

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 20 December 2023
(OR. en)

17025/23

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

**CIVCOM 310
COPS 601
CFSP/PESC 1721
CSDP/PSDC 847
RELEX 1512
JAI 1708
MAMA 187
EUBAM RAFAH 14**

COVER NOTE

From: European External Action Service (EEAS)
To: Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM)
Subject: EUBAM Rafah Six-Monthly Report 2/2023, 1 June 2023 to 30
November 2023

Delegations will find attached document EEAS(2023) 1456.[...]

Encl.: EEAS(2023) 1456

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EEAS(2023)1456

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EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



CPCC

Working document of the European External Action Service

of 20/12/2023

EEAS Reference	EEAS(2023)1456
Classification	RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED
To	CIVCOM
Title/Subject	EUBAM Rafah Six-Monthly Report 2/2023, 1 June 2023 to 30 November 2023
[Ref. prev. doc.]	N/A

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**CIVILIAN OPERATIONS COMMANDER'S OBSERVATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE EUBAM RAFAH SIX-MONTHLY REPORT
FROM 1 JUNE 2023 TO 30 NOVEMBER 2023**

1. Introduction

- 1) The Political and Security Committee receives the Six-Monthly Report from the Civilian Operations Commander (CivOpsCdr) and the Head of Mission (HoM) of EUBAM Rafah. I would like to express my thankfulness to the former Head of Mission, Florin Bulgariu, for his tireless efforts in supporting the General Administration for Borders and Crossings (GABC) and welcome the new Head of Mission, Nataliya Apostolova, who took over with tremendous experience in the region and at a very challenging time as of 1 November.
- 2) Recognising the Mission's achievements during the last six months and based on the EUBAM Rafah Six-Monthly Report submitted by the HoM for the period from 1 June to 30 November 2023, I hereby submit the following observations and recommendations.

2. Observations

- 3) The political and security environment in which EUBAM Rafah operates deteriorated significantly during this reporting period, with the Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel on 7 October, Israel's counter-offensive in the Gaza Strip, and the related situation in the West Bank. Restrictions of movement have placed limitations on both the Mission and its main counterpart, the Palestinian Authority's GABC in Jericho.

- 4) On my instruction, EUBAM Rafah has temporarily relocated non-essential staff, on a voluntarily basis, from the Mission area to continue contributing to the mandate implementation remotely. A gradual return of all international staff to the Mission area will start on 1 January 2024, similarly based on careful security assessment and operational needs. The Mission's local staff was evacuated from Gaza to Egypt on 19 November.
- 5) The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip caused by the armed conflict has increased interest from media and international stakeholders in the EUBAM Rafah mandate and its possible role in supporting cross-border humanitarian aid. Responses have been coordinated closely between the Mission, CPCC and the EEAS Strategic Communications Division.
- 6) During the reporting period, the Head of Mission maintained excellent cooperation with the host authorities, as exemplified with the signed update of the Joint Road Map (JRM) with the GABC and the PA Preparedness Project, covering common goals within the Mission current mandate.
- 7) The Head of Mission liaised with international actors in Gaza, with representatives of Egypt in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, with the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC) and the EU family on the ground to leverage mandate implementation and common objectives.
- 8) The Mission's support in providing expertise to the Trade Facilitation Project led by the Office of the EU Representative (EUREP) that seeks to enhance Palestinian trade with Jordan remains of high importance, although implementation is currently stifled due to the security situation. The technical upgrade with surveillance cameras at Al Karameh Terminal further demonstrates Mission achievement in support to strengthening of the GABC Command and Control Centre.

- 9) In the reporting period, the Mission finalised restoration of the GABC Training Centre, which is used as general hub for capacity building activities. The Mission also supported GABC capacity building efforts on border management, notably by facilitating a leadership development course for senior officials in cooperation with the Riga Technical University in Latvia. This course was followed up by visits to the Headquarters of the Latvian Customs and Border Guard Services for practical insights.
- 10) In September, an EUBAM Rafah delegation visited the Mission compound at the Rafah Crossing Point (RCP) in the Gaza Strip, noting damages to the structure of the compound and stolen technical equipment.
- 11) Due to the security situation following 7 October, a number of training activities were either cancelled or delayed. Cases in point are the Second Euro-Arab Border Security Conference (in cooperation with Frontex, the Mission had planned to support participation of the GABC Head of the International Relation Department), a training on Gender Responsive Border Management, and training in the area of protection of cultural heritage in cooperation with MIADIT (Italian Carabinieri). The Mission is however exploring opportunity for implementation in the next reporting period.
- 12) I would like to thank the Head of Mission and the Mission's staff for having delivered against the mandate throughout the reporting period, despite the deteriorating security situation. I would also like to thank the Member States for their continued support to the Mission.

3. Recommendations

- 13) In challenging times, the Mission and the PA / GABC, as a legitimate and internationally recognised authority, have proven their capacity for proficient and sustainable cooperation. Therefore, I welcome and support the Mission's way ahead as outlined in the report including implementation of the updated and jointly signed Joint Road Map for further strengthening of the PA / GABC's border management capacity.

- 14) The EU has expressed its support to the two-state solution and in this context EUBAM Rafah supports the PA / GABC in its efforts to become a proficient, beneficial and independent border management authority. Therefore, it is also important to continue supporting the EUREP Trade Facilitation Project with border and customs expertise as well as to review the elaborated Joint Redeployment Plan, taking into consideration developments on the ground.
- 15) The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip requires further international support through existing (border) crossing points or secured routes for the influx of humanitarian aid. It is therefore important that EUBAM Rafah supports the PA / GABC and international partners with its border management expertise. Due to EUBAM Rafah's limited authorised strength in its current stand-by mode, use of the "Exchange of International Staff Mechanism" or Specialised Teams should be taken in consideration.
- 16) Effective and efficient border management requires cooperation at both national and international level. EUBAM Rafah has extensive and long-standing experience in both areas and – in cooperation with Frontex and MIADIT as well as other partners on the ground – will continue to liaise and connect relevant actors to promote PA / GABC integrated border management capabilities and further confidence building.
- 17) EUBAM Rafah will continue to support the PA / GABC's Command and Control Centre in Jericho for its full operability as operations centre, including initial and cross-agency operational analysis of identified cross-border crime. The Mission will seek to deliver training courses on bio-metric passports and related strategic and operational training efforts.
- 18) Public relations work is important to demonstrate EU / Mission values and the Mission mandate in support of the PA / GABC and international partners, and therefore to be considered to be integrated in capacity building efforts of the PA / GABC.

1. Executive Summary

The reporting period was marked by a tense political and security situation in the region that escalated on 7 October with the Hamas terror attack on Israel, resulting in a direct and ongoing open armed conflict between Hamas and Israel. The humanitarian crisis caused new attention on EUBAM Rafah and its possible (future) role in the Gaza Strip.

In its stand-by mode in the West Bank, the Mission continued with the implementation of the long-term Palestinian Authority (PA) Preparedness Project, which EUBAM Rafah realises with the PA General Administration for Borders and Crossings (GABC) since 2014. The Mission also maintained its readiness to redeploy, jointly with the PA GABC, to the Rafah Crossing Point (RCP) once political and security conditions allow and Member States (MS) and parties on the ground agree. Despite facing challenges in executing its planned activities for the benefit of its counterpart GABC after 7 October, the Mission maintained regular contact with its partners, continuing to advise them and to adapt planned activities to the situation on the ground.

One Mission activity to be highlighted is the technical support for an important trade facilitation project of the Office of the EU Representative (EUREP) to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which aims to enhance Palestinian trade with Jordan. In the previous reporting period, EUBAM Rafah began its project involvement with support of EUBAM Libya via an Exchange of International Staff, due to the limited resources of the Mission. EUBAM Rafah consistently provided technical support and assumed a key coordination role.

The Mission organised and conducted training courses in the field of leadership for GABC top managers and donated technical equipment for the GABC Command and Control Centre to continue enhancing its operational capabilities. In general, EUBAM Rafah has once more proven its role as catalyst, working closely together with different stakeholders in the field of integrated border management, including Frontex, CEPOL, MIADIT (Italian Carabinieri), the Riga Technical University in Latvia and EUBAM Libya. The Mission also strengthened its cooperation with EUPOL COPPS to define further synergies for the benefit of the Missions' counterparts in line with the EU Integrated Approach.

2. Mandate Implementation – PA Preparedness Project

2.1 LINE OF OPERATION 1: Support the development of an efficient and accountable Palestinian Authority General Administration for Border and Crossings (GABC)

During the reporting period, the Mission continued to implement activities and projects aiming at enhancing the capacities of the GABC in the context of the PA Preparedness Project. However, it is noteworthy that two out of four positions within the Mission’s Operations Section remained (partly) vacant and that the general limited resources of the Mission in stand-by mode affect the range of possibilities for implementing activities.

In order to support the development of an efficient and accountable GABC and to enhance the GABC governance and management functions (Line of Operation 1), the Mission signed a Joint Road Map with the GABC for the current mandate from July 2023 until May 2024, ensuring a robust commitment and a common strategic approach.

The Mission finalised the restoration of the GABC Training Centre. The Training Centre, whose establishment and refurbishment the Mission has funded since 2016, is designed to facilitate the Mission in training its counterparts within a suitable environment. Moreover, the centre is a functional hub for all activities hosted by GABC involving other EU and international stakeholders. The GABC Training Centre has been operational since 2017. Through ongoing use of the facilities, the Mission intervened to repair damages and imperfections while also supplying additional equipment. This approach not only maintained the centre in good condition but also enhanced its overall operability.

In line with the goal to enhance the awareness of GABC personnel on respect for human rights standards and gender issues, the Mission organised and facilitated a Frontex training on ‘Gender Responsive Border Management’, specifically shaped for GABC officers. Since it could not be concluded in the reporting period as originally planned due to the situation on the ground, it shall be implemented in Germany in the upcoming reporting period.

2.2 LINE OF OPERATION 2: Enhance PA GABC knowledge and professional capacities for a return to and management of the RCP in line with international standards

The volatile political and security environment along with the EU non-contact policy with Hamas, did not allow the Mission to redeploy to the Rafah Crossing Point (RCP) and to implement the mandate as ‘Third Party’ observer at the RCP.

However, in line with the aim to liaise with relevant partners in Gaza and uphold the Mission’s activities there, EUBAM Rafah’s Head of Mission (HoM) continued to meet with key stakeholders. In this regard, HoM held periodical meetings with representatives of Egypt in Israel and Palestine respectively, as well as with representatives of the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). Given the current situation in the Gaza Strip, HoM maintained close contact with the EU Delegation in Egypt, the US Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC), and other international actors on the ground to discuss the state-of-play and coordinate activities.

The Mission conducted one visit to the Gaza Strip in September 2023, aiming to meet with EUBAM Rafah local staff, to visit the new premises of its Office in Gaza City and to pay a visit to the EUBAM Rafah compound at the RCP. While the visit to the office in Gaza City intended to maintain close contact to Mission local staff and to elaborate on its activities with regards to the RCP, the visit to the Mission’s compound at the RCP was helpful to provide first-hand information about the current situation and condition of the place.

The visiting EUBAM Mission delegation noticed that containers were still in the compound, but any possible valuable items had been taken by unknown. Some constructions or structures were heavily damaged as a result of explosions that had taken place outside the compound during the different conflicts affecting the Gaza Strip. No other technical equipment or machinery was found within the compound perimeter as per previous visits. The condition of the EUBAM Rafah compound at the RCP and the Office in Gaza City since the outbreak of the current armed conflict could not yet be confirmed.

However, the Mission has received a request by the UN for temporary use of the EUBAM Rafah compound as a logistic centre and accommodation for rotating UN staff after refurbishment, which tentatively has been agreed neglecting any responsibility of the condition of the facility.

The Mission continued to monitor the number of openings and passenger crossing at RCP throughout the reporting period by gathering information from national and international actors. Despite the evacuation of the local staff from the Gaza Strip in November 2023, the Mission was able to collect and report figures connected to the RCP.

While remaining in stand-by mode and operating outside the Gaza Strip, overall moderate progress was made during the reporting period in the goal to strengthen PA GABC capacities on border management. In this respect, additional advancements were achieved in developing the GABC Command and Control Centre to a fully operational and viable centre with the donation of further technical equipment. In close cooperation with a Palestinian High-Tech Company, 22 state-of-the-art CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) cameras were installed at the Al Karameh Terminal in Jericho to enhance the capabilities of Palestinian border agencies, including Border Police, Customs, Customs Police and Intelligence Services, in combating smuggling and providing additional safety and security for GABC staff working at the border as well as passengers.

The Mission supported the enhancement of PA GABC capacities on border management by facilitating a leadership development course for seven GABC senior officials (all male)¹, in cooperation with the Riga Technical University in Latvia. The training took place in Riga in June and addressed important topics regarding leadership and management skills as well as communication, business negotiation and conflict management. The Palestinian delegation had the possibility to visit the Latvian State Border Guard and Customs Administration and gained practical experience and insights into leadership approaches on the ground.

¹ The participation of female staff was not possible, as women in leadership positions at GABC and the PA, in general, continue to be underrepresented. The involvement of a female participant was initially scheduled but had to be cancelled at short notice.

The visit to the Latvian Customs Administration Headquarters and the Latvian State Border Guard Headquarters provided an opportunity to gain insights into customs laboratories and to discuss risk management in the context of border management, including EU common risk criteria.

Furthermore, the possibility to reach long-term cooperation with the two Latvian administrations was explored and will be followed up by the parties involved in line with the Mission's goal to enhance GABC capacity to cooperate with international stakeholders.

The activities outlined above supported the PA counterpart in achieving two of the key objectives of their Integrated Border Management Strategy and its training component: Firstly, the knowledge and awareness gained during the visit contributed to enhancing the institutional capabilities of border management-related agencies to fulfil their functions in a coordinated and accountable manner (intra-service and inter-agency cooperation). The more attuned GABC are, the more they incorporate best practices into their everyday work. Secondly, the activities aided fostering robust, long-lasting links and synergies between GABC and the Latvian institutions. This process was already initiated by the Mission under the umbrella of the 'TAIEX² Expert Mission on Training Strategy and Plan' that was initiated during the previous reporting period, with Latvian experts playing a leading and defining role.

One specific focus of EUBAM Rafah during the reporting period remained its support to the EUREP trade facilitation project that strives to establish a logistics centre/container terminal/bonded warehouse in Jericho. After EUBAM Rafah started its involvement in the project in 2022, significant progress was made in the last months. Due to the limited resources of the Mission, EUBAM Rafah successfully continued to collaborate with EUBAM Libya by applying the Exchange of International Staff, deploying two custom experts from EUBAM Libya for the project. The second deployment of the two customs experts, in June, aimed to provide a preliminary analysis for EUREP and implementing Palestinian and international partners for an intended Feasibility Study.

² TAIEX is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission.

The focus of the activity was the evaluation of previous recommendations and assumptions, the definition of a project vision and governance models for the public stakeholders, and the creation of a roadmap for the Feasibility Study's drafting and approval. All the objectives were met and included in the Final Report, which was shared with EUREP and the PA counterparts. Following this activity, the Mission provided additional technical coordination.

Steps included a preliminary market analysis, the identification of additional skills needed and the drafting of Terms of Conditions, as well as the identification of a first template for the Feasibility Study. Overall, the project, coordinated by EUREP, will be the next important step in the objective to enhance Palestinian trade with Jordan and therefore, to contribute to the development of the economy and tax revenue in the Palestinian Territories. Due to the ongoing conflict, the original schedule for the follow-up phases, including the implementation of the Feasibility Study, needed to be postponed due to other priorities of all parties involved and a new timeline will be defined in coordination with EUREP.

In line with the aim to continue the Mission's role as catalyst, leveraging other EU instruments in support of PA border management, EUBAM Rafah facilitated the intended participation of GABC Head of International Relations department in the 'Second Euro-Arab Border Security Conference'. This achievement was made possible due to the Mission's continuous advisory role in supporting cooperation between GABC and Frontex. The conference was co-organised by the Arab Interior Ministers' Council and the participation of a GABC representative, alongside the representatives of the PA Ministry of Interior (MoI), is assessed as an additional value for the PA institutions. It should increase GABC's visibility among the international actors and improve its options of cooperation at international level. Due to unprecedented geopolitical developments putting a strain on border security across the region and recent political development in Portugal, the conference was postponed, however, and a new date is still to be confirmed.

The Mission could not start intended activities to enable GABC to develop and implement new processes and procedures related to the introduction of Palestinian biometric passports, since the PA MoI has not issued a critical number of 800,000 to 1 million biometric passports yet (approximately 25 percent of the population in the West Bank).

EUBAM Rafah has monitored developments during the reporting period and stands ready to initiate supportive activities for biometric passport processing and to advise GABC further as soon as a critical quantity is attained. The project will further contribute to security and safety at borders.

3. Political and Security Context

During the reporting period, the security situation remained volatile in the Mission's Area of Operation, with increasing tensions in the West Bank and several terror attacks in Tel Aviv.

The Hamas attack against Israel on 7 October triggered an armed conflict between Hamas and Israel and along Israel's northern border with Lebanon's Hezbollah. On 27 October, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) started a ground operation in the Gaza Strip in order to fight Hamas and to free more than 240 hostages Hamas took on 7 October. Over 1,000,000 people were forced to flee to the southern part of the Gaza Strip. The armed conflict caused thousands of fatalities on both sides and led to a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. It also greatly affected the West Bank, where frequent confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli Security Forces (ISF) and settlers occurred with a high number of casualties. The tensions also affected the PA itself, which may come under further pressure should Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip intensify, exacerbating its legitimacy crisis.

Jericho, where the main counterpart of EUBAM Rafah is located, has seen an increased number of ISF operations throughout the reporting period, including hasty checkpoints around Jericho City. The evolving security situation in the West Bank constrained the freedom of movement for GABC and the Mission, necessitating adjustments to activities in accordance with the security conditions and limited operations of GABC after 7 October. The surrounding of the Mission HQ in Ramat Gan/Tel Aviv was impacted with several anti-government protest, and during the conflict with Hamas there were frequent rocket alerts. However, the Mission was able to hibernate the office in Tel Aviv and continue the mandate implementation from the vicinity of EUPOL COPPS (Jerusalem and Ramallah) after temporary relocation, or from outside the Mission area. Relocated staff will return to the Area of Operations and Tel Aviv successively.

Meanwhile, discussions among the international community about the ‘day after’ and the return of the PA as the solely legitimate and internationally recognised authority to Gaza have started. This discussion includes the EUBAM Rafah Mission as such as well as in consideration of its dedicated ‘Third Party’ observer role at the RCP.

4. Integrated Approach

EUBAM Rafah worked to enhance the Integrated Approach throughout the reporting period by maintaining close cooperation with other EU actors such as EUREP, the EU Delegation to Israel (EUDEL), and the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process (EUSR MEPP), which becomes increasingly relevant in the light of the situation at the RCP.

The most relevant integrated operational involvement remained the Mission’s active participation in EUREP’s project on trade facilitation. EUBAM Rafah continued to provide a specialised expertise in the field of customs procedures, also by applying the Exchange of International Staff mechanism with EUBAM Libya. As such, the Mission has proven its ability to function as a catalyst, enabling results in many projects and activities outside their direct support and leveraging other EU instruments to support the capacity development of PA border management.

EUBAM Rafah continued to strengthen its cooperation with Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) institutions, especially with Frontex, as outlined in the chapter ‘Mandate Implementation’. Besides, the Mission has been analysing opportunities that could arise from joining the EU-funded EUROMED Police project and will continue to liaise with CEPOL, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training, in the upcoming reporting period.

EUBAM Rafah continued to liaise with TAIEX experts regarding a TAIEX project on training strategy as well as with the Italian Training Mission in Palestine (MIADIT) for further activities in the field of Cultural Heritage Protection. Besides, the Mission started to liaise with UNDP regarding the growing support of UNDP for GABC and common efforts in the field of media for the benefit of GABC.

EUBAM Rafah continued to strengthen its cooperation with EUPOL COPPS. Both Missions started to explore possible means of synergies in the benefit of their counterparts, including for example, training support, on a more structural and a joined-up approach. Given the stand-by mode and limited resources, the Missions also continued to collaborate internally, including in the fields of Political Advice, Press and Public Information Officer (PPIO) and Procurement.

5. Visibility and Public Communication

In the reporting period, EUBAM Rafah published several articles and press releases in English and Arabic on its website outlining the Mission's activities and achievements. Publishing the articles in Arabic was crucial in order to reach the Palestinian population and to inform about the work and efforts of the Mission.

Additionally, the Mission ordered visibility products with the new Mission logo and worked on updating its online presence, including the website. Meanwhile, EUBAM Rafah got in touch with EEAS regarding the migration of the Mission's website to the EEAS domain in the next reporting period. This step will further professionalise the Mission's online presence. Moreover, the website will be more secure under the umbrella and support of the EEAS.

New attention of the media and EU Member States was brought to the Mission in the wake of the Hamas attack against Israel on 7 October. EUBAM Rafah received numerous requests from representatives of EU MS and media outlets regarding its role and possibilities at the RCP and the (humanitarian) crisis in the Gaza Strip. Several articles that included information about EUBAM Rafah, its mandate and conditions for a redeployment to the RCP were published by different media outlets. Furthermore, HoM had the opportunity to present the Mission to representatives of the EU MS in Brussels, including at the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPRC) Roundtable³ on the current situation in the Middle East.

³ A flexible crisis mechanism for supporting the presidency of the Council of the European Union in dealing with major natural or man-made cross-sectorial disasters, as well as acts of terrorism.

The presentation was well received by the audience. Besides, HoM participated in the EU HoMs' meetings organised by EUREP on a bi-weekly basis, which also contributed to the Mission's visibility in the Area of Operations.

Considering the Mission's stand-by mode and the resulting limited resources in terms of budget and personnel, the Mission's visibility activities generally remained on a rather low level, also considering that the Mission does not have a PPIO or Communications Team in line with the OPLAN. PPIO EUPOL COPPS continued to support EUBAM Rafah as defined in the OPLAN and MoU between the Missions. However, the support can only be limited and not to the extent needed due to their own capacities. Therefore, EUBAM Rafah staff performed PPIO and visibility related tasks.

6. Lessons Identified

Due to the limited financial and human resources, EUBAM Rafah's good relations with other implementing partners in the field of integrated border management remained essential. The Mission once again learned that Crisis Management tools available in the CPCC framework are very helpful instruments to fulfil the Mission's respective mandate goals. Those mechanisms also help CSDP Missions to apply and foster the spirit of the EU Integrated Approach. The choice of the right tools was crucial for success and an effective and efficient implementation.

However, a challenge encountered during the implementation of the Exchange of International Staff with EUBAM Libya, was the retrospective change in guidelines and regulations for this tool, impacting the Mission's budget. This once more stressed the importance of an anticipatory planning and budgeting and a good communication between HQs in Brussels and the Mission(s).

The limited resources of the Mission as per the EU MS decision and OPLAN continued to impede the implementation of activities. Essential seconded positions in the Operations Section remained vacant. Therefore, the support of EU MS, as per the Civilian CSDP Compact, remains vital for the Mission.

EUBAM Rafah also encountered challenges in implementing planned activities due to the volatile situation and the political environment in the Area of Operations, which impacted the availability of the Mission's counterparts, as outlined above.

In this regard, it is crucial for all parties involved (Mission, Brussel HQs, counterparts, implementing partners) to remain flexible and adapt activities to the circumstances on the ground.

Regarding the agreed support and cooperation with EUPOL COPPS in the fields of Missions security, political advice, procurement, legal, and press and public information, EUBAM Rafah learned how crucial a clear definition of the cooperation is and signed conclusively a new MoU with EUPOL COPPS. Further clarifications for the scope of the cooperation will be made.

7. Planning for the Next Six Months

Depending on the development of the situation, the Mission will work on updating the 'Preparedness Project Plan', including the Joint Redeployment Plan with GABC. The plan is a roadmap of the steps to undertake for an effective redeployment at the RCP, drafted on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the circumstances on the ground.

Despite the current sensitive and challenging context in the Area of Operations, the Mission is committed to implementing all planned activities for the coming months. However, EUBAM Rafah will need to adjust to the current environment, considering PA priorities and movement restrictions.

Among the planned activities, EUBAM Rafah will continue to facilitate the implementation of the TAIEX project on a training strategy for GABC, which started in the previous reporting period. The project will include a study visit to an EU MS as well as a technical assistance which will focus on training planning and delivery methods. Due to the current crisis mode, the implementation period could not be clearly defined yet.

The Mission will work on the delivery of training courses on biometric passports and on drugs and fake medicines detection techniques, thus improving GABC capacities in conducting effective checks and enhancing safety while managing the border.

The implementation of a specific project aimed at boosting GABC Media Section's capacities will be a priority of the Mission for the upcoming months, to reach a more effective level of communication with media and public and might be even more important due to PA's / GABC lack of reputation. Following an agreement between GABC and UNDP, intended to enhance GABC services at Al Karamah Terminal, EUBAM Rafah will be invited to participate in the specialised working groups to be formed in order to facilitate the implementation of the project.

All these activities depend on developments on the ground and the Mission maintains its readiness to redeploy to the RCP once conditions allow and MS so decide.

8. Comments by the Head of Mission

The reporting period experienced both important achievements and challenges and obviously, the situation since 7 October has been affecting EUBAM Rafah's mandate implementation.

The Mission's previous mandate was successfully closed in June, with a budget consumption of 95 percent. In July, the mandate of the Mission was extended for another year, and EUBAM Rafah drafted a new Joint Road Map with GABC, leading the way for our future joint activities.

Two main achievements in the reporting period were the donation of technical equipment for the Command and Control Centre of GABC and the continuous technical support of the trade facilitation project of EUREP. The continuation of the Exchange of International Staff with EUBAM Libya emphasised once again the significance of the EU Integrated Approach to enable flexible responses to the needs and requests of our counterparts.

In line with the Civilian Compact, EUBAM Rafah continued to promote the EU Integrated Approach and the cooperation with Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) actors. Moreover, the Mission further built upon synergies with our sister Mission EUPOL COPPS for the benefit of our counterparts.

But following the situation on the ground with great concern, I need to point out some challenges for the Mission. The security and political situation changed dramatically on 7 October and Mission Members experienced the conflict first-hand. Due to daily rocket attacks from Hamas on Tel Aviv, our staff had to seek shelter regularly. Our primary concern was for our local colleague in Gaza, who was finally evacuated on 19 November after significant efforts by the EU family.

After the temporarily relocation to Jerusalem due to the security situation, some Mission staff have been working in Jerusalem or at EUPOL COPPS HQ in Ramallah, and other staff have been teleworking from abroad; relocation back to the mission area is currently under consideration. This posed additional administrative and organisational challenges, particularly concerning the Mission's budget.

In the current stand-by mode, the Mission operates with a maximum staff of ten international and eight local Mission Members, lacking positions that other CSDP missions have. Therefore, all members are putting in extra effort to handle the crisis. In our Operational Section, two out of four positions have remained vacant, one for more than a year. Additionally, only one out of seven international Mission Members is currently seconded, and we received no applications for the two available seconded-only positions in our latest Call for Contributions. We depend on EU Member States' support for seconded personnel in accordance with the Civilian CSDP Compact commitments.

I just joined the Mission in November, and I am fortunate to bring prior experience as HoM in EUPOL COPPS that has acquainted me with the area and established crucial connections, which I aim to leverage for our mutual benefit.

In these times, I continued to liaise with representatives of EU Member States, local authorities, the PA MoI, USSC, and other actors on the ground to stay informed, to explain our mandate and to discuss possibilities of engagement for now and the ‘day after’. Although there are many discussions ongoing, also including the role of EU and EUBAM Rafah, it is too early at this stage to make a concrete assessment. However, the Mission has started to assess potential engagement strategies for the period following the current one.

The current situation has also placed the Mission in the spotlight, drawing increased attention from the media and EU Member States representatives considering the current importance of the Rafah Crossing Point. Therefore, I would like to stress that EUBAM Rafah, in line with its mandate, maintains readiness for a return to the RCP, to provide a ‘Third Party’ presence there as soon as political and security conditions allow, subject to the decision by the EU Member States and the agreement of the parties on the ground. I can ensure that the Mission continues to fully support our local counterparts despite the challenging circumstances and that our local counterparts appreciated the EU engagement. I hope that the situation on the ground will de-escalate and I plead with the Member States to support EUBAM Rafah by all means possible because it is in these times that the EU presence and involvement is needed and felt by the people in need.

Approved by
Head of Mission
Nataliya Apostolova

ANNEX I – Benchmarking: PA Preparedness Project

European Union Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah)		
Tasks as per OPLAN	<i>For each task describe in few words (max. 250) progress achieved since last SMR/ obstacles and the reasons for this blockage / suggestions</i>	Status of task delivery
LINE OF OPERATION 1: Support the development of an efficient and accountable Palestinian Authority General Administration for Border and Crossings (GABC)		
DECISIVE POINT 1.1: Strengthen the PA GABC governance		
DESIRED OUTCOME 1.1.1: Governance and management functions are strengthened		
Task 1.1.1.1 Enhance GABC governance and management functions (i.e. communication, leadership, training strategy and other strategic documents).	<p>The Joint Road Map (JRM) was signed by HoM and GABC DG. This ensured solid commitment and a common strategical approach. The JRM includes a list of activities to be implemented during the current mandate (see benchmarking table).</p> <p>The Joint Working Group responsible for the implementation of the tasks, under the umbrella of the Joint Road Map, will be soon involved in the review and update of the GABC Business Strategy in cooperation with UNDP, that assists GABC in a comprehensive project. Preliminary coordination with GABC is ongoing.</p> <p>With the support of the Riga Technical University, EUBAM Rafah organised a leadership development course with the participation of seven GABC top managers. Important topics such as leadership, managerial skills, communication, and conflict management were addressed.</p> <p>The Mission has been facilitating the participation of GABC in a TAIEX project on Training Strategy. Coordination is ongoing with some EU institutions which offered to host a study visit where GABC could have first-hand experience on how to implement an</p>	Moderate progress

	<p>effective strategy. The Study visit was planned for October-November 2023 but postponed due to the conflict.</p> <p>The Mission also finalised the restoration of the GABC Training Centre (TC), built in 2017 with Mission funds. The GABC TC is regularly used for Mission and GABC trainings and is a functional hub for all the activities involving other EU and international stakeholders hosted by GABC. Due to the continuous use of the facilities, the Mission intervention restored damages and provided further equipment, to keep the TC in good conditions and to improve its operability.</p>	
<p>Task 1.1.1.2 Support in enhancing anti-corruption concepts within GABC and Border Agencies</p>	<p>Cooperation with the Palestinian Anticorruption Commission (PACC) facilitated a Memorandum of Understanding between GABC and PACC, defining a more structural cooperation between GABC and the PACC.</p> <p>Following the meeting with EUPOL COPPS OPS section, further enhancement in the cooperation with PACC is planned.</p> <p>As soon as the Operation Section of EUBAM Rafah is fully staffed again, the Mission will be able to focus more on this task with the available resources.</p>	<p>Limited progress</p>
<p>Task 1.1.1.3 Enhance the awareness of GABC personnel on respect for human rights standards and gender issues ensuring mainstreaming in GABC policies and trainings</p>	<p>The Mission continued the gender mainstreaming project aiming at enhancing the capabilities of a selected group of GABC female officers aspiring on high level management positions within their organisation. To follow up the activities implemented in the past mandates, the Mission is currently establishing contacts with possible partners (FRONTEX and NSI - Negotiation Strategies Institute, cooperating with Harvard University).</p> <p>Together with FRONTEX, a ‘Gender responsive border management’ training course has been planned for GABC. It will be dedicated exclusively to GABC staff and should be implemented in the coming months in an EU MS (also depending on the political/security situation). The objective of the training course is to sensitise the participants about the different roles and expectations about women and men, and how the dynamics behind influence their respective security needs - in particular when interacting with people crossing borders. The international legal framework related to the WPS Agenda will be</p>	<p>Moderate progress</p>

	<p>introduced as well as aspects of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The participants will develop ways how integrating a gender perspective will make their operational work more effective and efficient, as the training aims to explain and illustrate why a gender perspective improves effectiveness through increased awareness of security risks, and enhanced ability to detect and address cross-border crime such as trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants.</p>	
<p>Task 1.1.1.4 Enhance GABC capacity to cooperate with the EU, Member States and other international stakeholders on how to obtain technical support</p>	<p>EUBAM supports GABC in creating long term cooperation partnerships with relevant stakeholders that are able to provide capacity building to the Palestinian border authority. The JHA agencies' network is a priority.</p> <p>EUBAM Rafah, together with its local counterparts, has been analysing and exploring the opportunities that could arise from joining the EU-funded EUROMED Police project (implemented by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training - CEPOL, in partnership with Europol). It aims at enhancing the capacity to fight serious and organised crime and to strengthen strategic cooperation between national law enforcement authorities, as well as with EU Member States and EU JHA agencies. In this context, CEPOL's assessment of partners' training needs together with the quality and quantity of its training portfolio could contribute to expand GABC staff knowledge, skills and competence in the areas covered by the project.</p> <p>The Mission is also working on the preparation of a comprehensive and effective presentation meant to enhance GABC capacity in presenting its structure, mandate and needs to the EU and international community.</p>	<p>Moderate progress</p>

LINE OF OPERATION 2:		
Enhance PA GABC knowledge and professional capacities for a return to and management of the RCP in line with international standards		
DECISIVE POINT 2.1: Enhance PA GABC capacities to return to and to manage the RCP		
DESIRED OUTCOME 2.1.1 Joint EUBAM Rafah-PA Redeployment Plan is updated as appropriate		
<p>Task 2.1.1.1 Assistance in updating the Joint PA - EUBAM Rafah Redeployment Plan when the prospects for redeployment increase or developments in the political situation so warrant to ensure that its provisions are in line with the PA's needs to allow for its further redeployment to the RCP, when conditions allow</p>	<p>A Joint EUBAM-PA Redeployment Plan was drafted in 2016 to ensure a coordinated approach, aimed at resuming, in a rapid and efficient manner, operations at the Rafah Crossing Point when conditions allow (and subject to a decision by the EU Member States and the agreement of the parties on the ground).</p> <p>The Mission will assess, together with PA/GABC, on how to approach the revision of the JRP to meet post-conflict scenarios within this reporting period, with high commitment of the GABC; due to the new and volatile situation on the ground (including a foreseen solely responsible role of the PA in the Gaza Strip in the future) many elements need to be considered to accurately update the document.</p> <p>In November 2018, GABC redeployed staff at the RCP and stayed in charge of it until January 2019, when the PA withdrew its staff after Hamas had taken control of the RCP. The RCP opening became semi-permanent as COVID19 pandemic receded: it was opened on a regular basis five days per week, except for closures conditional to the security and political situation, as well as national and religious holidays; it was meant for travellers only. The Situation drastically changed with the outbreak of the conflict: since 7th October 2023, the RCP remained closed to passengers. It was re-opened from 21st October to allow humanitarian convoys to enter the Gaza Strip.</p> <p>On 1st November, RCP re-opened for the first time to allow the evacuation of seriously injured Palestinians, foreign nationals and dual citizens. It continued to be open for this group on a non-regular basis.</p>	<p>Limited progress</p>

<p>2.1.1.2 Liaise with relevant partners in Gaza and uphold the Mission's activities in Gaza (RCP).</p>	<p>The Mission experts have closely coordinated with the Missions' local staff member based in Gaza to gather detailed information on the situation at the crossings, including Rafah Crossing Point and the crossing with Israel.</p> <p>During the reporting period, the Mission executed one trip to the Gaza Strip (Sept. 2023). Since the outbreak of the conflict on 7th October, the Mission keeps daily contact (if conditions allow) with the Mission member, also to ensure duty of care, and with the organisations operating in the area (UN, EU, NGOs) to stay updated on the situation on the ground.</p> <p>The condition of the EUBAM compound at the RCP and the Office in Gaza City since the outbreak of the conflict could not be confirmed yet. The compound has been heavily damaged before, with some containers still on the compound, but any possible valuable items had been taken from them.</p> <p>Gaza Local Staff member could be evacuated from Gaza Strip on 19th November.</p>	<p>Moderate progress</p>
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DECISIVE POINT 2.2: Strengthen PA GABC capacities in border management		
DESIRED OUTCOME 2.2.1 Knowledge and capacities of managers and personnel on Integrated Border Management (IBM) are increased		
<p>Task 2.2.1.1 Support GABC to perform customs functions and collect revenues from trade-related taxes in line with EUREP project intended to establish a logistic centre/container in Jericho area</p>	<p>The initiative had been triggered by the European Union Representative in Jerusalem (EUREP), within a comprehensive trade facilitation project in cooperation with Palestinian and Israeli Authorities, for which EUBAM's customs expertise was requested. In this context, the Exchange of International Staff mechanism was activated, and the Mission initiated the cooperation with EUBAM Libya experts.</p> <p>The deployment in May/June 2023 served as a follow-up to the assessment report from the first deployment Nov. 2022. It aimed at providing a further baseline for the 'preliminary analyses in preparation for the Feasibility Study.</p> <p>Following this activity, to further support the Feasibility Study for the development of a logistic centre/container terminal/customs bonded warehouse in Jericho area, the Mission provided additional technical coordination for the pre-feasibility analysis. To this aim, a preliminary market survey was prepared and distributed to a number of PA traders, with the endorsement and support of the GABC and the PA Ministry of National Economy. The survey aims at collecting and analysing trade flows, as well as the services requested by traders and will be driving the decisions of the PA actors involved, including the Mission's counterpart. Moreover, the suitable additional skills in the areas to be covered by the Study were identified (i.e. financial, logistic etc.) and a template for the Feasibility Study was identified.</p> <p>The original project schedule needed to be postponed due to the ongoing conflict and other priorities of EUREP, as project owner, and implementing partners. A new timeframe will need to be defined together with EUREP.</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>

<p>Task 2.2.1.2 Enable GABC to develop and implement new processes and procedures related to the introduction of biometric passports</p>	<p>The Palestinian Authority started the issuance of biometric passports with the aim of substituting all standard non-biometric passports with new biometric ones in the coming years. The overall number of biometric passports issued has still not reached the critical mass of 800,000 to 1 million needed to start a comprehensive large-scale intervention. Until November, only 200,000 biometric passports have been issued by the PA MoI. The Mission is closely monitoring the figures related to the number of biometric passports issued, supported by sources from the MoI, and started planning capacity building activities to develop and strength GABC staff knowledge, skills and abilities in properly processing passengers holding this type of documents. For a future large-scale project, the Mission will assist giving support in terms of additional capacity building and coordination among EU and international donors. EUBAM Rafah will have a key role in identifying partners to support GABC with the transition to new solutions and technologies for passenger processing (i.e. Automated Border Control (ABC) Gates)</p>	<p>Limited progress</p>
<p>Task 2.2.1.3 Develop capacities needed for the full operationalisation of the GABC Command and Control Centre</p>	<p>Within the comprehensive effort of the Mission to reach the full operability of the Command and Control Centre, additional technical equipment was donated to GABC. The project has been planned by the Mission’s Operations Department and implemented in close cooperation with a Palestinian High-Tech Company. 22 state-of-the-art CCTV cameras have been installed at Al-Karameh Terminal in Jericho to enhance Palestinian Border Agencies’ capabilities of combating smuggling as well as providing additional safety for border agents and passengers. The cameras provide more control over traffic and additional capability to detect smugglers.</p>	<p>Moderate progress</p>

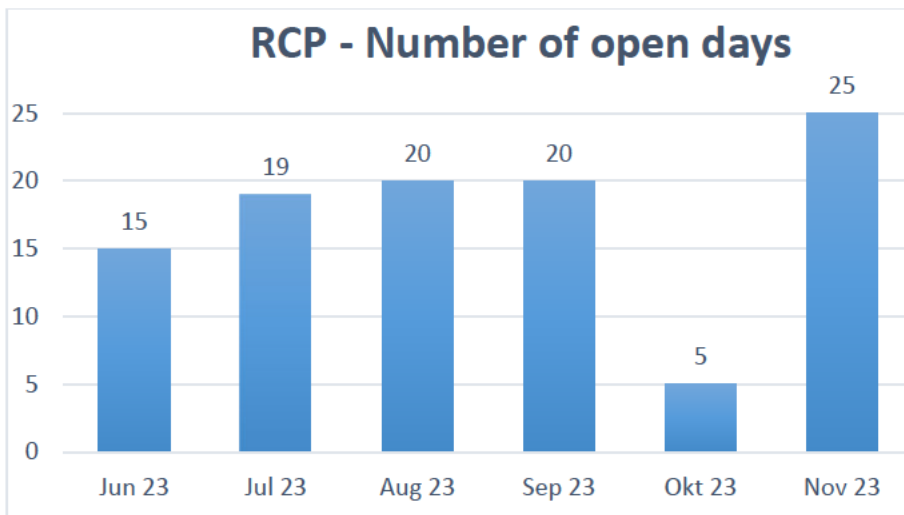
<p>Task 2.2.1.4 Develop GABC capacities for enhanced border controls and anti-smuggling functions.</p>	<p>The Mission organised the visit of a GABC delegation to the Latvian Customs Administration Headquarters (LCA) and the Latvian State Border Guard Headquarters (LSBG). The GABC delegation learned about instruments and approaches of Latvian Customs and Border Guards with regards to border management and border controls, including risk management and the use of customs laboratories. Detailed information was exchanged on the EU common risk criteria and standards and time was specifically allocated to the identification and control of high-risk goods movements using common risk criteria, and to the systematic and intensive exchange of risk information between customs through the customs risk management system. The visit increased the awareness of GABC on best practices and they will assess ways to integrate their findings into their operations. The visit also served as a valuable opportunity to strengthen the cooperation with the Latvian border agencies, resulting in the aim of GABC to conclude a MoU with the LSBG.</p> <p>To enhance GABC capacity in preventing trafficking in cultural property, the Mission continued the collaboration with the Italian Training Mission in Palestine – MIADIT. The training on Cultural Heritage Protection, follow-up of the previous course delivered in February 2023, was planned in November but, due to the ongoing challenging security situation, the activity has been suspended.</p>	<p>Moderate progress</p>
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<p>DECISIVE POINT 2.3: Continue the Mission’s role as catalyst, leveraging other EU instruments in support of PA border management</p>		
<p>DESIRED OUTCOME: 2.3.1 Facilitation of Integrated Approach on border-related matters enhanced for the benefit of the PA border agencies</p>		
<p>Task 2.3.1.1 Liaise with the EU, Member States and other international stakeholders in order to create synergies and identify suitable initiatives that could be implemented by the Mission or by other EU instruments or Member State/s to ensure required support is provided (e.g. FRONTEX, TAIEX, TWINNING).</p>	<p>The Mission’s role as coordinator and facilitator of the cooperation between GABC and several EU institutions and instruments continued during the reporting period. EUBAM has provided technical advice to the EUREP-led Trade facilitation project. The cooperation with FRONTEX resulted in the organisation of a training on ‘Gender responsive border management’, specifically shaped for GABC officers (postponed due to the current situation) and in the participation of a GABC representative in the ‘Second Euro-Arab Border Security Conference’.</p> <p>The Mission is closely coordinating with GABC and the TAIEX experts to move ahead with the project on training strategy. The Mission is facilitating contacts with several MS institutions and, in coordination with TAIEX office, will identify the best option for the counterpart’s needs.</p> <p>The Mission continued the collaboration with the Italian Training Mission in Palestine – MIADIT. The training on Cultural Heritage Protection, follow-up of the previous course delivered in February 2023, was planned in November but, due to the ongoing challenging security situation, the activity has been suspended.</p> <p>EUBAM and EUPOL COPPS, on the operational side, recently started a more structured approach aimed at finding possible synergies and ways of implementing joint actions. A comprehensive presentation was given by the two Operation sections, focusing on the mandate and future plans. Enhancing the common understanding and sharing the challenges will be the base for building a fruitful cooperation and will positively impact the Palestinian population and Mission’s counterpart.</p>	<p>Moderate progress</p>

ANNEX II – Situation Gaza Crossings**Rafah Crossing Point (RCP)**

The RCP is located at the southwestern border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. Between 01 June 2023 and 30 November 2023, it was open in both directions for 104 days. The situation by months is visualised on the graph below. The total number of passengers processed during the reporting period from Gaza Strip to Egypt was 53,725 – and the number processed from Egypt to Gaza Strip was 60,066, giving the total number of passengers processed in both directions is 113,791.

The provided information is missing passenger flow data for the entire month of September due to constraints in our data source, attributed to the ongoing armed conflict.



A notable closure occurred from 7 until 31 October 2023, directly influenced by the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas. Since 21 October, trucks with humanitarian aid have been allowed to enter the Gaza Strip via the RCP. Exceptions were also granted for specific humanitarian cases, the evacuation of international and dual citizens, a selected number of international delegations, UN organisations, and medical entities. This strategic access was facilitated to ensure the distribution of essential aid and medical assistance in Gaza. Besides, RCP was used for the exchange of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners.

Kerem Shalom Crossing Point (KS)

The Kerem Shalom Crossing Point on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip is managed by Israel and remains the main gateway for import/export of goods in/from the Gaza Strip. The number of truckloads cleared and processed between 1 June 2023 and 30 November 2023 is not available. It should also be noted that Kerem Shalom has been closed since 7 October 2023. Discussions for a potential establishment of Kerem Shalom Crossing Point as an ‘additional Rafah Crossing Point’ to bring humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip are ongoing at this point, considering a possible engagement of EUBAM Rafah.

The numbers of truckloads allowed to pass through Kerem Shalom are limited by the Israeli Authorities and are mainly restricted to humanitarian aid agencies, basic goods and construction materials (constituting the largest category of imports). The export of goods from the Gaza Strip to Israel and the West Bank is still limited to agricultural goods and in very limited numbers to furniture.

ANNEX III – Administration**1. Executive Summary**

During the reporting period from 1 June to 30 November 2023, the Mission managed two budgets in accordance with the allocated budget of EUR 2,570,000.00 for the contract CFSP/2022/20/EU BAM RAFAH (covering the period from July 2022 until June 2023) and CFSP/2023/35/EU BAM RAFAH with an allocated budget of EUR 2,360,000.

The Mission completed the audit for Mandate 17 CFSP/2021/38/ EUBAM Rafah and is reviewing the audit draft report from the external financial audit BDO.

Despite the active progress in the mandate implementation, we would like to point out the following challenges for the Mission:

- In the first quarter of the current mandate, one (1) international seconded staff member and one (1) national contracted staff member resigned;
- Currently, three (3) out of ten international posts are vacant, two (2) of them in the Operations Section. Two (2) out of eight (8) local positions are vacant as well;
- The Border Customs Expert position has been vacant since August 2022. No applications were received through CfC 1-2023 and we expect the replacement through the current CfC closed in the end of October 2023;
- The Head of Administration and Finance position has been vacant since March 2023. Twenty-four (24) applications were received through CfC 1-2023 but interviews were put on hold, pending approval of the new OPLAN;
- One (1) local Office Coordinator of Gaza Office resigned, and the post has been vacant since November 2022;
- In CfC 2-2023, no applications were received for the seconded positions of Police Border Experts and Reporting Officer.

Overview of the current situation with regards to old mandates:

- Mandate 16 (2020/2021, CFSP/2020/29/EUBAM Rafah): closed.
- Mandate 17 (2021/2022, CFSP/2021/37/EUBAM Rafah): received the draft report from the external audit and in the review phase for comments.

2. Financial management

2.1 CFSP/2022/20/EUBAM RAFAH

For the period of 01 July 2022 until 30 June 2023 (CFSP/2022/20/EU BAM RAFAH) with the budget of EUR 2,570,000 (including contingency reserve), the expenditures are as follows:

The current consumption rate of the current mandate until 30.06.2023 is 93.03% (EUR 2,348,000.39) if considering the forecast until closing the mandate it will result in 96.21%.

Additionally, despite numerous requests made through the EU Delegation to the Israeli Ministry of Finance, the Mission has been unable to obtain VAT recovery from Israeli authorities for several years. As per this specific mandate the amount of the VAT that remains unrecovered is 31,224.96 EUR.

EEAS(2023)1456

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

The following table provides a summary of the expenditures against the budget of the mentioned mandate until 30 June 2023:

Headings	Total Annual Budget (€) 2023-2023	RIDER 05.23 Total Annual Budget (€)	Reallocation 06.2023 BUDGET EUR	Eligible expenses (€) until 30.06.2023	Spending rate 01/07/22 - 30/06/23 (%)	Forecast Expenditure until 30.11.2023	Total Actual + Forecast Expenditure	Total Spent + Forecasting Percent %
1. Personnel	1,647,763.50	1,588,420.67	1,601,101.80	1,558,168.08	98.10%	64,116.16	1,622,284.24	100%
2. Mission Expenditure	42,030.00	88,956.00	81,349.87	66,908.60	75.22%	0.00	66,908.60	82.25%
3. Running Expenditure	423,662.00	413,500.20	408,425.20	329,080.88	79.58%	16,152.58	345,233.46	84.53%
4. Capital Expenditure	223,448.84	246,027.47	246,027.47	234,788.61	95.43%	0.00	234,788.61	95.43%
5. Representation	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00	3,970.26	94.53%	0.00	3,970.26	94.53%
6. Project Cell	182,700.00	182,700.00	182,700.00	155,083.96	84.88%	0.00	155,083.96	84.88%
TOTAL HEADINGS 1 - 6	2,523,804.34	2,523,804.34	2,523,804.34	2,348,000.39	93.03%	54,060.90	2,402,061.29	95.18%
7. Contingency Reserve 2%	46,195.66	46,195.66	46,195.66	0.00	0.00%	0.00	0.00	0.00%
8. VAT Deductible				31,224.96				
9. Exchange Rate Gain/Loss				53,417.76				
Total	2,570,000.00	2,570,000.00	2,570,000.00	2,348,000.39	91.36%	80,268.74	2,428,269.13	94.49%

2.2 CFSP/2023/25/EUBAM RAFAH

For the period of 01 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 (CFSP/2023/35/EU BAM RAFAH) with the budget of EUR 2,360,000 (including contingency reserve), the current expenditures are as follows:

The consumption rate of the current mandate until 30.11.2023 is 26.14% (EUR 616,919). Considering the forecast until closing the mandate, it will result in 96.67%.

EEAS(2023)1456

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

The following table provides a summary of the expenditures against the budget of the mentioned mandate until 30 November 2023 (end of reporting period):

We need to consider the current political situation in the region that will dramatically affect the budget consumption in all aspects. This forecast was created before the current political situation. We will reconsider the forecast during the coming two months and update it in the upcoming Second Quarterly Report.

Headings	Total Annual Budget (€)	BUDGET EUR Re-Allocation 11.23	Eligible expenses (€) until 30.11.2023	Spending rate 01/07/23 - 30/11/23 (%)	Forecast Expenditure until 30.06.2024	Total Actual + Forecast Expenditure	Total Spent + Forecasting Percent %
1. Personnel	1,584,499	1,686,243	507,179	32.01%	1,173,951	1,681,131	99.70%
2. Mission Expenditure	55,137	55,137	3,022	5.48%	54,704	57,726	104.70%
3. Running Expenditure	398,899	402,251	106,709	26.75%	260,837	367,546	91.37%
4. Capital Expenditure	72,109	59,716	0	0.00%	39,666	39,666	66.42%
5. Representation	4,200	4,200	0	0.00%	2,800	2,800	66.67%
6. Project Cell	133,510	133,510	0	0.00%	132,610	132,610	99.33%
8. Contingency Reserve	111,646	18,943	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Total	2,360,000	2,360,000	616,911	26.14%	1,748,768	2,281,479	96.67%

For the position of Border Customs Expert, that was transformed from a seconded to a contracted position during the reporting period, the Mission will proceed first with reallocating funds from existing budget lines to cover the costs of the transformation of post. It will provide FPI.6 with a new request to use the contingency once the mission has reached a consumption rate of at least 50% of its total budget, if still relevant, including the relevant proof. Upon availability of the EU Budget for 2024, an amendment to the contribution agreement CFSP/2023/35/EUBAM Rafah shall increase the EU contribution up to the total cost of the action, to commit the contingency reserve.

In general, the Mission faced some challenges with vacant positions, but it managed to utilise most of the budget line items under all headings. However, not all projects have commenced yet (due to the current situation on the ground), resulting in a lower consumption rate.

3. Procurement

Actions summary

The procurement plan is being regularly followed up. The administration Section is fully supporting the Operations Section to move on with initiating the procurement processes as soon as possible.

The contracts were revised at the beginning of the mandate, and Procurement Planning has been concluded.

- The Mission finalised the procurement plan, which is endorsed by HoM;
- The procurement procedure for the insurance of the Mission vehicles has been finalised;
- The lease Agreements/insurance for the Mission Offices were renewed;
- The Procurement procedure for the Mission vehicles parking has been finalised;
- The procurement procedure for providing the cleaning services for the Mission's HQ has been finalised.

4. Human Resources*Staffing/International Staff*

When fully staffed, the current Mission strength in the stand-by mode as per the OPLAN is ten (10) international and eight (8) local staff members. The total strength of EUBAM Rafah Staff over the reporting period was as follows:

HoM and seven (7) international staff members (Integrated Border Management Expert, Border Police Expert stayed until August 2023, Border Planning and Organization Adviser, Administrative Officer, IT Officer, Deputy Senior Mission Security Officer, Reporting Officer,), and seven (7) national staff members (Six (6) in Ramat Gan and one (1) in Gaza Strip). One (1) staff member (HoM Assistant) resigned in August 2023 and the post is vacant. One (1) Office Coordinator in Gaza Office resigned in November 2022 and the post is vacant.

In the end of November, seven (7) out of ten (10) international and six (6) out of eight (8) local positions were filled.

On 13 September 2023, the Mission requested CPCC to launch the second Call for Contribution for 2023 (2-2023) with a deadline for applications on 03 November 2023 for the following positions:

- OPS 05, Border Police Expert (seconded), no applications were received.
- RE 01, Reporting Officer (seconded), no applications were received.
- ADM 01, Head of Administration and Finance (seconded/contracted), 52 applications were received, four (4) candidates were shortlisted, interviews were conducted on 24.11.2023 and on 28.11.2023. The evaluation process is currently ongoing.
- OPS 08, Border Customs Expert (seconded/contracted), 56 applications were received, three (3) candidates were shortlisted, interviews were conducted on 16.11.2023. A contracted candidate was selected. Currently, the grading process is ongoing.

Local Recruitment

The Mission launched a Call for Contribution for the post of Office Coordinator in Gaza on 18 September 2023, 194 applications were received. The selection process was interrupted due to the ongoing armed conflict.

The Mission launched a call for contribution for the post of Head of Mission Assistant / Language Assistant on 23 November 2023. Deadline to receive applications is 06 December 2023.

Gender balance

Gender Balance	
Total per Mission (%)	
Male	Female
53.85%	46.15%

5. Transport

The fleet is currently comprising of 13 vehicles, out of which four (4) armoured vehicles and nine (9) soft skins.

6. Medical Issues

The Medical Advisers (MA) of EUPOL COPPS, established since 2019, also support EUBAM Rafah as per the OPLAN and maintain the occupational safety and health perspective, whilst providing medical advice for the Mission and its staff as a part of Joint Security and Duty of Care Department (JSDCD). During the reporting period, one MA post became vacant and to date no replacement has been identified. The second MA post is being turned into a local MA/ Medical Expert in 2024.

In Israel the number of COVID-19 cases hospitalised reported are slowly increasing and the adapted vaccine is available, whereas no information of COVID-19 is available in Palestine.

During the reporting period MA has focused on:

- Providing mission staff with medical support, advice and, when needed, referral to relevant Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs),
- Promoting psychosocial wellbeing among mission staff;
- Updating and streamlining of Vehicle Trauma Kits;
- Providing the Mission with advice on preventive health including psychosocial support;
- Regular contacts with Medical Task Forces (MTFs) in both West Bank and Israel, focused on current status and operationality.

Planned and ongoing activities:

- Reinstating practical First Aid training for staff, when feasible to do so.
 - Continue updating contacts with MTFs and doing assessments of MTF as needed and possible.
 - Continuing to follow up on psychosocial support for staff as needed, including identifying viable external options.
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ANNEX IV – List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AoO	Area of Operation
CCC	Command and Control Centre
CivOpsCdr	Civilian Operations Commander
COGAT	Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories
CEPOL	EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training
CPCC	Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability
CSDP	EU Common Security and Defence Policy
EEAS	European External Action Service
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
EU	European Union
EUDEL	EU Delegation to Israel
EUPOL COPPS	EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories
EUREP	EU Representative's Office to the West Bank and Gaza Strip
EUSR MEPP	EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process
FPI	Foreign Policy Instrument of the European Commission
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GABC	General Authority for Borders and Crossings
HQ	Headquarters
HoM	Head of Mission
IBM	Integrated Border Management
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
ISF	Israeli Security Force
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
JRM	Joint Road Map
KS	Kerem Shalom Crossing Point
LCA	Latvian Customs Administration
LSBG	Latvian State Border Guard

LOO	Line of Operation
MEPP	Middle East Peace Process
MIADIT	Missione Addestrativa Italiana - Italian Carabinieri training Mission in Palestine
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member State
PA	Palestinian Authority
PPIO	Press and Public Information Officer
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RCP	Rafah Crossing Point
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (European Commission)
TC	Training Centre
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USSC	U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority
