



***Association of World Council related
Development Organization in Europe***

Brussels, 16 October 2003

Mr. Pim van Ballekom
European Commission

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Aprodev Middle East working group, I would like to thank you and Mr. Kristian Vangriecken for having met us on 16/09/03 on the occasion of an Aprodev round of meetings with the Commission and the Council.

One major concern, as development agencies, is that the EU conduct its external relations in the Mediterranean region in a manner consistent with its obligations under European and international law, with its commitments to support sustainable development, human rights and the rule of law in third countries and with the common legal engagements of the Member States.

Given that illegal Israeli policies continue to pose a major obstacle to our development work in the region, it has been extremely useful for us to be briefed on the Commission's efforts to bring an end to Israel's misapplication of key provisions of the EC-Israel Association Agreement. Indeed, we are following with great interest and concern the positions taken by the Council and the efforts of the European Commission and the Member States in this regard.

From our discussion, we have taken note of a few major issues.

With regard to the issue surrounding Israel's misapplication of the rules of origin, an important step forward has been made by the Commission's Notice to importers of 23/11/01 which prompted the Member States to collect duties on some settlement products. However, in recent court cases in EU Member States, importers have asked to review the customs' decision to refuse preferences. It appears that more needs to be done to eliminate the persisting deficiencies in the implementation of the agreement. It is not evident to us that relying on the verification procedure as currently implemented by the Member States can achieve this objective.

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In light of the above, we greatly appreciate your commitment to discuss these issues within the cabinet of Mr. Bolkestein and the legal service of the European Commission, as well as your assurance that respect for rules, existing agreements and peremptory norms of international law will be the condition for any further expansion of EU-Israel relations.

The Aprodev agencies will seek to keep abreast of the progress made and problems encountered as the issues surrounding the application of the origin rules' protocol and the territorial clause of the Association Agreement are clarified and properly resolved. The Aprodev Agencies will inform their respective Foreign Ministers of the information received during this round of meetings.

We wish to express again our appreciation for the clarity and opportunity for helpful discussion which you kindly provided.

Yours faithfully,

Giovanna Lelli

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