

EU powers back Israeli war on Gaza, banning anti-war protests

Johannes Stern, Alex Lantier
14 May 2021

European Union (EU) governments are endorsing the Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip. In a further attack on basic democratic rights, they are banning peaceful protests in favor of the Palestinians in European cities, based on the slander that those attending are violent anti-Semites.

The fighting that has escalated since Israeli riot police rampaged through the Al-Aqsa Mosque last weekend is a one-sided slaughter. The Israeli military is bombing the Gaza Strip and boasting of assassinating Palestinian military commanders, who can reply only with a few crude rockets. As of yesterday, there were over 126 Palestinians had been killed, along with six Israelis and one Indian national. Ten Palestinians were also killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank yesterday. Yet the EU and its member states are lining up behind the Israeli government, denouncing the Palestinians.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen set the tone, taking to Twitter to declare herself “concerned.” She then endorsed the Israeli position against the Gaza Strip, writing: “I condemn indiscriminate attacks by Hamas on Israel. Civilians on all sides must be protected. Violence must end now.” Similar remarks came from both Berlin and Paris.

After German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesman Steffen Seibert denounced Palestinian “terror attacks” and hailed Israel’s “right to self-defense,” the Elysée presidential palace in Paris released a statement yesterday. It said French President Emmanuel Macron had called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: “He presented his condolences for the victims of fire from Hamas and other terrorist groups that he again firmly condemned. And on the anniversary of Israel’s creation, the president stressed his unwavering support for Israel’s security and its right to self-defense.”

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) blamed Hamas for the conflict and called for bans on

demonstrations in defense of the Gaza Strip. “At the very least, Hamas has wantonly caused the latest escalation, by firing over a thousand rockets at Israeli cities,” he told the *Bild* newspaper. He said pro-Palestinian demonstrations should be banned “if criminal actions can be expected there.”

The EU powers are supporting Israeli aggression, though they know it could trigger a broader war.

On May 12, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told the French Senate he was “very concerned at the gravity of the situation in the Near East.” Israel has repeatedly bombed Syria this year, targeting both Syrian government and Iranian forces, and Le Drian noted the danger that a regional war could erupt: “The ongoing spiral of violence in Gaza, Jerusalem, in the West Bank and several Israeli cities threatens to provoke a major escalation. In less than 15 years, the Gaza Strip has seen three bloody wars. Everything must be done to avoid a fourth.”

Nonetheless, Le Drian came down in support of Israeli aggression, declaring, “France condemns in the strongest terms the rocket and missile fire from the Gaza strip targeting Jerusalem and several inhabited areas in Israeli territory, including Tel Aviv.”

Without condemning Israel’s far greater bombardment of the Gaza Strip, Le Drian cynically tried to adopt an evenhanded posture. Condemning Israel’s forced resettlement of Palestinians from East Jerusalem, he pledged to work with German, Egyptian and Jordanian officials to “restart dialog between the conflicting parties to attain a just and lasting settlement of the conflict.” He also called for the right to protest to be respected in Israel.

EU governments’ own policy at home exposed the hypocrisy of Le Drian’s statements of concern about democratic rights in the Middle East. Amid growing working-class anger at police brutality, social inequality and the over one million deaths caused by the EU’s policy of malign neglect towards the circulation of the

COVID-19 virus, governments across Europe are banning or threatening to ban anti-war demonstrations.

On Thursday, French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin banned today's pro-Gaza protest in Paris. "I asked the prefect of police to ban demonstrations Saturday that are linked to the recent tensions in the Near East," he tweeted, adding that across France, "orders have been given to the prefects to be especially vigilant and firm." He told France's police prefects to "mobilize the intelligence services [to] closely follow these movements" and "anticipate any risk of troubles."

The sole justification Darmanin gave for this drastic attack on civil liberties was that seven years ago, there was violence at a pro-Palestinian protest in Paris against the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza.

The Association of Palestinians of Île-de-France, which is organizing the Paris protest, condemned Darmanin's ban. Its spokesman Walid Atallah said: "By banning this demonstration, France shows its complicity with the state of Israel, which wants to ban all expression of solidarity with the rights of Palestinians, who are suffering occupation, colonization, and bombardments."

The Paris administrative court rejected a first appeal of Darmanin's ban by the association, which appealed to France's State Council. It maintained the call for the protest, nonetheless, noting that "too many demonstrators have planned to make the trip in order to express themselves."

Frankfurt city authorities have banned a rally in the city center this afternoon by several pro-Palestinian organizations. The reason given on yesterday was that criminal acts committed by demonstrators could endanger public safety. City official Markus Frank (CDU) accused the organizers of making "anti-Semitic calls."

Such accusations of anti-Semitism serve to suppress any protest against Israel's murderous actions.

Before the protest, in fact, organizers repeatedly spoke out against anti-Semitism, especially after a few dozen people chanted anti-Semitic slogans outside a synagogue in Gelsenkirchen. A statement released Thursday by the group "Palestine Speaks" stated, "If you hate Jews, you have no business being here." The official leaflet for the Frankfurt demonstration calls on everyone to show "solidarity against expulsion, against land theft, against ethnic cleansing, against the ongoing Nakba and for the right of return and for an open society for ALL."

That does not stop European politicians and media from denouncing any protest against Israel's war policies as anti-Semitic. However, criticism of the right-wing

Netanyahu government's brutal actions has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. On the contrary, the claim that the terror-bombing of a largely defenseless population is an expression of Judaism is itself an anti-Semitic argument.

Nothing could make the reactionary nature of the official propaganda campaign clearer than the fact that it is led in Germany by the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany), whose members glorify the Nazi Wehrmacht and are agitating against the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

It is not anti-war demonstrators, but the EU governments that promote anti-Semitism. They not only court the far right across Europe, but also collaborate with openly anti-Semitic forces to pursue their political goals. This was notably the case with the far-right coup in Ukraine in 2014, when then-German Foreign Minister and current President Frank-Walter Steinmeier met the leader of the fascist Svoboda party, the notorious anti-Semite Oleh Tyahnybok, in the German embassy in Kiev.

As for France's interior minister, Darmanin, he is a sympathizer of the far-right *Action française* on record as declaring that he dislikes seeing kosher foods in French supermarkets.

The EU governments' response to the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, including their banning of legitimate public protests, is a serious political warning. To advance their interests at home and abroad, they increasingly rely on war and dictatorship, with fascistic indifference towards human life. War can be stopped only by mobilizing the enormous opposition that exists among workers and youth across Europe, the Arab countries and Israel itself on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)