplating the possibility of the resolution, *NRC* notes the deep symbolism and fundamental role of the antagonism in both Islamic and Israeli conceptions of the state and the nation and highlights the challenge of securing the long-lasting peace as long as the very existence of the opposing state remains the root issue for either side.

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Appeal to reason

Le Figaro reports on the evolution of the situation in the Gaza Strip since Hamas' surprise attack last weekend. On Wednesday, the Israeli army closed the entire border around Gaza to civilians, subsequently declaring this region a war zone as control of the border has still not been reestablished by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Constant bombings against Gaza have led to enormous destruction, while military experts doubt the effectiveness of such actions, considering Hamas has had time to disperse its forces. "A total blockade will also be insufficient, even if its impact on the Palestinians will be terrible", add analysts from the CSIS institute. On Wednesday, the Palestinian authorities reported 1,055 dead and 5,184 injured, and it is to be feared that the human toll will dramatically increase as the Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant threatened: "What Gaza was will no longer exist." The territory has been deprived of electricity delivery since this weekend and nearly 187,500 people out of the 2.3 million inhabitants have already been displaced. Residential buildings as well as schools and mosques are being destroyed by bombs, with at least 9 UN workers reportedly killed. While the Human Rights Watch is calling for the protection of civilians, *Le Figaro* concludes sombrely that "this appeal to reason will undoubtedly not resist Israeli anger".

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In (no) uncertain terms

Following the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Várhelyi's now-rebuked declaration of the immediate suspension of all aid to Palestine in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel, the Foreign Affairs Council, held on Tuesday, October 10, concluded with more even-handed remarks, reports *El Mundo*. The 27 foreign ministers, along with the High Representative Josep Borrell, condemned the "barbaric and inhuman act" committed by Hamas and endorsed Israel's right to defend itself while also calling upon the Israeli government to open humanitarian corridors to help Palestinians flee the bombings to Egypt. Simultaneously, the Council warned against "all attacks on civilians" and the "collective punishment", particularly in the form of putting two million Palestinians in Gaza under blockade with no access to water, food, electricity, and fuel. Drawing a dividing line between the "terrorist organization" of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, Borrell stated that most of the Member States agreed that developmental aid to Palestine should continue, although it will be subjected to a rigid audit to make sure no funds get to Hamas. Considering the dire humanitarian situation and growing victim toll in Gaza, "we have to give more support, not less", concluded High Representative Borrell.

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The weight of words

Immediately after the Hamas attacks on Israel last Saturday, the governments of Ireland, Luxembourg, and Denmark campaigned for the joint EU response to include "a call to avoid escalation", writes *The Irish Times*. As EU Member States coordinated with one another following the attacks, the other 24 governments prioritised making clear that Israel has the support of the European Union. Austria, for one, strongly objected to the proposed language, refusing to sign off on a statement that included it. For the sake of expediency and compromise, Ireland backed the EU statement in the end despite the omission. Amidst the flood of disinformation spreading about this conflict, a report from Israel went viral that claimed the three Member States refused to describe Hamas as a terrorist organisation – a report that has been swiftly and strongly denied by all three countries. Since then, the EU and individual Member States have waffled on whether to suspend aid to Palestinian territories. A dismal humanitarian case continues to develop in Gaza, as the Israeli government has blockaded it from food, fuel and electricity and officials have pledged to obliterate it.

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