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**AN EVASIVE INSIGHT TO A  
COMPLEX REALITY  
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE  
EUROPEAN UNION DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION IN PALESTINE**

**Bachelor's Degree Dissertation**

**Author:** Gabriela Iriondo Sumalla

**Supervisor:** Carlos D. Martín Faus

**International Relations**

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*To Professor Carlos D. Martín Faus, the supervisor of this dissertation, for conveying calmness and trust, and being an essential guide throughout this process.*

*To all my friends, especially the ones with whom I have shared countless hours at the library advising and supporting each other through this work.*

*To my parents, for sharing their views on the world and always encouraging me to learn, and to my little sister and brother, Leire and Tomás, for eagerly listening to me talk about this research.*

*And lastly, to the association SUDS and the Palestinian activist that openly talked with me, this work would have never come to be without yours.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Palestine has been a receiver of development assistance for decades, with the European Union and its member states as the main donors. Nonetheless, these programmes have not managed to secure long-term prosperity and peace in the territory and for its people. In order to comprehend the substantial reasons behind this deficiency, the European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine has been chosen as the case study for this work, with the objective of critically assessing whether it is effectively and coherently transforming the lives of the Palestinian people. In light of the current humanitarian crisis, the research also evaluates the adaptability of the Strategy to these circumstances. The conceptual foundation of the analysis is comprised of decolonial literature, anthropological viewpoints and other critical perspectives on development cooperation that can be applied to the Strategy, and explain its incapacity to accordingly adapt to the reality and the aspirations of the local population.

**Key words:** critical thinking, development cooperation, European Joint Strategy, European Union, humanitarian assistance, Palestine occupation

## RESUM

Palestina ha estat receptora d'ajuda al desenvolupament durant dècades, amb la Unió Europea i els seus estats membres com a principals donants. No obstant això, aquests programes no han aconseguit establir prosperitat i pau a llarg termini en el territori i per la seva població. Per tal d'entendre les raons de base darrera aquesta deficiència, la European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine ha estat escollida com a estudi de cas d'aquest treball, amb l'objectiu d'avaluar de forma crítica si està aconseguint transformar de forma efectiva i coherent la vida del poble palestí. Donada l'actual crisi humanitària, la recerca també valorarà l'adaptabilitat de l'Estratègia a aquestes circumstàncies. El marc conceptual de l'anàlisi està comprès per literatura decolonial, perspectives antropològiques i altres punts de vista crítics amb la cooperació al desenvolupament, els quals poden ser aplicats a l'Estratègia i expliquen la seva incapacitat per adaptar-se acordament a la realitat i aspiracions de la població local.

**Paraules clau:** pensament crític, cooperació al desenvolupament, European Joint Strategy, Unió Europea, assistència humanitària, ocupació de Palestina

## RESUMEN

Palestina ha sido receptora de ayuda al desarrollo durante décadas, con la Unión Europea y sus estados miembros como principales donantes. Sin embargo, estos programas no han conseguido establecer prosperidad y paz a largo plazo en el territorio y para su población. Con tal de entender las razones de base detrás de esta deficiencia, la European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine ha sido escogida como estudio de caso de este trabajo, con el objetivo de evaluar de forma crítica si está consiguiendo transformar de forma efectiva y coherente la vida del pueblo palestino. Dada la actual crisis humanitaria, la investigación también valorará la adaptabilidad de la Estrategia a estas circunstancias. El marco conceptual del análisis está comprendido por literatura decolonial, perspectivas antropológicas y otros puntos de vista críticos con la cooperación al desarrollo, los cuales pueden ser aplicados a la Estrategia y explican su incapacidad para adaptarse acordemente a la realidad y aspiraciones de la población local.

**Palabras clave:** pensamiento crítico, cooperación por el desarrollo, European Joint Strategy, Unión Europea, asistencia humanitaria, ocupación de Palestina

## ACRONYMS

DG ECHO	European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department
EDP	European Development Partners
EJS	European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUREP	Office of the European Union Representative
HDP nexus	Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
PA	Palestinian Authority
PEGASE Instrument	Mécanisme Palestino-européen de Gestion de l'Aide Socio-économique
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
ROF	Result Oriented Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Development programmes have been analysed, reviewed and criticised from multiple perspectives and for different aims since their conception. In the present work, the motivation comes from the concern to decipher the structures of knowledge and practice that govern development programmes and are an impediment to positively effecting the lives of the local population. On such accounts, Palestine rises as a singular case given its aid dependency, the dubious local inception of its reforms and their deficiency to secure long-term prosperity and peace. The European Union is the main development assistant of Palestine, and in line with the goal of a two-state solution, it has financed and implemented development projects in the territory for decades. The current situation of Palestine, however, is far from this ambition, and even further away from the aspirations of freedom and justice of the Palestinian people.

The main objective of this work is to form a coherent critique of the development plan that the European Union is carrying in Palestine. In order to do so, the chosen case study is the **European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine: Towards a democratic and accountable Palestinian State**, which is composed by two periods of work (2017 – 2020, and 2021 – 2024) and its aim is to increase the effectiveness, accountability and transparency of European development cooperation in its work for reaching the two-state solution (European External Action Service, 2022: 1).

Therefore, the principal research question of the work is **what has been the effectiveness and coherence of the European Joint Strategy in transforming the lives of the Palestinian people?** This is answered in the critical analysis considering the EJS' own recommendations and future policy proposals, and applying the remarks of the interviewed Palestinian feminist activist and the elements of the Conceptual Framework, which encompass concepts from decolonial literature defending indigenous resistance and alternative possibilities, and other critical perspectives that condemn the power structures underlying development cooperation. This first question is supported by two secondary ones asking **on the evolution of the European Joint Strategy's goals and results**, which is a preliminary quantitative assessment that establishes the basis for the critical analysis, and another questioning the **Strategy's adaptability to the humanitarian crisis**, that is responded with a study on the current situation in Palestine and the Strategy's mechanisms to incorporate the tackling of these events.

The combination of analysing a specific case study and at the same time acknowledging the broader dynamics and assumptions that influence the impact of development programmes, offers adequate evidence to critique development cooperation from both a practical and theoretical basis. Moreover, this research is meaningful for promoting an alternative view on the European Union's work in Palestine, one that goes beyond its own presumptions and clears the way for its possible revision.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine has been chosen as the case study for the present work because it is the instrument by which European Development Partners (EDPs) aspire to work together more efficiently to enhance the coherence between the development, political and humanitarian dimensions of their work (European External Action Service, 2017: 36). Therefore, it is an appropriate object of research to critically evaluate the performance of the European Union's development cooperation in Palestine.

The methodology of the work will be a qualitative analysis of the recommendations and future policy proposals of the Result Oriented Framework from both periods of the EJS. The analysis will be based upon the critical ideas and perspectives defined and operationalised in the Conceptual Framework (decolonial thinking critique on development cooperation, how the EU is complicit with the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian Authority's lack of legitimacy, the incoherence of the EJS with the local reality, and finally, a reconceptualization of sustainability from an anthropological perspective), and it will consist on contrasting them with the development assumptions and vocabulary present in the EJS, while also considering the perspective of the interviewed Palestinian feminist activist. These concepts will also serve as the basis of the inquiry on the EJS adaptability to the humanitarian crisis. Previous to this study, a preliminary quantitative analysis will be conducted utilising the data on the results of the various indicators of the ROF from both periods to examine the evolution of the EJS.

### **3. BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTS**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the political agreements and institutional arrangements that establish the European Union development initiatives in Palestine, as well as its humanitarian work. It also compiles a theoretical overview of the EU understanding of development and the conceptual fundament that will guide the critical analysis.

#### **3.1. THE INSTITUTIONAL AND NORMATIVE FOUNDATION OF THE EUROPEAN JOINT STRATEGY**

The basis for EU – Palestine relations is the Euro-Mediterranean Interim Association Agreement on Trade and Cooperation between the European Community, of the one part, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for the benefit of the Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, of the other part (1997).

The main bilateral political framework is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was formed in 2004 “to foster stability, security and prosperity in the EU's neighbouring regions” (Strategic Communications, 2021). Its political scope encompasses the EU-Palestinian Authority Action Plan that sets the agenda for economic and political cooperation, and the New Agenda for the Mediterranean established by the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood (signed with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia). In terms of bilateral investment and financial assistance, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) is the main external financing tool of the EU cooperation with partner countries (European Commission, 2022a: 1). But in the case of Palestine, direct financial support is also channelled through the PEGASE Instrument, which has the objective of shifting from emergency assistance to a sustainable Palestinian development process (Europe Aid Co-operation Office, 2008: 2). In addition, the Union for the Mediterranean complements the partnership by acting as a multilateral forum (European Commission, 2008: 2) (Al-Fattal, 2010: 4).

Finally, the EJS follow the Middle East Peace Process EU Council Conclusions dating from 2012 to 2016 that reiterate the commitment to reach a two-state solution based on

the 1967 borders that ends the Israeli occupation (Council of the European Union, 2016: 8).

Based on the previous frameworks and the New European Consensus on Development that promotes the replacement of bilateral documents with joint programming in order to strengthen collective impact (Council of the European Union, 2017), the Office of the European Union Representative (EUREP) and Member States have worked towards an EU Joint Programming in Palestine since 2011. Finally, EDPs and the Palestinian Authority launched the European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine in 2017.

For the period 2017-2020, the Strategy is aligned with the 2017 – 2022 Palestinian National Policy Agenda: Putting Citizens first (European External Action Service, 2017: 13), and in the period 2021-2024, with the National Development Plan: Resilience, Disengagement, and Cluster Development towards Independence (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2021: 4). Both plans' main ambitions are achieving independence and promoting institutions that can exert authority over all Palestinians as citizens of a sovereign state.

**Table 1. The institutional and normative foundation of the European Joint Strategy**

<b>Euro-Mediterranean Interim Association Agreement on Trade and Cooperation</b> between the European Community, of the one part, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for the benefit of the Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, of the other part (1997)			
<b>Bilateralism</b>			<b>Multilateralism</b>
<b>European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (2004)</b>		<b>New European Consensus on Development (2017)</b>	<b>Euro Mediterranean Partnership,</b> institutionalised as the <b>Union for the Mediterranean (2008)</b>
<u>Political framework</u>  EU-Palestinian Authority Action Plan  Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. New Agenda for the Mediterranean	<u>Investment and financial assistance</u>  Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)  PEGASE Instrument		
Following <b>Middle East Peace Process EU Council Conclusions</b> dating from 2012 to 2016			
The <b>Office of the European Union Representative (EUREP)</b> and <b>Member States</b> define the EU Joint Programming in Palestine (since 2011):			
<b>EUROPEAN JOINT STRATEGY IN SUPPORT OF PALESTINE: TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC AND ACCOUNTABLE PALESTINIAN STATE</b>			
Period 2017 – 2020		Period 2021 – 2024	
Aligned with 2017 – 2022 Palestinian National Policy Agenda: Putting Citizens first (NPA)		Aligned with National Development Plan: Resilience, Disengagement, and Cluster Development towards Independence (NDP 2021-2023)	

Source: compiled by the author

### 3.2. THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Parallel to the European Union's development cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, the organisation has been providing humanitarian assistance to Palestinians since 2000

through the **European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (DG ECHO)**.

The EJS is also directed at supporting the **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)** as a means to aid Palestinian refugees and the diverse education and health services that the Agency delivers (European External Action Service, 2017: 26). The European Union is the third principal donor of the UNRWA, and its member states are among the top government donors as well (UNRWA, 2021: 1).

The Strategy for the period 2017-2020 signalled the problematic of aid diversion, given that “the humanitarian crises and the occupation-related fiscal losses have diverted aid from development to humanitarian interventions” (European External Action Service, 2017: 13). In recent years, there has been a general growing interdependence between humanitarian and development work, which demands the creation of synergies and joint activities. In addition, the period 2021-2024 aims at emphasising the **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP nexus)**, whose objective is to coordinate the EDPs support and Palestine's local authorities and actors' capacity to address humanitarian needs, as well as development and peacebuilding challenges (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2021: 1).

### **3.3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This section includes an outline of the European Union's perspective on development, and a comprehensive overview of the various concepts and past evaluations on EU cooperation in Palestine in which the critical analysis will be based upon.

Firstly, the crucial objective of the European Joint Strategy for Palestine is to attain the European Union's political objective of a two-state solution, thus aiding the Palestinian Authority to protect and prepare its institutions for statehood. **State-building** programmes by the EU in Palestine adopt the liberal democratic principles defending the adoption of democracy and good governance as a driver of peace (Bouris, 2014: 54). This process is intrinsically linked to the reinforcement of **good governance**, that in eyes of the EU is mainly based on strengthening institutions through capacity building, as the European Consensus on Development establishes (Council of the European Union, 2017:

32). In addition to political principles, European development cooperation aspires to improve aid **effectiveness**. The EU aid effectiveness agenda's central components are the Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour based on the concentration of member states' activities in a limited number of sectors (Carbone, 2013: 40). Parallely, the Busan Partnership Agreement focuses on an overarching enhancement of effective development, founded on principles such as ownership of development priorities by the developing country, results-oriented strategies or mutual accountability (OECD, 2011: 3). In addition, the Agreement calls for a framework in which the developing countries integrate into the global economy, hence the need to mention a key concept by which the current political economy of Palestine is defined in the Joint Strategies themselves: **de-development**. As Sara Roy initially defined it, de-development is "deliberate, systematic and progressive dismemberment of an indigenous economy by a dominant one, where economic –and by extension, societal– potential is not only distorted but denied" (Roy, 2007: 33). Therefore, the Strategy has a target on the **sustainable development** of Palestine's economy, financial model, private sector and other parts of what, according to the Joint Strategy, will become the basis for the Palestinian state. The EU comprehension of sustainability is built upon ideas of environmental security that also aims at continued economic growth and maintenance of established lifestyles (Moore, 2017: 69).

*Table 2. The European Union's perspective on development*

<b>State - building</b>	Liberal democratic principle: adoption of democracy and good governance as a driver of peace
<b>Good governance</b>	Strengthening institutions
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour
	Busan Partnership Agreement: effective development
<b>De-development (Roy, 2007)</b>	Deliberate and systematic dismemberment of an indigenous economy by a dominant one, distorting and denying economic and societal potential
<b>Sustainable development</b>	Environmental security and continued economic growth

Source: compiled by the author

Having conceptualised the main development vocabulary present in the EJS, it is necessary to go through the critical perspectives by which the EU's development cooperation in Palestine has been analysed.

To begin with, development studies have been generally based on the simplification that all human beings have the same universal interests and needs, and therefore they adopt an essentialist ontology that is then portrayed in global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda (Telleria, 2024: 30) and development programmes as a whole. Palestine has grown immensely dependent on foreign aid and development assistance –principally from the EU– and thus the internal or external origin of such reform proposals is blurred (Brown, 2005), putting into question their ownership. On a similar note, **decolonial thinking** condones how development studies still preserve and perpetuate historical structural inequalities and power asymmetries that constraint them from actually achieving a transformative change (Kothari, et al, 2024: 258).

In that respect, the case of Palestine is of special concern given the criticism to the EU **compliance with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories**. After the 1993 Oslo Accords supported by the EU, the Palestinian Authority was established and the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the state of Israel mutually recognised each other. Badarin (2021: 6) explains that in settler-colonial situations, recognition between the settler and the indigenous population must be understood as an attempt to institutionalise the logic of elimination and the violence of colonisation. In this sense, there is an agreement among certain scholars that the Oslo process represented a continuation and reinforcement of Israeli occupation (Roy, 2008: 11, cited in Bouris, 2014: 94). Although the logic of Oslo of “peace now, democracy later” has been left behind and current efforts are focused on “democracy now, peace later”, Brown (2005: 22) suggests that placing and expecting Palestinian public institutions to have authority and accountability in a severely limited autonomy and unfavourable international political context might steer long-term failure. Evaluations on European Union's cooperation with Palestine prior to the Joint Strategy's formulation suggest that the EU has not been willing or able to end the principal binding constraint that has hindered the prosperity of such cooperation: the Israeli occupation (DRN, et al, 2014: 98) (Al-Fattal, 2010: 30). They also raise doubts on whether the convergence between the political and developmental views of joint programming will be translated from paper into practical actions (ADE, 2017: 313).

Besides the EU part, the picture becomes more complex when acknowledging the role of the **Palestinian Authority** in maintaining this power structure. Khalil and Del Sarto (2015: 146) consider that in their attempt to promote democracy and the rule of law, the EU and the PA—led by the political party of Fatah—are defining the justice and governance system of Palestine under the matrix of control of Israel. Correspondingly, from a decolonial perspective, Rodríguez (2019: 212) underlies the liberal approach's neglect of power dynamics within the local communities, consequently prioritising dialogue with just some leaders and suppressing other perspectives. Moreover, Chandler (2013: 98) considers that the EU approach to governance puts at its core the building of technical and administrative capacity rather than representative legitimacy. Such remarks gain value in light of the authoritarian and non-transparent role that the PA has taken (Duplá del Moral, 2020: 237).

Beyond the incoherence between the EU's development programmes' objective of good governance and democracy, and its reinforcement of an illegitimate government, in the present context **coherence** can be conceptualised as the consistency of the programme aspirations and representations with the local reality. In this sense, a crucial concept to take into account in order to understand Palestine's reality is its unpredictability, which is intrinsically related to **sustainability**. The EU's view on sustainable development seeks to preserve the ways of being and doing. However, anthropologists Brightman and Lewis (2017: 2) challenge this prevailing ideology of constant progress by pointing out the need to encourage diversity in order to reconceptualise sustainability. The authors' outline is notably applicable to Palestine because they criticise the tiring efforts put into an "elusive future 'modern state'" that fail to respond appropriately to the present moment, and they defend that for the meaning of sustainability to become clear, it must prepare us for an unpredictable future (Brightman and Lewis, 2017: 3).

**Table 3. Critical analysis operational concepts**

<b>Decolonial thinking</b>	Development studies perpetuate inequalities and power asymmetries	
	Neglect of power dynamics within local communities	
	Local ownership of the reforms	
<b>EU compliance with Israeli occupation</b>	The Oslo accords reinforce the occupation	
	Palestinian public institutions with no real autonomy	
	Question of EU convergence between its political and development dimensions	
<b>Palestinian Authority</b>	EU focus on institutions' technical capacities rather than legitimacy	
	Palestinian Authority's lack of democratic accountability and legitimacy	
<b>Coherence</b>	Consistency of programme aspirations with local reality	
<b>Sustainability</b>	Brightman and Lewis (2017) reconceptualization of the term	Appropriate response to the present
		Embrace of an unpredictable future
		Encouragement of diversity

Source: compiled by the author

Table 3 is a compendium of the terms, theories and ideas presented in this section that will serve as the guiding structure for the elaboration of the critical analysis, which at the same time is built upon a preliminary quantitative overview of the EJS evolution.

## **4. EVOLUTION OF THE STRATEGY'S RESULTS**

Before evaluating the Strategy using the previously defined concepts, it is vital to estimate what has been its achievement throughout the two periods of work.

The 2017 – 2020 period of the Joint Strategy established 3 crosscutting themes: gender equality, environment and youth; that are integrated into 5 pillars (see Table 1), which are based upon the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As it is stated in the document, “pillars were selected based on comparative advantage of European donors based on historical and current division of labour arrangement” (European External Action Service,

2017: 13). The following table shows the division of each pillar in various sectors and the EDP in charge of providing support.

***Table 4. European Joint Strategy 2017 – 2020 Pillars, Sectors and Leads***

<b>EJS pillars</b>	<b>Sectors</b>	<b>EDP Lead</b>
1. Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy	Public Financial Management and Macroeconomic Support Sector	EUREP
	Public Administration Reform - Central Government Sector	EUREP
	Public Administration Reform - Local Government	Denmark
2. Rule of Law, Justice, Citizen Safety and Human Rights		EUREP
3. Sustainable Service Delivery	Education	Finland
	Health	Italy
	Social protection	EUREP
4. Access to Self-Sufficient Water and Energy Services	Water and wastewater	The Netherlands
	Energy	France
5. Sustainable Economic Development	Private sector	EUREP
	Labour	Germany
	Agriculture	Spain
Cross-cutting themes	Gender equality	Italy
	Environment	Sweden
	Youth	Denmark

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021a

For the period 2021 – 2024, there have been transformations in the following aspects: the order of pillar 1 and 2 is exchanged; the addition of two sectors in the pillar of Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights; the substitution of Finland by Ireland as EDP in the Education sector; and the substitution of France by Norway as EDP in the Energy sector.

**Table 5. European Joint Strategy 2021 – 2024 Pillars, Sectors and Leads**

<b>EJS pillars</b>	<b>Sectors</b>	<b>EDP Lead</b>
1. Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights	Democracy and Electoral Support	EUREP
	Rule of Law and Human Rights	EUREP
2. Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy	Macroeconomic Support Sector and Public Financial Management	EUREP
	Public Administration Reform - Central Government Sector	EUREP
	Public Administration Reform - Local Government	Denmark
3. Sustainable Service Delivery	Education	Ireland
	Health	Italy
	Social protection	EUREP
4. Climate Change, Access to Self-Sufficient Water and Energy Services	Water	The Netherlands
	Energy	Norway
5. Sustainable Economic Development	Private sector development	EUREP
	Labour / TVET	Germany
	Agriculture	Spain
Cross-cutting themes	Gender equality	Italy
	Environment	Sweden
	Youth	Denmark

Source: European External Action Service, 2022

The following data has been acquired from the latest Result Oriented Framework of each period. This document reviews the results of each sector's **impact level** and progress towards SDGs, the **outcomes** supported by EDPs interventions, and the **induced outcome** which refers to the necessary improvements and reforms in Palestinian public policies. Moreover, these three levels are composed by several indicators which are evaluated using the following criteria: **progress**, the milestone met or almost met and the trend is in the right direction; **deviation**, the milestone is not met and there is stagnation that requires a review of the Theory of Change; and finally, **aggravation**, there is a

negative trend which requires a review of the Theory of Change and corrective action. A Theory of Change can be understood as a tool and approach that supports the effective design, implementation and evaluation of a programme, by clarifying the causal chain and effects that link a programme's activities to its final objective (European Commission, 2022b: 1).

In order to analyse the results of both periods of the EJS, these three evaluation categories have been quantified and systemised in the following tables.

Table 6 exhibits the general results of the year 2020 (belonging to the ROF of the first period), including the cross-cutting themes, while Table 7 displays the results of each of the five pillars, and the percentage that the three evaluation categories represent in each one. As seen in Table 6, the majority of the indicators are classified as deviation, followed by aggravation and progress. The pillar with the most positive results is Pillar 1: Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy Reform Sector, while the one with a higher percentage of aggravation indicators and lack of data is Pillar 3: Sustainable service delivery.

***Table 6. Results of 2020***

	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Progress</i>	43	23,8
<i>Deviation</i>	56	30,9
<i>Aggravation</i>	45	24,9
<i>N/A</i>	37	20,4
<b><i>Total indicators</i></b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b

**Table 7. Pillar results of 2020**

	<b>Pillar 1: Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy Reform Sector</b>		<b>Pillar 2. Rule of law, justice and human rights</b>		<b>Pillar 3. Sustainable service delivery</b>		<b>Pillar 4. Self- sufficient water and energy services</b>		<b>Pillar 5. Sustainable economic development</b>	
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar
<i>Progress</i>	9	37,5	3	14,3	8	21,6	3	20,0	16	29,1
<i>Deviation</i>	8	33,3	12	57,1	8	21,6	8	53,3	16	29,1
<i>Aggravation</i>	3	12,5	2	9,5	11	29,7	4	26,7	13	23,6
<i>N/A or PBC</i>	4	16,7	4	19,0	10	27,0	0	0,0	10	18,2
<b>Total indicators per pillar</b>	24	100	21	100	37	100	15	100	55	100

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b

Table 8 shows the comparison between the previously displayed results of 2020 and the latest obtained results of 2021 / 2022. The evolution exhibits a growth in progress indicators in all the pillars except one, which were the least abundant in 2020 and for 2021 / 2022 they are the majority, as well as a drop on the number of indicators with no data available. Nevertheless, aggravation has also risen –although to a lesser extent– in all pillars except one, revealing that a growth in progress is accompanied by a growth in aggravation. There has also been no qualitative shift among the pillars’ performance (see Table 9) (see Annex 1 – 5 for complete information and comparison), given that Pillar 2: Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy Reform Sector (Pillar 1 in the previous period) remains the one with more positive results, and the one with the higher percentage of aggravation and lack of data is still Pillar 3: Sustainable service delivery.

**Table 8. General evolution of the two periods**

	2020		2021 / 2022		Difference	
	Total	%	Total	%	Absolut	%
<i>Progress</i>	43	23,8	93	35,5	69,2	11,7
<i>Deviation</i>	56	30,9	55	21,0	24,1	-9,9
<i>Aggravation</i>	45	24,9	79	30,2	54,1	5,3
<i>N/A</i>	37	20,4	35	13,4	14,6	-7,1
<b>Total indicators</b>	181	100	262	100		

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b and European External Action Service, 2022

**Table 9. Pillar results of 2021 / 2022**

	<b>Pillar 1. Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights</b>		<b>Pillar 2. Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy</b>		<b>Pillar 3. Sustainable service delivery</b>		<b>Pillar 4. Climate Change, Access to Self-Sufficient Water and Energy Services</b>		<b>Pillar 5. Sustainable economic development</b>	
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar
<i>Progress</i>	12	29,3	22	48,9	10	18,9	19	67,9	26	44,8
<i>Deviation</i>	15	36,6	10	22,2	11	20,8	6	21,4	6	10,3
<i>Aggravation</i>	6	14,6	11	24,4	20	37,7	3	10,7	20	34,5
<i>N/A or PBC</i>	8	19,5	2	4,4	12	22,6	0	0,0	6	10,3
<b>Total indicators per pillar</b>	41	100	45	100	53	100	28	100	58	100

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2022

This chapter aimed at answering the first of the secondary research questions by visualising the progress of the EJS considering the European Union own evaluation system. The results show a positive evolution, but their relevance must be measured by evaluating their qualitative impact, that is, their capacity to transform the lives of the Palestinians.

## **5. AN EVASIVE INSIGHT TO A COMPLEX REALITY**

Following on the work's goal of criticising the European Joint Strategy's effectiveness and coherence in transforming the lives of the Palestinian people, this chapter evaluates the performance of the EJS utilising the conceptual framework as the criteria. After, it will prove the validity of the critical analysis by incorporating into the discussion the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and demonstrating the EJS' inability to adapt to it.

### **5.1. CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

In addition to the indicators, the Results Oriented Framework of both periods propose an adaptation to the Theory of Change and set the priorities for policy dialogue and future programming based on the latest results. Both ROFs display few notable transformations and quite identical notes on the preferences for the coming years of the EJS.

This section will assess these key ideas, assumptions and proposals by applying the operational concepts collected from the Conceptual Framework (see Table 3), which encompass decolonial thinking terms, the view of the EU as complicit to Israeli occupation, the lack of legitimacy of the PA, the inconsistency of the programme with local reality and the consequential inappropriate response to the present and unpredictable future. Furthermore, the interview held with a Palestinian feminist activist<sup>1</sup> has incorporated both a local and expert voice to the critical analysis.

To begin with, the first decolonial critique to development cooperation that can be observed in the Strategy is a perpetuation of power asymmetries between Palestine and Israel by its tackling of the occupation. Its proposition against incursions such as the demolitions of Palestinian schools or the military attacks in Gaza—which have made Pillar 3 the worst performer—is to reinforce the Palestinian Authority's capacity to “minimise the disruptions” and enhance its “shock responsiveness”. Similarly, it recommends the improvement of infrastructures and technology as the solution to the hampered flow of goods between the West Bank and Gaza, ignoring the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel. The naturalisation of these violations perpetuates and institutionalises the

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation had with a Palestinian feminist activist through an online meeting. Their name will remain anonymous at their personal request.

colonial restrictions by recommending a managerial solution that reduces the matter to an administrative capacity concern.

Furthermore, the Strategy insists on the importance of the identification of the correct duty bearers given that sometimes it is dubious between the Fatah-led PA and the Government of Israel. The ROF includes various indicators to measure the accountability of Palestinian public institutions, but there is no mechanism to incorporate the responsibility of Israel, even if it does mention its repercussion in violating the rights of farmers, demolishing schools, incorrectly charging water treatment, or shaping trade. It is true that the ROF mentions the establishment of trilateral meetings between the EU, the PA and Israel, but there is no indicator on how these talks have any effect on the evolution of the Strategy. Likewise, there is no suggestion to formulate an indicator that overviews the coordination of the development objectives with the political one –the two-state solution–, failing to add a more structural and less momentary perspective to the whole Strategy and impeding an assessment on the cohesion between the two dimensions. Despite the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus being a valuable addition, its operationalisation and implementation are yet to be brought about in all the sectors, and meetings discussing the topic have only been held in two out of sixteen.

Moreover, the Strategy exhibits a complete disregard of the European Union's role in sustaining the political division of Palestine. While it mentions the lack of political will for an intra-Palestinian reconciliation, it does not consider the effects that the EU's no-contact policy with Hamas and the dismissal of its electoral win in 2006 have had on the division. Several reports have signalled that this line of action of exclusion has distorted good governance reforms and diminished the EU's role in state-building (Charrett, 2018: 174). In addition, according to the interviewed activist, there is a shared feeling of distrust towards the European Union and its member states, which are seen by the Palestinian people as interest-driven actors that finance the projects that benefit them, imposing their own capitalist and imperialist ideas while also supporting Israel (Palestinian feminist activist, personal communication, 2024).

The general view on the Palestinian Authority is similar: an ally of the occupation. The EJS solely engages with an Authority that monopolises the Palestinian voice and is proved to violently repress opposing views. What is more, the consultations held by the EDPs with the heavily controlled civil society organisations are infrequent, and this creates an absence of mechanisms that recognise the proposals, needs and aspirations of the local

population. The Palestinian Authority is an undemocratic government with an extended issue of illegitimacy, which the Strategy intends to transform by recommending the celebration of elections and the coordination with other stakeholders. Nonetheless, each pillar set of future programming priorities include the strengthening of its institutions. Following a liberal democratic perspective, the EU is working under the assumption that powering PA institutions and increasing their capacities will somehow translate into them learning about democratic governance, which will later conclude in peace. This correlation has not only been proven to be ineffective, but its operationalisation is not palpable in the formulation of the numerous indicators, nor their results, and even less in the current reality of Palestine.

Precisely, a weakness of the EJS is the evasion of past and current factors that shape the reality it is attempting to improve. In spite of the fact that 10% of Israeli population is living beyond the internationally recognised borders, occupying Palestinian land and terrorising its inhabitants on a daily basis (Ibáñez and Esposa, 2023: 12), the ROF only incorporates two indicators that measure the number of attacks by settlers. Similarly, the two indicators measuring mental disorders do not associate this growing and urgent issue to the occupation, despite evidence proving the correlation between the proximity of military bases and occupation forces with mental health issues (Ibáñez and Esposa, 2023: 25). This fails to take into account the unpredictability and insecurity that characterise the life of Palestinians, and thus prevents the Strategy from appropriately responding to the present and guaranteeing sustainability. Besides that, the EJS is also incapable of acknowledging the resistance of the population to the occupation. Self-organisation has a vital role in Palestinian society, there are groups of women that support each other through the traumas of the occupation, families that rebuild their houses after Israeli demolitions, farmers that construct their own wells, and children that stand by each other when their parents are detained (Ibáñez and Esposa, 2023). In the words of activist Khalida Jarrar: “Our daily life is *sumud*. I can’t travel, I can’t go to Jerusalem, sometimes I can’t even move between Palestinian cities, every day you think you can go back to prison. How can you survive all of this? With *sumud*. This is the word we associate with surviving until we are free” (piece of interview from Ibáñez and Esposa, 2023: 19). The Palestinian people reject the 1967 borders established by the two-state solution –the political basis of the EJS–, and they demand the return to the 1948 territories from where they were removed (Palestinian feminist activist, personal communication, 2024). By actively

dismissing the existence of the anti-colonial struggles and claims of the Palestinians, the Strategy conceptualises their reality in a way that will serve *its* aspiration of building *its* idea of a Palestinian state. And as of now, it has not even managed to make its own goal any closer.

**Table 10. The critical analysis**

	Conceptual Framework		European Joint Strategy		
Decolonial thinking	Development studies perpetuate inequalities and power asymmetries		Short-term and managerial solutions to structural constraints		
	Neglect of power dynamics within local communities		Unique engagement with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority	Minimal civil society inclusion	
	Local ownership of the reforms				
EU compliance with Israeli occupation	The Oslo accords reinforce the occupation		Dismissal of EU role in sustaining intra-Palestinian division		
			Evasion of the Palestinian people distrust towards the EU		
	Palestinian public institutions with no real autonomy		No indicator to incorporate Israeli responsibility		
	Question of EU convergence between its political and development views		No indicator measuring coordination between political and development objectives		
			No operationalisation and implementation of the HDP nexus		
Palestinian Authority	EU focus on institutions' technical capacities rather than legitimacy		Short-term and managerial solutions to structural constraints		
	Palestinian Authority's lack of democratic accountability and legitimacy		Strengthening institutions' capacity		
			Minimal civil society inclusion		
Coherence	Consistency of programme aspirations with local reality		No acknowledgment of population's self-organisation and resistance	Minimal indicators on settlers' actions	No operationalisation and implementation of the HDP nexus
Sustainability	Brightman and Lewis (2017) reconceptualisation of the term	Appropriate response to the present			
		Embrace of an unpredictable future			
		Encouragement of diversity		Minimal civil society inclusion	

Source: compiled by the author

## **5.2. CURRENT SITUATION: ADAPTABILITY TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS**

With the objective of proving the relevance of the critical analysis nowadays, an assessment of the Strategy's adaptability to the current situation of Palestine must be done. Since October 2023, Israel has carried military attacks throughout the Gaza Strip that have killed more than 35.000 people, cut electricity, water and food supplies, and forced the massive and continuous displacement of Palestinians. The Strategy established that a review of itself might be necessary in case of a "substantially changed political context" that would impede the viability of the objective of a two-state solution (European External Action Service, 2022: 5) and has described Palestine as being a "sui generis" case for aid and cooperation. However, despite this current crisis being of an unprecedented scale, the Palestinian people have been suffering a constant ethnic cleansing ever since the Nakba in 1948 (Pappé, 2008: 40), and the current events are an extension of this logic of elimination that has made Palestine dependent on humanitarian aid.

As it has been mentioned, in a context of high interdependence between development and humanitarian interventions, it is vital that both dimensions are formally coordinated. Thus, the object of study by which this section will assess the adaptability of the EJS to the current crisis is the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Not only is this nexus the instrument by which the EJS merges humanitarian and development to achieve peace, but the Strategy is the mechanism –along with the DG ECHO– in which the nexus relies on for its application (European Commission, 2024: 6).

The nexus is mainly hampered by the fact that it has not yet been fully incorporated into the EJS, and meetings for its operationalisation have only been held in two of the sixteen sectors. The prospects of its application, however, are not remarkable due to the EU approach to the nexus' three dimensions: humanitarianism, development and peace. Firstly, the current proposals for EU humanitarian interventions are emergency responses, which is well-aligned with the level of vulnerability in Gaza. Nevertheless, a challenge emerges because the protracted nature of the crisis in Palestine has made humanitarian programmes structural (Reid, 2023). Hence, these short-term solutions generally act as band-aids that may increase survival but do not tackle the long-term factors that create the need and dependence for this type of assistance in the first place. Moving on to the development level, the previous section has justified that the EJS itself is formulated in a

way that fails to tackle longer-structural factors behind the conflict, since it reinforces power asymmetries between the actors, thus preventing the promotion of a Palestinian state and the supposed consequent peace. On this last topic, certain findings have signalled that incorporating peace into the HD nexus demands addressing the political components of the donor agendas and of the conflict (Brown, Mena and Brown, 2017: 13). In this sense, a big obstacle is the disjointedness between the EJS' goal of Palestinian statehood and the political attitude of the European Union and its member states. As the interviewed activist mentioned, there is always an agenda in international aid (Palestinian feminist activist, personal communication, 2024), and in the present case Germany and Italy's (EDPs in the Strategy) must be questioned due to their unconditional support to an Israeli government that rejects the two-state solution, and the European Union's given the growing internal contestation towards an agreement on a common policy (Akgül-Açıkmeşe and Özel, 2024: 74).

In conclusion, it seems almost impossible to adapt to the unpredictability that reigns in the daily lives of the Palestinian people, but this insecure context is not arbitrary and it is consolidated by intent decisions and incoherent interventions. Accordingly, it is sensible to affirm that the European Joint Strategy does not have the capacity to properly adapt to the current humanitarian disaster. This is primarily because the mechanism by which development and humanitarian assistance are coordinated –the HDP nexus– is not implemented in the formulation, but also because the Strategy is not structured to address the systemic factors that create Palestine's humanitarian needs.

In light of this statement, important questions arise and new lines of investigation are opened: what are the future prospects of the EJS as a state and peace-building mechanism, and as an effective aid instrument? Can humanitarian and development assistance in Palestine be coordinated while upholding a long-term solution? Is the involvement of EDPs that support Israel an impediment to the EJS' effectiveness? Does the EU and its member states have the capacity and interest to promote a resolution to the conflict? And is it possible to converge the EU development and political dimensions?

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

“It’s the same as when a woman is mistreated by her husband and instead of telling her: ‘Divorce him, leave him, send him to jail’; they tell her: ‘You don’t know how to deal with him, don’t defend yourself, you have to handle him better so he doesn’t mistreat you.’ That is what the European Union does with the Palestinian people” (Palestinian feminist activist, personal communication, 2024). These words expressed by the interviewed activist embody the critical outline conveyed throughout the document. The objective of this work was to assess whether the European Joint Strategy is being an effective instrument for transforming the lives of the Palestinian people, an ambition that is articulated in the principal research question of the work. Two secondary research questions were formulated to support this objective.

To begin with the one asking on the results of the Strategy, it would be unwise to state that it is profoundly failing on its own goals, because there is a positive evolution of the indicators. But beyond the EU own mechanisms to assess its programme, it is vital to develop instruments and concepts that form alternative sources of knowledge and assessment that are more in touch with the reality of the people whose lives are affected by development programmes.

Correspondingly, this work has used decolonial notions, anthropology reconceptualisations of development vocabulary, reports denouncing the EU and the PA compliance with power inequalities, and a personal interview with a Palestinian feminist activist to answer the principal research question, and thus justify the inadequacy of the Strategy to be an effective tool in transforming the lives of the Palestinian people. The starting point of the European Joint Strategy already falters, since the national plans in which it is based on are a Palestinian Authority’s initiative. The reforms are owned by the Palestinian institutions, but not by the Palestinians, because the former do not hold the support of the latter in any way. However, the future programming proposals focus on powering the capacities of an undemocratic government whose actions are determined by an occupying power. The colossal obstacle that this last fact supposes for any project’s success is not illustrated in the Strategy’s formulation, as there is a refusal to even identify Israel as a responsible actor in the instability of Palestine on most pillars. This omission is aggravated by the discoordination between the EU development dimension, namely the EJS and its goal of Palestinian statehood, and the EU political dimension, which in light

of recent events has proved to be ambiguous on its position towards a conflict resolution. Therefore, the essential assumption of the EJS that preparing PA institutions for statehood will lead to the creation of the Palestinian state and the arrival of peace is erroneous, and despite the EJS accepting that this is a long-term vision, even its present actions are not adhering to this goal.

Finally, the fact that the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus is not yet implemented or operationalised prevents the EJS from adapting to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and its numerous deficiencies only aggravate the possibility of this nexus to be effective.

Ultimately, the problem relies in the fact that the EU institutional apparatus to support Palestine is enormous, but after decades of formulations and financing, evaluations and reforms, and constant reiteration for the need of a “political solution”, the EU has failed to provide such support. The European Joint Strategy in support of Palestine only achieves certain milestones that do not translate into a transformation of the lives of the Palestinian people, but rather end up preserving the status quo. A critical transformation of the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the EU development cooperation in Palestine is required to make these programmes and aid coherent with the reality of the case and the aspirations of its people. There is an extensive community work that the Palestinian people embark on parallel to any institutional arrangements undertaken by the PA, and some of it is supported by precisely international and European associations that defend their fight for liberation and support their agency.

The European Union may allow itself to dodge past and present realities to make its policies and programmes manageable and adherent to its interests and capacities, but Palestinians do not, and they will never forget the actions and decisions that brought them to where they are now. And so, as long as the occupation remains, so will their resistance.

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# ANNEX

## *Annex 1. Evolution of Pillar 1 (changed to 2 in second period)*

	Pillar 1: Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy Reform Sector		Pillar 2: Governance Reform, Fiscal Consolidation and Policy		Difference	
	2020		2021 / 2022			
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Absolut	%
Progress	9	37,5	22	48,9	13,0	11,4
Deviation	8	33,3	10	22,2	2,0	-11,1
Aggravation	3	12,5	11	24,4	8,0	11,9
N/A	4	16,7	2	4,4	-2,0	-12,2
Total indicators in the pillar	24	100	45	100		

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b and European External Action Service, 2022

## *Annex 2. Evolution of Pillar 2 (changed to 1 in second period)*

	Pillar 2. Rule of law, justice and human rights		Pillar 1. Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights		Difference	
	2020		2021 / 2022			
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Absolut	%
<i>Progress</i>	3	14,3	12	29,3	9,0	15,0
<i>Deviation</i>	12	57,1	15	36,6	3,0	-20,6
<i>Aggravation</i>	2	9,5	6	14,6	4,0	5,1
<i>N/A</i>	4	19,0	8	19,5	4,0	0,5
<b>Total indicators in the pillar</b>	21	100	41	100		

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b and European External Action Service, 2022

### Annex 3. Evolution of Pillar 3

	Pillar 3. Sustainable service delivery		Pillar 3. Sustainable service delivery		Difference	
	2020		2021 / 2022			
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Absolut	%
<i>Progress</i>	8	21,6	10	18,9	2,0	-2,8
<i>Deviation</i>	8	21,6	11	20,8	3,0	-0,9
<i>Aggravation</i>	11	29,7	20	37,7	9,0	8,0
<i>N/A</i>	10	27,0	12	22,6	2,0	-4,4
<b>Total indicators in the pillar</b>	37	100	53	100		

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b and European External Action Service, 2022

### Annex 4. Evolution of Pillar 4

	Pillar 4. Self-sufficient water and energy services		Pillar 4. Climate Change, Access to Self-Sufficient Water and Energy Services		Difference	
	2020		2021 / 2022			
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Absolut	%
<i>Progress</i>	3	20,0	19	67,9	16,0	47,9
<i>Deviation</i>	8	53,3	6	21,4	-2,0	-31,9
<i>Aggravation</i>	4	26,7	3	10,7	-1,0	-16,0
<i>N/A</i>	0	0,0	0	0,0	0,0	0,0
<b>Total indicators in the pillar</b>	15	100	28	100		

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b and European External Action Service, 2022

***Annex 5. Evolution of Pillar 5***

	<b>Pillar 5. Sustainable economic development</b>		<b>Pillar 5. Sustainable economic development</b>		<b>Difference</b>	
	<b>2020</b>		<b>2021 / 2022</b>			
	Total	% pillar	Total	% pillar	Absolut	%
<i>Progress</i>	16	29,1	26	44,8	10,0	15,7
<i>Deviation</i>	16	29,1	6	10,3	-10,0	-18,7
<i>Aggravation</i>	13	23,6	20	34,5	7,0	10,8
<i>N/A</i>	10	18,2	6	10,3	-4,0	-7,8
<b>Total indicators in the pillar</b>	55	100	58	100		

Source: compiled by the author based on European External Action Service, 2021b  
and European External Action Service, 2022