RECOMMENDATION REGARDING THE EU ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL

Partnerships Advisory Committee, RU

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Summary
The RU Partnerships Advisory Committee recommends that the Executive Board advocate for suspending the EU Association Agreement with Israel due to Israel's violation of treaty obligations in connection with the ongoing serious human rights violations in Gaza and the other Palestinian territories.

1. Background

The Radboud University Partnerships Advisory Committee (hereafter: Advisory Committee) issued a recommendation on 2 April 2025 to suspend Radboud University's partnerships with two Israeli universities (Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem) (internet link to the recommendation). This initially concerned the university-wide partnerships (MoUs) with the two Israeli universities. But the advice was also to suspend institution-wide bilateral collaborations, such as those between a research group at the RU and a group at one of the two universities.

The Advisory Committee also considered multilateral partnerships in consortia, such as partnerships between partners in multiple countries under Horizon Europe (European Union). Israeli universities also participate in these collaborations under the State of Israel's Association Agreement with the EU. The Advisory Committee stated that terminating RU participation in such a consortium could lead to a breach of contract and other significant financial and ethical consequences. In addition, the unilateral termination of such cooperation could seriously damage RU's reputation as a reliable partner. Participation in ongoing projects should therefore not be suspended for the time being, according to the recommendation.

The Executive Board of Radboud University adopted the recommendations in full and suspended university-wide cooperation with the two Israeli universities (LINK).

On 14 May 2025, Belgium's 10 universities asked the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs to urge the European Council to move for an immediate suspension of the Association Agreement with Israel. In line with the European Union's core values (respect for human rights, rule of law, and democracy) in Article 2 of the European Union Treaty, this Association Agreement stipulates that Israel and the European Union must respect fundamental human rights. The concrete consortium agreements also contain a reference to human rights and respect for the fundamental values on which the European Union is founded.

Against this background, the Belgian universities have called for "an immediate suspension of the Association Agreement with Israel. Continuation of the Association Agreement is perceived as legitimising a government that is guilty of far-reaching human rights violations and even prevents humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people. This is in no way reconcilable with basic European values."

On 28 July 2025, in view of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and human rights violations in Gaza, the European Commission proposed to the Council of Ministers of the European Union to partially suspend Israel's participation in the Horizon Europe research programme. The European Commission pointed out that a review by the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy had found that Israel was in breach of Article 2 of the Association Agreement which obliges Israel to respect human rights. The Council of Ministers of the European Union did not to date reach a decision on this matter.

On 11 September this year, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) Board issued a statement, stating that the Board was "deeply concerned about the inhumane conditions and violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza. The tens of thousands of civilian deaths, the Israeli-created and acute famine and disease, the blockades of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the systematic destruction of hospitals, water and sewage infrastructure, universities and schools (scholasticide) in Gaza testify to catastrophic human suffering."

2. Recommendation

The Advisory Committee notes the strong calls from the international academic community, as well as from the European Commission, for the suspension of the Association Agreement with Israel and the suspension of Israeli research institutions' participation in large-scale research consortia. This in view of the serious and systematic human rights violations by the Israeli authorities.

The Advisory Committee notes that the Radboud University research institutes currently participating in the research programmes, in which Israeli institutions participate under the said Association Agreement, are in a situation where core values for research cooperation, such as respect for human rights, are not observed by the treaty partner.

Israel's breach of treaty obligations thus erodes the basis for cooperation in the relevant research programmes. This violation leads to a situation in which research programmes are maintained in violation of treaty obligations. Radboud University's research institutes are thus placed in an impossible position, especially as unilateral withdrawal from ongoing research programmes is not a real option (see above).

Against this background, the Advisory Committee advises the Executive Board to follow the example of the Belgian universities and the Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and advocate, for the purpose of supporting the Radboud University research institutes in question, for suspension of the Association Agreement due to Israel's violation of treaty obligations in connection with the ongoing serious human rights violations in Gaza and the other Palestinian territories. The Advisory Committee recommends that the Executive Board explicitly endorse the initiative of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), approach the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, and urge for the suspension of research cooperation with Israel under the Association Agreement.