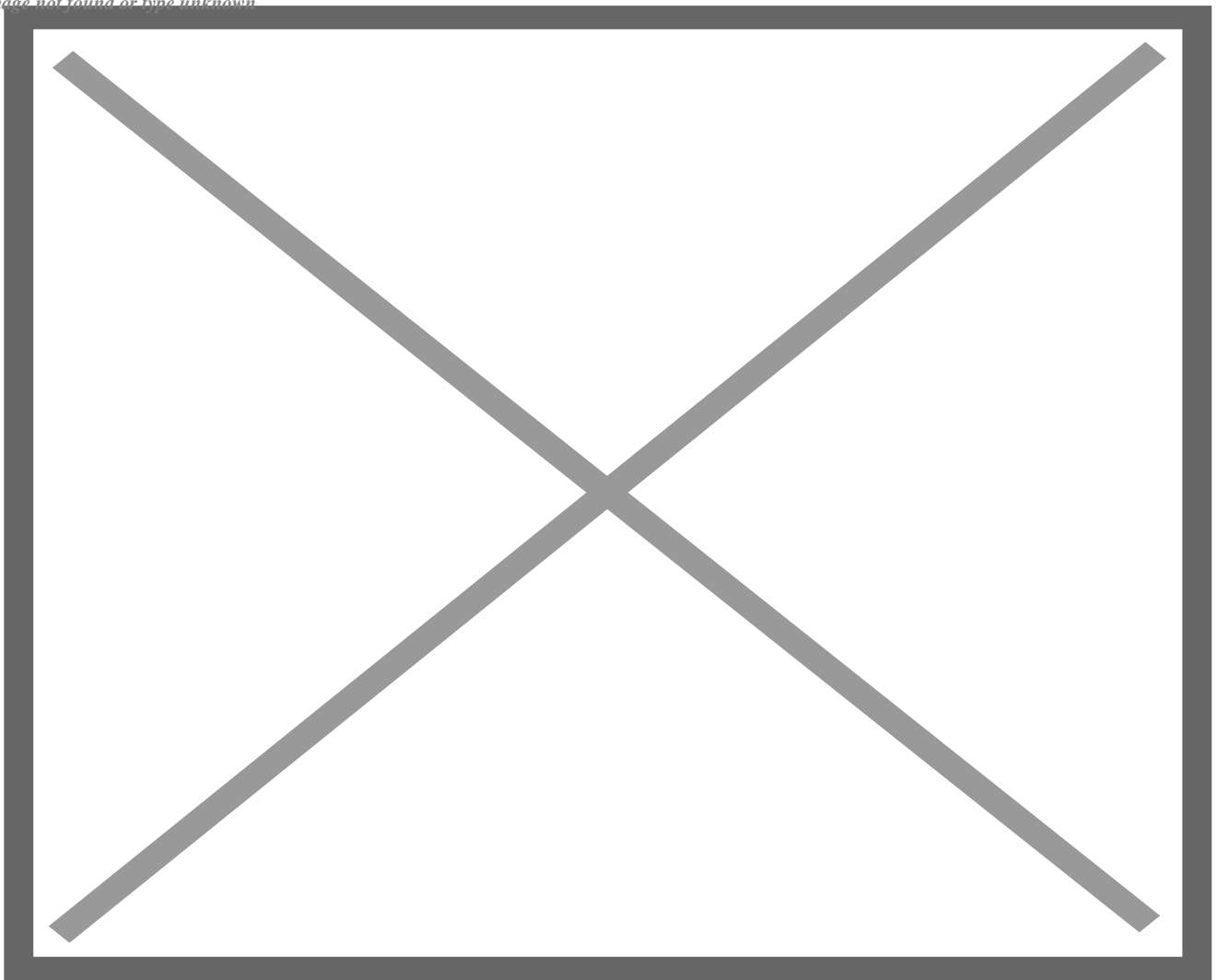


EU message to Israel is inappropriate, discriminatory and racist

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Palestinian leaders and social media users alike criticize the European Commission president for comments saying Israel makes 'the desert bloom' when marking its 75th 'independence' day.

Ramallah, April 27 (RHC)-- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's congratulatory message on Israel's 75th year of independence has been met with a swift backlash in Palestine. The Palestinian Authority (PA) called von der Leyen's message "inappropriate, false and discriminatory" in a statement on Wednesday.

"Today, we celebrate 75 years of vibrant democracy in the heart of the Middle East," she said. "Today, we also celebrate 75 years of friendship between Israel and Europe," the German politician said. "We have more in common than geography would suggest: our shared culture, our values and hundreds of thousands of dual European-Israeli citizens have created a deep connection between us."

The PA called the speech "propagandist" and part of the continued erasure of the Nakba, or "catastrophe", referring to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

Israel has long denied the forced expulsions of Palestinians during that time, in which the newly formed Israeli army and Zionist militias expelled at least 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and land and captured 78 percent of historic Palestine. The Palestinian Authority urged von der Leyen to issue an apology to Palestinians.

Condemnation of the EU official's statement was also rife on social media. "Spare us the colonial rhetoric!" tweeted Jihad Abusalim, executive director of The Jerusalem Fund, based in Washington, DC.

Another user called von der Leyen's treatment of Israel hypocritical when compared with Russia.

A writer based in Palestine said von der Leyen's statement disregards Palestinian suffering.

A Palestinian professor in Canada echoed the PA's remark that the comment about Israel making "the desert bloom" is "racist."

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