

The Apartheid Analogy: Israel is Not Apartheid South Africa – Implications for EU Policy

Factsheet No 3

The
Israel Clarity
Initiative

Verifiable Facts for Policymakers

Claims that Israel resembles apartheid-era South Africa distort the facts and mischaracterise international law. Israel is the Middle East's only democracy and is exercising its lawful right of self-defence against Iranian-backed terrorism and rejectionism. While the EU's attachment to a rules-based international order is important, these analogies undermine its credibility by ignoring context and applying selective standards.

Why the Apartheid Analogy Fails

1. Apartheid in South Africa Was Racial Domination – Israel's Reality Is Not

- Apartheid South Africa (1948–early 1990s) was a **system of racial classification** that denied the black majority citizenship, voting rights, freedom of movement and equal access to land and jobs via pass laws and Bantustans.
- Israel has no equivalent. Arab citizens (21% of the population) enjoy full legal equality: they vote, serve in the Knesset and Supreme Court, and access the same healthcare, education and welfare as Jewish citizens. **Israel has no racial laws or supremacy system.**

2. The Legal Definition of Apartheid Does Not Apply

- The 1973 Apartheid Convention defines the crime as **inhumane acts committed with the specific intent** to establish and maintain domination by one racial group over another. No international court or tribunal has ever ruled that Israel practices apartheid.
- Reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch rely on distorted and politically motivated definitions that do not match the legal standard. Analyses by NGO Monitor, Thinc. and UKLFI demonstrate **these claims lack legal basis** and seek to delegitimise the Jewish state.

3. Arab Citizens Have Full and Equal Rights

- Approximately 2.1 million **Arab Israelis are full citizens** with equal rights under Israeli law since 1948.
- They vote in elections, serve as Members of Knesset, **sit on the Supreme Court**, and hold senior positions in medicine, academia, business, diplomacy and the military.
- **Arabic is an official language**, and Arab citizens enjoy access to the same public healthcare, education and welfare systems as Jewish citizens.

4. Control in Disputed Territories Is Security-Based

- The West Bank and Gaza are **disputed territories** captured in defensive wars. The Palestinian Authority has civil autonomy under the Oslo Accords; Israel fully withdrew from Gaza in 2005.
- Security barriers and operations respond to suicide bombings, rocket attacks and the 7 October 2023 massacre. **These measures are reversible** with genuine peace and deradicalisation.

The EU's Position and Risks

The apartheid myth ignores the conflict's origins in decades of **Palestinian rejectionism**, incitement and **Iranian-backed terrorism**, including the atrocities of 7 October 2023. Equating a democracy defending itself with racist apartheid South Africa strips Israel's security measures of legitimacy, applies double standards, damages EU-Israel strategic ties, and **fuels extremism** and antisemitism. This selective framing also undermines the EU's credibility when promoting consistent standards of international law elsewhere.

Recommendations for EU Leaders

EU policymakers need to:

- **Reject** the apartheid analogy as factually inaccurate and legally baseless;
- **Affirm** Israel's right to exist as the Jewish democratic state and to defend itself;
- **Prioritise** sanctions against Iran and its proxies while supporting genuine Palestinian reform in prioritising education free of hate towards Jews and **mutual recognition** for peace.