



**POLICY
WORKING
GROUP**

Jerusalem, 25.5.2020

To: Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Federal Chancellor of Austria
Cc: H.E Hannah Liko, Ambassador of Austria to Israel

RE: ISRAELI ANNEXATION OF THE WEST BANK

Dear Chancellor Kurz,

Allow me first a word of introduction. The Policy Working Group (PWG) is a voluntary team of senior Israeli academics, former diplomats, media experts and human rights defenders who advocate to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict on the basis of the two-state solution.

We are writing to you out of deep concern that the Israeli Government will move ahead with its plans to implement Articles 28 and 29 of the coalition agreement signed by Prime Minister Netanyahu and Blue and White leader Gantz on annexation of parts of the West Bank.

PA President Abbas's announcement of the termination of all agreements with Israel and the United States and Jordanian King Abdullah's warning of a "massive conflict" should annexation proceed are clear indications that annexation will endanger Israel's security and could destabilize the entire region, with consequences for European security as well. Furthermore, unilateral annexation, regardless of its scope, will have an impact on the civil and human rights and livelihood of millions of Palestinians, thereby undermining the democratic values on which the State of Israel was founded.

We are aware that Austria opposes an EU decision to sanction Israel should it proceed with annexation out of concern that Europe would be applying a "double standard." We see no "prejudice," as Foreign Minister Schallenberg put it, in holding Israel to the same standards as the rest of the Western world; rather, it is precisely because Israel belongs to the family of progressive nations that allowing its annexation of the West Bank to go unchallenged would undermine the rules-based international order that has reigned since World War II.

We see no benefit to adopting a wait-and-see attitude, as it appears that Prime Minister Netanyahu is intent on fulfilling his political commitment to implement annexation unless he is convinced that it will take a heavy toll in terms of Israel's diplomatic and economic relations. Therefore, it is imperative that Europe act now to advise the Israeli leadership and public of the price to be paid.

We welcome Foreign Minister Schallenberg's statement expressing interest in a dialogue with Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, his new Israeli counterpart. We hope he will use the opportunity to dissuade Israel from taking steps that would put an end to the possibility of achieving peace based on the two-state solution and could plunge the region into violence. We urge you to align with the EU member states who are attempting to salvage the two-state solution by conveying a united and unequivocal European position that Israel should abandon this dangerous course.

The PWG wishes to assure you of its respect and highest consideration.

Cordially,

Ambassador (ret.) Ilan Baruch, PWG Chairperson
Ms. Susie Becher, PWG Steering Committee Coordinator