Subject: Reply to Joint letter signed by 30 Palestinian coalitions regarding possible funding for Elbit systems and other Israeli military and security companies with in Horizon 2020 Framework Programme

Dear Ms Mantovani,

I would like to thank you for your email of 7 May 2015 submitting a joint letter signed by 30 Palestinian coalitions, trade unions and civil society organisations regarding the possible funding of Elbit systems and other Israeli companies by the EU’s research and innovation programme – Horizon 2020.

Regarding your concerns related to the participation of these companies in Horizon 2020 and the risk of using EU funding for military purposes, we would like to assure you that the EU framework programmes, including Horizon 2020, have an exclusive focus on civil applications. They focus on research and innovation cooperation within the EU and with international partners in various fields, including civil security research which targets important topics such as disaster response, civil protection, border surveillance and crisis management.

Several mechanisms have been put in place to prevent that EU funds are used for activities that could be contrary to international law. All projects, most of which are of a collaborative nature involving participants from a number of different countries, are selected on the basis of excellence. Eligible proposals are evaluated by a panel of external independent experts. If a project raises ethical questions, it also undergoes an additional ethical review. The ethical evaluation of these projects includes an assessment of the possible dual-use of the proposed research and compliance with applicable EU, national and international legislation, including the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Proposals involving security issues can also be subject to additional review.

In June 2013, the EU adopted the ‘Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards’. In line with the Guidelines, Israeli entities established in, or wishing to carry out activities in these Occupied Territories under an EU funded project, are not eligible to participate in Union programmes and to get EU funding from such programmes.
Israel is associated to Horizon 2020, which means that Israel pays a substantial financial contribution to the programme. As a result of the association, Israeli legal entities may receive funding from Horizon 2020, subject to compliance with the requirements of the above mentioned Guidelines. This does not remove the obligation for Israeli entities to follow Horizon 2020's requirements, including the condition that research activities must be carried out in compliance with European fundamental ethical principles.

From the legal viewpoint, in cases where the EU Council adopts sanctions targeting potential participants, such participants would be ineligible for funding. However, where no sanctions have been adopted by the EU, there is no legal basis on which a particular participant from an associated country could be excluded from participation and funding.

Please also note that the Commission supports science diplomacy and research and innovation cooperation in the Middle East, including between Israeli and Palestinian researchers. In FP7 and Horizon 2020 there have been several projects where Israeli and Palestinian entities participated together in areas such as energy, research infrastructures, disaster response, space, social sciences and humanities and others.

Yours sincerely,

Robert-Jan Smits