
EU OFFICIALS PREPARE FOR US EXTRAVAGANZA ON PALESTINE

- 20.06.2019

EU Observer (19 June 2019)

Low-ranking EU officials are to represent Europe when America unveils part of its new deal on the Arab-Israeli conflict in Bahrain next week.

"We are considering the level of attendance that might be most likely a technical level," EU foreign relations chief Federica Mogherini said on Monday (17 June) following a meeting with Jordan's foreign minister in Luxembourg.

The US invitation came after Jared Kushner, a White House aide and US president Donald Trump's son-in-law, met Mogherini in Brussels earlier this month.

She also went to Washington to meet Kuser and other US officials on Tuesday.

But her office declined to comment whether the EU would be sending Juncker's staff dealing with financial affairs or more political envoys from Mogherini's diplomatic ranks to the Bahrain event.

The US has also invited finance chiefs from some member states.

The French finance ministry confirmed last Friday that it had been asked to come, saying: "We are in touch with our partners, and notably our European partners, on this question".

Mogherini's directors dealing with the Middle East from Morocco to Palestine and Iran have held talks on the subject.

But EU foreign ministers did not discuss Bahrain when they met in Luxembourg on Monday and the EU has not coordinated member states' response to US invitations, a senior EU diplomat told EUobserver.

The EU delegation will mingle with a mixed bag of guests at what the US has called the "Peace to Prosperity economic workshop" in Manama on 25 and 26 June.

Kushner has promised a grand unveiling at the Four Seasons hotel of the financial part of Trump's wider "Deal of the Century" on the decades-old Arab-Israeli conflict.

The political part, on Palestinian statehood, is to follow in autumn.

Arab states will lead participation, with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates to send official delegations.

Kushner is bringing International Monetary Fund staff from Washington.

He is also bringing the CEOs of US investment firms BlackRock, Blackstone, and Colony Capital and a senior executive from US investment bank Goldman Sachs.

It is unclear which journalists or NGOs might be allowed to attend.

But Kushner's guest list looked odd when Martin Hirsch, the director of l'Assistance publique-Hopitaux de Paris, a French university hospital trust, told French newspaper Le Monde that he was also asked to come in an email from US treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Hirsch asked the French embassy in the US if the email was "a joke, a fake", but they told him "it was real".

Trump Plan

The Bahrain event comes amid EU and Palestinian concern that Trump aims to kick Palestinian statehood into the long grass in return for flashy infrastructure projects in Palestinian territories and other financial incentives.

It has been dubbed a Marshal Plan for Palestine in Trump circles, by reference to US aid to Europe after World War Two, but the model is different, with Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia to sign cheques for US firms to rebuild the region.

Palestinian leaders, Iraq, and Lebanon have boycotted the event and urged EU countries to do so in solidarity.

China and Russia have boycotted it.

The Cairo-based Arab League has also said Israel must withdraw to its 1967 borders in any peace settlement.

Meanwhile, Israel's finance minister, who was to come, later backed out, amid reports that Israel was keen for the event to be a damp squib.

Mogherini said the EU delegation in Bahrain would seek "more insights on possible steps or plans that can be put forward".

EU promise

The EU officials would carry weight despite their "technical" status, she noted, because Europe was the largest aid donor to the Palestinians.

But she also promised that when they crossed the picket line in Manama it would not amount to EU endorsement of a US alternative to a future Palestinian state.

"Our Arab friends can count on the Europeans and the European Union to fully support their requests for ... the only sustainable and viable solution - that is the two-state solution," she said.

Jerusalem should be "the capital of both the state of Israel and the state of Palestine", she added, after Trump backed Israel's 1967 annexation of the holy city by moving the US embassy there from Tel Aviv last year.

"Participation at technical level at a workshop does not infringe on any of these very clear commitments", Mogherini said.

Kaynak/Source: