

(English version)

Question for written answer E-003022/24
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Hanna Gedin (The Left), Jonas Sjöstedt (The Left)
(18 December 2024)

Subject: Israel's disinformation campaign against UNRWA

The Israeli Government has paid for ads on Google and on billboards in cities across the world in which the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) is labelled as a terrorist organisation ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾. This is a clear case of a disinformation campaign. It not only puts UNRWA staff in danger, it also risks stopping aid from reaching the starving population in Gaza. The UNRWA is now calling for regulation to stop the dissemination of such damaging messaging.

In 2022, the EU imposed sanctions on several Russian media outlets and holdings, suspending their transmission and broadcasting within the EU following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine ⁽³⁾. In her 2024 election campaign, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed a 'European Democracy Shield' to counter foreign information manipulation and interference ⁽⁴⁾.

1. What actions will the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) take to hold the Israeli Government accountable for the disinformation campaign against the UNRWA?
2. What actions will the VP/HR take to prevent Israel's disinformation campaign from spreading throughout the Member States?
3. What will the VP/HR do to reaffirm the EU's support for UNRWA?

Submitted: 18.12.2024

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas on behalf of the European Commission
(2 April 2025)

The EU is one of the main supporters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The European Council condemned any attempt to repeal the 1967 agreement between Israel and UNRWA and to attempt to obstruct its capacity to operate its mandate ⁽¹⁾.

It is of utmost importance to counter the disinformation campaign aimed at UNRWA. For this reason, the European External Action Service monitors and documents the campaign closely, within the mandate 'to counter and expose disinformation in countries neighbouring the Union' outlined in the 2018 Action Plan for Disinformation ⁽²⁾.

The EU and its Member States also continue to reach out to the Israeli authorities, and to highlight concerns through diplomatic outreach and public statements.

The European Council, on 21 March ⁽³⁾, 27 June ⁽⁴⁾, 17 October ⁽⁵⁾ and 19 December 2024 ⁽⁶⁾ has consistently reiterated that the services provided by UNRWA are essential.

The High Representative/Vice-President discussed ways of supporting UNRWA with foreign ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council.

¹ UNRWA, 'The state of Israel continues disinformation campaign against UNRWA', 4 December 2024, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/state-israel-continues-dis-information-campaign-against-unrwa>.

² Sveriges Radio, 'Israelisk reklam misskrediterar Unrwa — sprids på svenska nyhetssajter', 3 December 2024, <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/israelisk-reklam-misskrediterar-unrwa-sprids-pa-svenska-nyhetssajter>.

³ Social Europe, 'Russia, disinformation and Europe's battle for truth', 8 May 2024, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/russia-disinformation-and-europes-battle-for-truth>.

⁴ Euractiv, 'Von der Leyen promises "European Democracy Shield" to combat foreign interference at EU level', 15 May 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/von-der-leyen-promises-european-defence-shield-to-combat-foreign-interference-at-eu-level/>.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/2pebccz2/20241017-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

⁽²⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/b654235c-f5f1-452d-8a8c-367e603af841_en?filename=eu-communication-disinformation-euco-05122018_en.pdf

⁽³⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/70880/euco-conclusions-2122032024.pdf>

⁽⁴⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/qa3lbgla/euco-conclusions-27062024-en.pdf>

⁽⁵⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/2pebccz2/20241017-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/jhlenhaj/euco-conclusions-19122024-en.pdf>

The EU will continue to provide both political and financial support to UNRWA. In 2024, the EU provided EUR 92 million in support to UNRWA. This came in addition to the EUR 48.5 million of EU humanitarian funding in 2024.
