

# European Union Gives Still More Money – No Questions Asked – to the Palestinian Authority

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**The E.U. announced** at the beginning of May that it was sending an additional \$41 million to the P.A., as part of a total package of \$76 million being given to help the P.A. deal with the coronavirus outbreak. The money is to be used, however, to pay salaries of civil servants, rather than on PPE, ventilators, ICU beds, and medical personnel. This is one more example of the continuing failure of the E.U. to recognize the main source of the P.A.'s financial distress: its greedy and grasping leaders, who steal so much of the aid money for themselves. The Palestinians themselves are aware of how corrupt their leadership is, but can do little about it.

A year ago, documents were leaked online showing that in 2017, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had quietly agreed to increase monthly salaries of his ministers by 67 percent, from \$3,000 to \$5,000, as well as boosting his own salary from \$4,000 to \$6,000 a month. According to the Associated Press, the raises were kept secret from the public and approved by Abbas. Once the raises were made public, the succeeding uproar caused Abbas to promise to rescind those secret raises. But did he? We know that Abbas rewards his loyalists with sums far beyond what they receive in salaries. Hanan Ashrawi has mysteriously become a multi-millionaire over the past two years, with a net worth of \$5 million; Saeb Erekat now has about \$2 million. It's not possible, on their stated salaries, for them to have accumulated so much. But what Palestinian is going to dare to investigate?

In the P.A., the greatest crook of all is Mahmoud Abbas, who with his sons Tareq and Nasser has amassed a family fortune of more than \$400 million. The E.U. should demand an accounting from the P.A. as to how its leaders have made so much money, before it lavishes still more aid on the P.A. By never raising the issue of corruption with the P.A., leaders the E.U. demoralizes those many Palestinians who, struggling to get by, are infuriated by the sums they see being received by Abbas and company. The gated community of villas in the West Bank town of Ramallah may help explain why Palestinians almost universally believe there is corruption in the government of President Mahmoud Abbas. The secluded "Diplomatic Compound," built for senior Palestinian Authority officials on subsidized land, is one of the symbols of what many Palestinians think is wrong with their leaders – that they are cut off from the people, do not suffer along with them, and continue to award themselves large sums and special deals that are kept hidden from view.

Here is the story, at [Middle East Monitor](#), of the latest lavishing of aid money on the P.A. by E.U. taxpayers:

*As part of its global response to the coronavirus outbreak, the European Union (EU) has allocated €38 million (\$41 million) to Palestine, reported the Wafa news agency.*

*The support will enable the Palestinian Authority (PA) to meet its commitments towards the April payments of Palestinian civil servants' salaries and pensions in the occupied West Bank.*

*The EU said in a statement that it made this contribution as part of the #TeamEurope approach recently adopted by the 27 EU Member States to support partner countries and fragile populations to fight the coronavirus crisis.*

*In early April the EU said it would provide the PA an assistance package of around €71 million (\$76 million), including the €38 million announced yesterday, while the World Bank approved a \$5.8 million emergency package in light of coronavirus.*

*The announcement was made during a video meeting between Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh and foreign diplomats, including the head of the Office of the EU Representative to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff.*

*"These are difficult times as we face together the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We have been engaged from day one with the Palestinian government to advance and readjust our support to better serve the Palestinian people amid this crisis," Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff said in a statement yesterday.*

*He explained that this contribution is a clear message of the EU's strong commitment to the Palestinian people at this critical time.*

There would be enough money to pay the P.A.'s civil servants

if Abbas and his henchmen were not siphoning off so much of it. They steal from the tax revenues that Israel collects for it and then transfers to the P.A. They steal from the aid money that the P.A. receives in such abundance from so many gullible Western countries. They steal from their own government by making sweetheart deals available only to themselves as, for example, the land they are allowed to buy at greatly subsidized prices in Ramallah on which to build their villas. That land is in the secluded neighborhood – as noted previously – known as the “Diplomatic Compound,” where the P.A.’s leaders have built their luxurious villas, with well-tended flower beds and pools, carefully guarded from the prying eyes of the Palestinian *hoi polloi*.

Most luxurious of all those residences is the \$13 million palace that Abbas has had built for himself. Why, given the constant financial distress of the P.A., did he require such a lavish dwelling? Why did he need to buy a private jet costing \$50 million, for his use alone? How many plane trips does Abbas take each year that justify such a costly purchase? And why now, during the coronavirus pandemic, does he not sell that quite unnecessary jet to help pay for medical equipment for the long-suffering Palestinians, about whom he claims to care so much? Why has Abbas never been asked by the E.U. to justify these expenditures – that palace, that private jet – or to explain the sources of his \$400 million fortune?

Questions, questions. Will anyone in the E.U. dare to ask them? Many Palestinians, who are afraid to ask them – those who do end up in prison – would be heartened if someone better situated, such as the member states of the E.U., did so. Or will the world’s silence about the Grand Theft by Mahmoud Abbas and his privileged henchmen continue, as they pocket so much of the wealth that comes to the P.A. from abroad, while holding their hands out, unashamedly, for more and yet still more?

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