



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



Brussels, 6 March 2013
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**Remarks by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
after his meeting with President of the State of Israel
Shimon Peres**

Let me first of all warmly welcome President Peres to the European Union. His first visit ever to the European Council as President of Israel.

Mr. President, you have contributed decisively to developing your country as a modern and democratic nation. Through the historic Oslo Accords, already 20 years ago, you also opened the way to the peaceful resolution of the conflict with Palestine. For it, together with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, you were rightfully awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Your visit honours us. Your vision and wisdom are today more necessary and important than ever.

Indeed the international community and particularly the Middle East are living challenging times. Your region is experiencing momentous changes and facing difficult, in some cases dramatic, situations. While these developments entail grave risks -and human suffering, particularly in Syria, needs to be halted immediately-, they also offer opportunities. Opportunities to move towards healthier and more stable relations among neighbours based on cooperation and mutual respect.

The European Union is following these events closely. They affect directly our security and our interests. And we want to contribute as best we can to the stabilisation, democratisation and development of the region. We are convinced that Israel can play a key role in this regard. And we wish to increase our dialogue on these issues. Your visit, Mr. President, will undoubtedly contribute to this.

P R E S S

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President Peres and I have just had a first candid exchange on these issues which we will now follow over a working dinner.

We have also examined our bilateral relations, appreciated their relevance and richness. We agreed on the need to seek further ways to expand them.

At the same time, I have explained to President Peres the clear positions taken by the Council as regards the Middle East Peace Process and the European Union's conviction that bold and concrete steps need to be taken now. The parties have to engage in direct and substantial negotiations. There will be no sustainable peace until the Palestinian's aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and those of Israelis for security are fulfilled through a comprehensive and negotiated peace based on the two-State solution. For these reasons, I have recalled the opposition of the European Union to the illegal expansion of settlements.

Finally, I underlined the European Union's determination to continue supporting the peace process through its various instruments, political, economic and crisis management, as well as its commitment to the security of Israel, including with regard to vital threats in the region. To achieve these goals the European Union will continue working with the United States and other international partners, including within the Quartet. Once again Mr. President, many thanks for your visit.
