



BEYOND THE “GAZA RIVIERA” APPROACH

PRESERVING IDENTITY AND SUPPORTING PALESTINE’S LANDSCAPE AND SOCIAL FABRIC

ABSTRACT

This policy brief critically assesses the recent proposals for Gaza’s reconstruction put forth in US President Donald Trump’s “Peace Deal”. It argues that they frame reconstruction primarily as a real estate and investment opportunity while overlooking the political, social, and economic conditions necessary for sustainable recovery. Such approaches risk depoliticising the Palestinian question and reducing reconstruction to a technical exercise detached from the realities of occupation, displacement and governance. The brief also examines the European Union’s response to the destruction of Gaza. Internal divisions among member states and the absence of a coherent strategic vision have prevented the EU from advancing a credible alternative framework, limiting its role to humanitarian support rather than political leadership. The publication argues that reconstruction must be understood as a multidimensional process. Beyond rebuilding infrastructure, it requires restoring human capital through investment in schools, universities, healthcare services, and local economic development. Equally important is the reconstruction of the Palestinian political sphere, including the promotion of representative and accountable governance capable of addressing the legitimacy crisis of the Palestinian Authority. Finally, the brief highlights the importance of supporting locally driven reconstruction initiatives. Empowering Palestinian communities and grassroots actors offers a more sustainable and inclusive pathway to recovery than externally imposed megaprojects, while strengthening prospects for long-term stability and self-determination.



AUTHORS

MATTIA GIAMPAOLO
Researcher at CeSPI

VALERIA GIANNOTTA
Scientific Director of the Turkey
Observatory at CeSPI

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FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

Avenue des Arts 46
1000 Brussels (Belgium)
www.feps-europe.eu
@FEPS_Europe

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

ETERON

ETERON

Leokoriou 38-40
10553 Athens (Greece)
<https://eteron.org/>
@eteronOrg

**Friedrich
Ebert
Stiftung**

FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG - CYPRUS OFFICE

20, Stasandrou, Apt. 401
Nicosia (Cyprus)
<https://cyprus.fes.de/>
@FESonline

 Centro Studi
di Politica
Internazionale
CeSPI ETS

CESPI ETS

Piazza Venezia, 11
00187 Rome (Italy)
<https://www.cespi.it/>
@CeSPI_Roma



FONDATION JEAN-JAURÈS

12 Cité Malesherbes
75009 Paris (France)
<https://www.jean-jaures.org/>
@j-jaures



FUNDACIÓN AVANZA

C/Ferraz, 66 Planta baja
28008 Madrid (Spain)
<https://lab-avanza.es/>
@AvanzaLab



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Content editor: Hedwig Giusto (FEPS) and Beatriz Abellán (FEPS)

Project coordinator: Hedwig Giusto (FEPS), Beatriz Abellán (FEPS) and Thainá Leite (FEPS)

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Introduction

Over the past three years, Israel has devastated the Gaza Strip. Indiscriminate bombardments targeting the civilian population, critical infrastructure and essential services, combined with an unprecedented closure of all border crossings and stringent restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid, have rendered this small territory effectively uninhabitable for civilians.

Even prior to 2023, the 2 million Palestinian population in Gaza was living under highly precarious conditions. This was despite Israel's formal withdrawal from the Strip in 2005, which was followed by Hamas' rise to power. From 2005 onward, although Israel no longer exercised direct internal control over Gaza, it effectively maintained tight control over its land borders, airspace and adjacent maritime areas. In this regard, Israeli policies of aggression toward the Gaza Strip, which may be characterised as necropolitical¹ due to their destructive impact on both human lives and infrastructure, constitute part of a broader process of "slow violence"². Slow violence refers to a systematic, gradual, and cumulative form of harm that, in the Palestinian case, arises from an enduring structure of domination and deprivation of rights rather than from isolated episodes of violence.

When episodes of violence do take place, such as the periodic military operations targeting the Gaza Strip since 2008, they combine with the extensive destruction of critical infrastructure and essential public services to not only restrict the population's access to fundamental services, but to erode human capital and diminish psychological well-being. This has particularly been the case for Gaza's predominantly young population, with 70% of the population under 18. These effects have been further compounded by the comprehensive isolation policies imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007, which have weakened internal social structures and intensified existing socio-economic and developmental vulnerabilities. These policies of isolation consisted of a comprehensive blockade of the Gaza Strip, affecting both the movement of

goods and the mobility of people. Control over the border crossings (Erez and Rafah, administered by Israel and Egypt, respectively) prevented the population from accessing essential goods. This was compounded by Israel's control over Gaza's maritime space, as well as its airspace, further reinforcing the territory's isolation³.

Hamas's de facto authoritarian governance in the Strip, characterised by extensive control over the population, administrative structures and economic life, has compounded this.

The United States' initiative to lead a transitional phase and to establish a so-called "Board of Peace" has been broadly welcomed by much of the international community. Although this body appears to be essentially a private initiative composed largely of authoritarian regimes, it has nonetheless been received favourably by the European Union.

This implicit acceptance of the American initiative not only signals the absence of a coherent strategy on the part of the EU with regard to its role and projection in the Mediterranean region, but also highlights its internal difficulties in supporting outward-driven initiatives, and formulating and advancing proposals that are consistent with the very values the Union claims to uphold.

The purpose of this policy brief is to identify and articulate key elements for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, adopting an approach that is less narrowly pragmatic while remaining grounded in the realities in Gaza and being consistent with European perspectives on Mediterranean policy. It argues that, while the urgency of addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is undeniable, it would be a strategic error to pursue reconstruction efforts without adequately considering the initiatives emerging from within Palestinian society, including those advanced by civil society actors and political decision-makers.

In this sense, an inclusive approach would not only enable Europe to engage more attentively with the regional contexts in which it operates, but would

also align with the objectives set out in the New Pact for the Mediterranean, as well as with the broader set of principles commonly referred to as “European values”.

Has there ever truly been an elusive alternative?

In 1993, Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn on the occasion of the Oslo Accords – an agreement which have provided for an initial form of Palestinian autonomy in Gaza and Jericho, followed, after five years, by negotiations concerning the establishment of a future Palestinian state. Many observers at the time argued that, given the international context and the balance of power, which strongly favored the United States and Israel—particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War and amid the PLO’s political and economic crisis—there were unlikely to have been any viable alternatives available at the negotiating table⁴. The prevailing mood in 1993 was one of optimism. Yet the claim that no alternatives to the Oslo Accords existed did not stem from the impossibility of negotiating a different, perhaps more binding, arrangement between the parties. Rather, it reflected the reality that, at that particular historical juncture, no actor was in a position to challenge the hegemony of the United States within the international system. The Cold War had formally come to an end and the world appeared to be entering what Francis Fukuyama famously described as the “end of history”.

That world, however, no longer exists. History did not end then, nor has it ended now. Contemporary global dynamics point instead to an increasingly multipolar order, marked by the emergence of alternative centres of power competing for influence at both the international and regional levels.

Although major European actors frequently criticise the destabilising effects of US foreign policy, both economically and militarily, the EU itself has struggled to formulate an autonomous and effective strategy for conflict resolution and renewed negotiations in Palestine. Until 2023, the Palestinian question occupied only a marginal place

within European policymaking, with the EU largely committed to preserving the status quo. Repeated references to the two-state solution often remained rhetorical rather than translating into concrete political initiatives. Meanwhile, Gaza continues to function as an open-air prison marked by severe socio-economic hardship, while in the West Bank Israeli settlement expansion, particularly in Area C, progressively undermines the practical viability of a Palestinian state.

Over the past two decades, the EU has shown limited capacity to respond effectively to regional instability. Its approach has been shaped by a rigid political realism that weakened its credibility and opened space for greater influence by actors such as Russia, China and India. Although the EU remains a major partner for Mediterranean countries, its increasingly “geopolitical” posture has prioritised strategic interests over democratisation, not only in electoral terms but also in relation to social justice, economic development and human rights.

This orientation became particularly visible after the Arab uprisings, when the EU prioritised what may be described as the “myth of stability”. Across the region, stability came to mean the preservation of authoritarian systems or their reconfigured equivalents. In the Palestinian case, maintaining the status quo effectively meant indefinitely postponing any meaningful political process capable of resolving a conflict that has lasted for more than a century.

The events of 7 October 2023 and the subsequent large-scale violence shattered this fragile equilibrium and exposed Europe’s lack of preparedness in addressing a crisis with profound political implications. The issue was not simply the inability to propose an immediate solution to the Palestinian question, but rather Europe’s failure to adopt a coherent and autonomous position while widespread public concern and civic mobilisation emerged across European societies in response to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

The challenge for Europe was therefore to recognise the broader implications of Israel’s actions in Gaza, which many observers interpreted both as a form of

systematic ethnic cleansing and genocide, and as part of a broader attempt to reshape the geopolitical balance of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

As in other crises, internal political and cultural divisions among EU member states prevented the emergence of a unified strategy. The Union's implicit support for proposals associated with Donald Trump further demonstrated the absence of genuinely European alternatives. In this sense, the participation of the EU commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica, as well as that of Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani and Viktor Orbán in Washington during the inauguration of the Board of Peace, demonstrates the tacit support of the EU and its member states for Trump's plan⁵. While in 1993 the lack of alternatives could partly be explained by the post-Cold War geopolitical order, its persistence today appears more striking given the EU's ambitions for strategic autonomy and its considerable political and economic capacities.

A proactive European policy must therefore begin with reconstruction, understood not only in physical terms but also as a broader process of political, social, economic and human-capital recovery. Post-conflict studies consistently show that rebuilding infrastructure cannot be separated from rebuilding society itself. In this regard, externally imposed proposals – such as transforming Gaza into a luxury resort – have been widely criticised as unrealistic and insensitive. Any viable alternative must instead be rooted in Gaza's realities and incorporate initiatives developed by Palestinians themselves.

The reconstruction of Gaza: Priorities, needs and inclusive planning

To fully grasp the scale of devastation in the Gaza Strip, it is essential to foreground several key concepts. As noted in the introduction, Israeli policies in Gaza have been characterised not only by the physical devastation of the built environment but, more significantly, by their profound social consequences. The comprehensive blockade imposed over the past two decades has severely restricted freedom

of movement and hindered economic and social development, while simultaneously rendering the territory increasingly uninhabitable in both environmental and psychological terms. Moreover, it has deepened Palestinians' dependence on the Israeli occupying authorities.

In the aftermath of successive Israeli military operations prior to 7 October 2023, international responses have largely concentrated on rebuilding damaged facilities and services, while devoting comparatively little attention to the enduring consequences experienced by the population and the long-term transformation of everyday life under conditions of prolonged occupation and siege.

Since 2023, scholars, analysts and experts have increasingly referred to Israeli actions in Gaza as ecocidal, scholasticidal, and genocidal, albeit with the first two remaining marginal compared to references to genocide. The application of the concept of genocide to the Palestinian case has encountered significant resistance across Europe and, more broadly, within Western political and intellectual circles. On the one hand, this reluctance is often linked to the historical position of Israel as the state established in the aftermath of the genocide experienced by the Jewish people. On the other hand, it reflects a broader unwillingness to jeopardise the longstanding political, economic, and security alliances that bind Israel to European states and other Western actors.

Nevertheless, alongside genocide, increasing attention has been devoted to concepts such as ecocide and scholasticide, which have acquired growing political and analytical significance⁶. These frameworks seek to capture dimensions of destruction that extend beyond the direct loss of human life, encompassing the systematic degradation of environmental systems, educational institutions, and the broader social conditions necessary for collective survival and self-determination.

Ecocide, which refers to the severe, widespread, or long-term destruction of ecosystems and living conditions in ways that compromise the health,

survival and future prospects of populations, entered mainstream debate during the Vietnam War and has regained prominence in the context of the war in Gaza. Similarly, scholasticide, coined by Karma Nabulsi in 2009, denotes the systematic destruction of educational infrastructure alongside the killing, detention or repression of students, academics, researchers and teachers.

This terminology is not employed arbitrarily, but supported by concrete data that accurately reflect the reality on the ground in the Gaza Strip. According to the most recent data reported in the study “Gaza Strip: Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment” by the World Bank, the United Nations, and the European Union, the Israeli war on Gaza has resulted in an estimated \$35.2 billion in physical damage and \$22.7 billion in economic losses, for a combined estimated impact of \$57.9 billion⁷. Recovery and reconstruction needs are estimated at around \$71.4 billion. The sector most severely affected in structural terms is housing, which accounts for approximately 51% of total damage in the Strip, followed by infrastructure related to commerce, transport and water systems.

In light of the population’s needs and the urgency of addressing both the infrastructural and human dimensions of the crisis, projects such as the so-called “Gaza Riviera” or other large-scale infrastructural megaprojects appear ill-suited to meet the actual needs on the ground. While the reconstruction of Gaza is undoubtedly essential, it must also be understood as a central component of Palestinian self-determination. Rather than serving as a purely technical or humanitarian undertaking, reconstruction should contribute to strengthening Palestinian political agency and collective autonomy. If proposals such as Trump’s reconstruction plan effectively reproduce longstanding colonial patterns of external control and intervention, any alternative framework must be grounded in the social, cultural and political realities of the Palestinian context. Consequently, reconstruction efforts should be designed with careful attention to the local social fabric, existing community structures, and the political aspirations of the Palestinian people. Only by

incorporating these dimensions can reconstruction avoid becoming another mechanism of dependency and instead serve as a foundation for a more just and sustainable future.

Although the aforementioned report⁸ identifies key priorities based on robust quantitative data, a critical gap remains in terms of the participation and inclusion of the Palestinian population. Following the publication of the report, the European Union issued a statement emphasising the importance of ensuring an active Palestinian role in reconstruction efforts. However, the statement failed to specify either the actors to be involved or the mechanisms through which such inclusion would be operationalised.

In this regard, and in line with the stated objective of promoting an inclusive reconstruction process – and contrasting with the more ad hoc approach associated with Trump’s plan – Palestinian civil society has, since December 2023, begun to formulate alternative initiatives. Among these, “Gaza Phoenix” currently stands out as one of the most ambitious efforts to rethink reconstruction paradigms⁹. Developed by Palestinians from both the West Bank and Gaza, the project brings together professionals from diverse backgrounds, including engineers, architects, sociologists, political scientists, economists and other academic and technical experts. It envisions a reconstruction process grounded in sustainability and aimed at revitalising Gaza’s social, cultural, economic and ecological fabric. The plan is structured around six core planning principles: wartime resilience, local agency and social cohesion, circularity and sustainability, productivity, mobility and heritage preservation.

From this perspective, the Gaza reconstruction project emerges not only as a sustainable initiative attentive to the actual needs of the local population, but also as one that is fully consistent with the principles of the New Pact for the Mediterranean. Moreover, the project rests on a solid foundation of international cooperation: alongside Palestinian stakeholders, European experts joined the initiative in 2025. The city of Bari, Italy, served as the

launching point for the project's promotion, hosting the participation of several representatives of local institutions, including the mayor of Gaza, Yahya al-Sarraj.

The project is therefore not only bottom-up in its approach, but also genuinely inclusive, fully respectful of the cultural identity of Gaza and Palestine, and politically independent in its orientation.

Human capital reconstruction and contrasting scholasticide

According to the United Nations, the scale and severity of deprivation across living conditions, livelihoods and income, food security, gender equality, and social inclusion have been so extensive that they have set human development in the Gaza Strip back by an estimated 77 years. The United Nations further projects that the Human Development Index (HDI) will decline to 0.339, its lowest level since measurements began¹⁰.

Laying the foundations for a just reconstruction of the Gaza Strip does not merely entail the regeneration of a physically devastated environment; it requires rebuilding the social, economic, cultural and political fabric. The physical reconstruction of buildings, infrastructure and services alone is clearly insufficient. The literature on post-conflict reconstruction highlights this point extensively, particularly when reconstruction processes fail to take into account the underlying dynamics of the conflict and the social mechanisms that characterised the pre-war phase¹¹. Neglecting these factors, as well as the internal societal dynamics – however deeply disrupted by war they have been – may, during the reconstruction phase, give rise to renewed tensions and further social conflict.

Before examining the specific dynamics of reconstruction, it is essential to foreground several key considerations that are indispensable to any meaningful recovery process in Gaza, particularly the impact of destruction on the population.

Among these, the psychological dimension is of paramount importance. Trauma in Gaza is not only collective and intergenerational; it permeates virtually every aspect of daily life. Consequently, mechanisms of care, psychosocial support, and resilience are not merely necessary but must be grounded in local realities and social practices¹².

Palestinian contemporary history demonstrates that forms of solidarity and collective organisation have consistently been rooted in local communities. From the popular committees that emerged during the 1970s, to the extended family networks that continue to structure social relations, and the activities of non-governmental organisations operating in the Gaza Strip prior to 7 October, community-based structures have played a central role in sustaining social cohesion and resilience. Failing to take these social dynamics into account during the reconstruction process risks undermining existing support networks and reproducing the very social fractures that Israeli military actions have generated.

Three key dimensions must be considered: the educational system, the economic system and the political/governance framework. Repeated bombardments of the Gaza Strip have almost entirely destroyed school and university infrastructures, while also causing thousands of casualties among students, teachers and administrative staff. According to available data, the 12 universities located in Gaza have been either completely or partially destroyed, while more than 80% of school buildings have suffered the same fate.

The destruction of infrastructure, much of which had been newly rebuilt following the 2014 war¹³, resulted in the complete suspension of educational activities. These activities had already been severely constrained by the recurrent use of military force by Israel and by the extensive control exercised by Tel Aviv's authorities over the mobility of students and researchers, including restrictions on travel, prohibitions on the purchase of materials for scientific experimentation deemed by Israeli authorities to be at risk of "dual use", and limitations on the trade of electronic devices.

Following 7 October 2023, teaching activities were effectively suspended for approximately one year and resumed only later through online modalities and instant messaging applications. In many cases, lessons were delivered through WhatsApp voice messages in order to reduce the burden on already fragile internet connections. Despite attempts to ensure continuity in educational provision, several studies have highlighted that electronic devices are frequently shared among students, friends and family members, making it extremely difficult to sustain regular teaching activities. This challenge affects not only students but also researchers and academic staff, who are largely unable to continue essential scholarly tasks such as writing articles, preparing lectures and conducting research-related activities.

These difficulties are compounded by the profound human consequences of the war. According to several studies, most students, as well as faculty members and researchers, suffer from severe psychological distress. This situation calls for a holistic approach to the reconstruction of Gaza's educational and university system, one that prioritises not only the rebuilding of physical infrastructure, but also the well-being of individuals. In the short term, therefore, the reconstruction of buildings alone does not appear to be the primary priority. Rather, greater urgency lies in providing the tools and resources necessary to resume educational activities. As one lecturer from Gaza told this author, "it is as though the experience of Covid-era distance learning is being repeated".

A further, and perhaps more profound, concern is the erosion of scientific and intellectual capacity resulting from the destruction of schools and universities. This process compounds the substantial loss of human capital already brought about by the cumulative effects of slow violence. . It is therefore unsurprising that academic research remains highly constrained, with most available resources and institutional efforts directed toward maintaining the most basic forms of teaching and educational provision. As a result, the capacity of educational institutions not only to transmit knowledge but also to generate it has been substantially weakened,

with long-term consequences for Gaza's social, economic and political development.

Urgent effort must therefore go towards ensuring the entry of humanitarian aid and, equally importantly, the delivery of electronic devices into the Gaza Strip. This second point is significant not only for the resumption of educational and professional activities, but also for preventing the expansion of an extant black market for electronic equipment. Such devices are often resold at prices far above normal market value. These dynamics not only deprive large segments of the population of access to essential technological tools but may also contribute to the emergence of new power structures and social tensions, ultimately undermining the social and educational recovery of students, researchers and teachers in the Strip.

This final aspect is therefore closely linked to Gaza's broader economic recovery. According to the joint report by the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations, investments targeting economic recovery constitute the largest share of reconstruction funding, with approximately \$11 billion in damages and an estimated \$20 billion required for the reconstruction of Gaza's productive sectors, including agriculture, trade, industry and finance. An additional \$9 billion in damages must be added to these figures, alongside equivalent reconstruction needs in vital sectors such as communications, energy, municipal services, transport, and water and sanitation infrastructure¹⁴.

Economic reconstruction, far from being based solely on a luxury tourism sector, as envisioned by Trump, must instead address the actual needs of the population and build upon Palestinian economic and financial traditions. It is important to emphasise that Gaza's economic situation was already severely constrained prior to 7 October. The comprehensive closure imposed by successive Israeli governments on the Strip effectively prevented any meaningful development policy for the area. Gaza's near-total dependence on external funding, combined with the absence of opportunities for endogenous development due to tight Israeli control and the

system of governance established by Hamas since 2006, made sustainable economic growth virtually impossible.

As with education and the physical reconstruction of Gaza, it is inconceivable to imagine even a minimal economic recovery today without the active involvement of the local population and its authorities. Indeed, any gradual revitalisation of Gaza's economy requires a governance framework capable not only of addressing the internal dynamics of the Strip, but also of laying the foundations for political and economic reunification with the West Bank.

Finally, at a broader level, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip raises a number of critical issues and risks that warrant careful consideration. A first concern relates to the economic model that will underpin the reconstruction process and the actors responsible for shaping it. In this regard, particular attention should be paid to the relationship between any future governance structure in Gaza and the external actors involved in reconstruction efforts, many of whom have historically operated through forms of economic dependency and neocolonial intervention.

Although the scale of destruction will require substantial financial resources and technical expertise, the involvement of major international corporations and external investors should not be regarded as the only possible path to reconstruction. Otherwise, the reconstruction process risks reproducing and reinforcing existing asymmetrical power relations, both between occupier and occupied and, more broadly, between the global centre and the periphery. Under such conditions, the principal beneficiaries of reconstruction may be external economic and financial actors, while Palestinians themselves risk being relegated to the role of a labour force within a development model over which they exercise little control. Such an outcome would further weaken an already fragile Palestinian economy and deepen existing patterns of dependency.

A related concern involves the political conditionality often associated with international aid and investment flows. Although efforts aimed at promoting a sustainable and democratically grounded reconstruction are undoubtedly necessary, the influx of foreign capital may replicate dynamics that have characterised previous intervention frameworks, whereby economic assistance becomes contingent upon specific political arrangements or objectives. This could constrain Palestinian political agency and negatively affect future processes of self-determination.

From this perspective, it is important to recognise that paradigms such as peacebuilding have often contributed to the depoliticisation of the Palestinian question by reframing it primarily as a matter of development, governance or humanitarian management. Yet the Palestinian question remains fundamentally political in nature. Core issues – including occupation, self-determination, sovereignty and territorial control – cannot be meaningfully separated from their political dimensions. Consequently, any reconstruction project that fails to address these underlying realities risks focusing exclusively on the material consequences of destruction while leaving untouched the structural conditions that produced them.

Rethinking the concept of 'deradicalisation' and going beyond the security paradigm

What has persisted in the Palestinian-Israeli context is the continual reassertion of the security paradigm, whose influence extends beyond the political sphere into the humanitarian domain¹⁵. In order to counter the securitization approach, a viable alternative lies in moving beyond the securitised framework that has long shaped both European and American policies in the region. While maintaining stability remains essential for the safety and well-being of local populations, stability cannot continue to be equated with the forms of militarised security that have dominated responses to terrorism and asymmetric warfare.

In the Palestinian context, and more broadly across the so-called Arab world, this approach has frequently resulted in the authoritarian suppression of dissent and the consolidation of incumbent regimes' legitimacy¹⁶. In Palestine, it has manifested in the intensification of Israeli policing and coercive practices throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the West Bank, as well as in necropolitical forms of governance – in other words, those that, by using Achille Mbembe definition, linked to the sovereign power of the state to determine who may live and who must die, and to consign entire populations to “deathworlds” – directed at the Gaza Strip¹⁷. This process has also entailed the securitisation of Palestinian politics. Although it is now widely acknowledged that the Palestinian Authority (PA) has lost much of its legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian population, this erosion of public trust can be traced to mechanisms designed to preserve what may be described as an “authoritarian stability” within the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As a result, the PA has increasingly assumed the role of a security actor whose functions are closely tied to Israel's security architecture, while simultaneously enabling the continuation of Israeli occupation policies.

This dynamic has not only obstructed the development of a viable and democratic Palestinian political process, such as that briefly represented by the 2006 elections, but has also deepened internal polarisation between the PA, civil society actors, and political opposition movements. Moreover, the prolonged absence of electoral processes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – resulting from constraints imposed by both Israel and the PA – has contributed to the transformation of the PA from a quasi-state institutional body into an increasingly authoritarian system operating under conditions of severely limited sovereignty.

In this context, the final indispensable dimension is therefore the political reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. Yet through the establishment of the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, The Board of Peace has effectively laid the groundwork for a governance structure lacking full Palestinian sovereignty. The Committee, established by the

United Nations, consists of 15 Palestinian members, all from Gaza, with predominantly technical backgrounds and close ties to the PA. 'While the Committee may represent a valuable starting point for coordinating reconstruction-related activities, it is clear that it has been imposed from above (US with the support of the PNA) without any democratic process and without taking into account the Palestinian political ecosystem¹⁸. Central to any “two peoples, two states” solution is, first of all, the radical reform of the Palestinian Authority, and second of all, the political reunification of Gaza and the West Bank.

The reform of the PA has become a central topic of the EU's political agenda. Nevertheless, it is increasingly clear that the term “reform” appears more as a rhetorical device of the EU intended to soften the complexity of the issue than as a concrete political project. A closer examination of the power structures within the West Bank, where the PA ostensibly governs, reveals how, despite its sovereignty being continuously violated, it has, over the years, evolved into an authoritarian system in many respects. Arbitrary arrests of political opponents, extensive networks of corruption and the increasingly delegitimised leadership of Mahmoud Abbas make the prospect of reform far more complex than is often assumed.

Today, major sectors of the Palestinian society denounce the near-total absence of democracy within Palestinian institutions, which are themselves increasingly delegitimised even by the political actors operating within them. Recent mobilisations – particularly those preceding 7 October – led by younger generations and civil society actors in Gaza, the West Bank, and across the diaspora communities in refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, as well as in Europe and the United States, called for the dismantling of the Oslo system, namely the end of the Oslo Accords. In particular, they strongly criticised the security coordination mechanisms that have effectively rendered the PA dependent on Israel, while also demanding an end to Israeli settlements in Area C of the West Bank – which constitutes approximately 60% of the territory occupied in 1967 – as well as in East Jerusalem¹⁹.

Although the events of 7 October effectively interrupted a bottom-up political process driven by civil society, this does not imply that such demands have lost their political relevance. On the contrary, these issues remain crucial both in terms of democratisation and, above all, with regard to the political reunification of Gaza and the West Bank. This latter issue constitutes the second major challenge of Palestinian political reconstruction. Since 2006-2007, the two territorial entities have been administered under separate systems of governance, and their reunification cannot occur through mere imposition. Although it may currently appear inconceivable, it is evident to all major actors, including the United States, that Hamas continues to play – and will likely do so into the future – a central role in Palestinian politics.

If the objective of Trump's plan is the deradicalisation of the Gaza Strip, such a process cannot realistically occur without integrating the Islamist movement into the Palestinian political framework. However controversial this may appear to many observers, it essentially mirrors the process that took place during the 1980s with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which at the time was regarded by both the United States and Israel as a terrorist organisation, much as Hamas is today.

This represents the true long-term challenge for the genuine democratisation of Palestinian politics. It is undoubtedly a highly complex process, and it must place Palestinians themselves at its centre. Indeed, if there is one recurring failure throughout the long history of the Palestinian question and its various diplomatic phases, it has been the systematic exclusion of Palestinians from decision-making processes. This was true during the 1970s, partly true during the 1990s, and remains true today in Trump's plan.

In order, therefore, to achieve a just peace, Palestinians must be included in any dialogue over the rules of the political process. It is precisely in this regard that Europe could play a fundamental role in pushing the initial phase of the process beyond the rigid rhetoric of "two peoples, two states" to focus more directly on the underlying mechanisms of

power, thereby ensuring that the process becomes genuinely inclusive in practice.

Policy recommendations

In a context in which Israel continues to violate its ceasefire with Hamas through the killing of civilians and ongoing illegal displacement and settler violence in the West Bank, Europe is, Europe is tasked with developing a coherent policy that not only distances it from Trump's plan, but also allows it to pursue a path consistent with the initiatives underpinning its broader regional projection. Policy elements may be divided into two major macro-categories: political positioning vis-à-vis Israel, the United States and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA); and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, encompassing not only its physical infrastructure but also the political, economic, and social fabric of Palestinian life.

With regard to the first macro-category, although some limited initiatives have been introduced, such as sanctions against settlers in the West Bank, these measures remain insufficient to exert meaningful pressure on Israel to halt the offensive against Gaza, as well as colonisation and violence against the population in the West Bank. In this regard, Europe should:

- Support the preservation of unity between Gaza and the West Bank and promote dialogue initiatives among all Palestinian actors, both within and outside the PA (including civil society organisations, trade unions, and human and civil rights associations).
- Support an alternative political process aimed at promoting the political inclusion of all Palestinians. This can be done by incorporating institutions representing the entirety of the Palestinian population, including women, youth and religious minorities. An example is the Palestine Liberation Organization, which represents Palestinians in the occupied territories, in Israel and within the diaspora. Central to this approach is the need to take into account the Palestinian social fabric, particularly

given that social constituencies are strongly represented through the dense network of popular committees, including those organised around women, youth, workers, and other community groups. Equally important are local institutions, such as governorates and municipalities, which over the years have emerged as significant actors in decentralised international cooperation. Their experience, local legitimacy, and embeddedness within Palestinian society make them essential stakeholders in any reconstruction process aimed at fostering sustainable and locally driven development.

- Resume constructive dialogue with Israeli progressive forces, provided that they support the end of colonisation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and endorse the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip.
- Support, at the regional level, the cessation of Israel's military aggression against Lebanon, Iran and Syria, as well as the restoration of the ceasefire and the withdrawal from occupied territories in southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights, as mandated by international law.
- Open mediation platforms with neighbouring Arab countries in order not only to foster dialogue with key actors shaping the regional balance, but also to ensure the stabilisation and securitisation of the area, while simultaneously facilitating a dialogue aimed at guaranteeing the security of the Israeli population. At the core of this process must remain the principles of international law and the implementation of United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338.

With regard to the second macro-category – reconstruction – the main framework from which to proceed is the New Pact for the Mediterranean. This framework appears particularly coherent with both the physical and non-physical phases of reconstruction.

In line with point I.2 of the EU document concerning the axis of culture, sport and tourism, and with

regard to the physical reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, the EU should:

- Support reconstruction projects such as Gaza Phoenix, which aim to preserve indigenous national, cultural and traditional identity. This is not only consistent with the Pact for the Mediterranean, but also reflects a broader vision of the right to self-determination, and sustainable development aligned with the needs and priorities of the local population, without further destabilising its political, social and cultural dynamics.
- Through the instruments outlined in the previous section, exert pressure on Israel to ensure the continuous restoration of humanitarian aid in accordance with the needs of the population, as well as the entry of non-governmental organisations capable of responding to urgent humanitarian needs.
- Support the ICC and ICJ in advancing proceedings on genocide and war crimes against Israel, and require all EU member states to comply with the international arrest warrants issued against members of the Israeli government. To this must be added a clear process of reconciliation and justice, as well as a programme of reparations for the Palestinian population. Suspend the trade agreement between the EU and Israel and overcome the resistance of states such as Germany and Italy. This would not only make EU policy more coherent in relation to the double standards applied in comparison with Russia, Venezuela and Iran, but would also facilitate political negotiations and contribute to de-escalating regional tensions.
- Extend the sanctions imposed on certain violent settlers in the West Bank, which, although representing a step forward, should also target members of the Israeli government who maintain direct and organic links with settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Facilitate greater dialogue with local authorities (municipalities and regional administrations

within the Strip), without political prejudice, in order to initiate international cooperation projects aimed at restoring essential infrastructure (water, electricity, internet access, communication routes and transportation systems).

With regard to supporting the immaterial reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, Europe could play a decisive role in re-establishing relations with local actors and strengthening international organisations operating on the ground. Simultaneously, Europe must also commit itself to the Palestinian domestic political sphere by fostering broad national reconciliation and extending its relations beyond the PA. In this respect as well, the Pact for the Mediterranean appears to constitute a mechanism capable of creating the necessary preconditions, particularly point I.3, which emphasises the role of civil society and younger generations.

In this regard, the European Union should:

- Support the Union's existing initiatives in education, such as the H-Gaza project, focused on the resilience of researchers and university lecturers. Moreover, extend these initiatives in the near future to university students and lower-level educational institutions. The objective should be to reconstruct the educational fabric of the Gaza Strip and prevent brain drain. This is consistent with both the previously mentioned principles of the Pact for the Mediterranean and point I.1 concerning research, training and higher education. However, this cannot be achieved without genuine cooperation between European and Mediterranean academic institutions (including the proposed establishment of a Mediterranean University) and greater facilitation of mobility understood as circular migration.
- Support initiatives aimed at maintaining and developing a sustainable economy within the Gaza Strip, beginning with the financing of development cooperation projects designed to sustain economic activities by providing instruments for the recovery of agricultural production, land rehabilitation, and concrete

support for initiatives undertaken by the population of Gaza itself.

- Support initiatives for national political dialogue by promoting genuinely inclusive dynamics within Palestinian civil society and fostering interaction between the social, political and cultural realities of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In this regard, it will also be essential to engage beyond the structures of the PA in order to bring forward those social and political actors that, in recent years, have emerged as increasingly significant elements within the political sphere.
- Supporting gender-sensitive policies through a holistic approach. Given that women and children are often among the groups most severely affected by armed conflict, it is essential to recognise the specific risks and burdens faced by women in the context of Gaza. These include the intensification of unpaid care responsibilities, increased exposure to psychological distress and trauma, heightened vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation, as well as the consequences of forced displacement and continued exposure to insecurity. In this regard, particular emphasis should be placed on supporting Palestinian civil society organisations already operating within Gaza. Strengthening these organisations through adequate financial resources, institutional support, and infrastructure would enable the establishment and expansion of centres dedicated to assisting women and their families. Such initiatives would provide not only psychosocial support but also community-based mechanisms for protection, empowerment and recovery. To ensure that interventions are responsive to local realities and needs, Palestinian actors must occupy a central role in the design and implementation of these policies. Without a locally grounded approach, there is a significant risk that externally driven initiatives may inadvertently reproduce existing social divisions and tensions, thereby exacerbating rather than alleviating the collective trauma experienced by the population.

Long-term policy recommendations concerning fundamental political elements

If a resolution to the Palestinian question must necessarily involve the resumption of dialogue with Israel, it is equally undeniable that this phase must first draw lessons from the failures of the past. In this regard, Europe should promote:

- The full inclusion of all Palestinian political forces in the promotion of a genuine and unified Palestinian national dialogue, with the aim of addressing polarisation among political actors that has inevitably also affected civil society initiatives.
- A dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians that does not focus directly on a final resolution of the conflict, but rather proceeds in the opposite direction to the traditional diplomatic tactic of constructive ambiguity – namely, postponing the most contentious political issues to a later stage (such as the question of Palestinian refugees, and settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem).
- The reform of the PA, understood as the revitalisation of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the representative body of all Palestinians, conceived as an inclusive institution encompassing all Palestinian political realities and capable of reforming the PA in a fair and democratic manner. Within this process, the inclusion of factions currently outside the organisation – most notably Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad – is indispensable. Only in this way can a process of inclusion coincide with a process of “deradicalisation”.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MATTIA GIAMPAOLO

Mattia Giampaolo is a researcher at CeSPI who specialises in North Africa and the Middle East. His work has examined Libya's transition and the influence of Libyan political actors internationally, as well as exploring political movements and parties in Egypt and Tunisia. He has also analysed Women, Peace, and Security Agenda's implementation across the Mediterranean. As part of CeSPI's Türkiye Observatory, he looks closely at Ankara's relationship with North African countries, particularly Libya and Egypt. Previously, he was a Pan-European Fellow at the ECFR. His publications include "La Turchia in Nord Africa" in Valeria Giannotta's "La Turchia nel Mediterraneo. Tra storia e attualità" (Donzelli ebook, 2022) and "The Two Souls of the Egyptian Revolution and Its Decline: A Socio-Political Perspective" (2021). He earned his PhD from La Sapienza University, focusing on the Oslo Accords between Israel and Palestine. He is fluent in Arabic and has spent significant time living in Egypt.



VALERIA GIANNOTTA

Valeria Giannotta is an academic specialising in international relations and Turkish politics. Since 2009, she has been active in Turkey as a researcher and lecturer in Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Ankara. She is the scientific director of the Turkey Observatory at CeSPI (Center for International Political Studies) and a lecturer in Turkish politics at Unicusano University and Accord University in Mogadishu. She is a member of the Board of Directors of Apri International (Confprofessioni) and the delegate for international relations at PLP (Independent Psychologists), as well as director of the research center of the Union of Italian Honorary Consuls (UCOI). As an expert on Turkey, she is the author of articles presented at national and international conferences, regularly participates in high-level strategic meetings, and contributes to Italian and international media. Her book "Erdogan and His Party: The AKP Between Reformism and Conservatism" (Castelvecchi) received the 2018 Cerruglio Award. For her objective analysis and commitment to supporting Italian diplomacy in Turkey, Valeria Giannotta was awarded the title of Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy by the Presidency of the Italian Republic in recognition of her work in support of Italian diplomacy in Turkey.

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Avenue des Arts 46
1000 Brussels, Belgium
info@feeps-europe.eu
www.feeps-europe.eu
[@FEPS_Europe](https://twitter.com/FEPS_Europe)

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Leokoriou 38-40
10553 Athens (Greece)
info@eteron.org
<https://eteron.org/>
[@eteronOrg](https://twitter.com/eteronOrg)

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**Friedrich
Ebert** 
Stiftung

20, Stasandrou, Apt. 401
Nicosia (Cyprus)
office.cyprus@fes.de
<https://cyprus.fes.de/>
[@FESonline](https://twitter.com/FESonline)

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Piazza Venezia, 11
00187 Rome (Italy)
cespi@cespi.it
<https://www.cespi.it/>
[@CeSPI_Roma](#)

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75009 Paris (France)
contact@jean-jaures.org
<https://www.jean-jaures.org/>
[@j-jaures](#)

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C/Ferraz, 66 Planta baja
28008 Madrid (Spain)
info@lab-avanza.es
<https://lab-avanza.es/>
[@AvanzaLab](#)

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