

Le gouvernement néerlandais appelle les supermarchés du pays à étiqueter les produits des colonies

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Les pays-bas sont le 3^e pays en Europe à avoir publié des directives demandant aux distributeurs d'étiqueter correctement les produits des colonies sur la marché hollandais.

The Dutch government has for the first time called for retail chains in the Netherlands to state the origin of products from West Bank settlements, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. This makes the Netherlands, one of Israel's greatest friends in Europe, the second country in the European Union, after Britain, to recommend such labeling.

The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs issued a directive Wednesday to all retail chains in the country, stating that it wished to clarify procedures regarding the labeling of products from the settlements and to assist consumers. "The decision was made after consulting the European Commission," the document said.

The letter states that the government is recommending the label change but that no steps will be taken against retailers who do not comply, and that it is not illegal to import products from the settlements.

The document calls for the labeling of the following products : fresh fruit and vegetables, wine, honey, olive oil, fish, meat, chicken, eggs and cosmetics produced in the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These products should no longer state on their packaging that they are made in Israel. Rather, they should be labeled as originating in "Israeli settlement in the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, the West Bank or in Palestinian territories," the directive states. Retailers, not importers, will be responsible for the labeling.

The Netherlands' foreign minister, Frans Timmermans, said in a speech to parliament Wednesday that the settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. He said that the labeling of products by retail chains in Holland will allow consumers to know whether they want to purchase these products. "We do not want to contribute to the economy of the illegal settlements," Timmermans said.

The Dutch government's decision came following a letter sent on February 22 by the EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton to the 27 foreign ministers of the EU member states. In the letter, which was quoted by the Hebrew daily Maariv, she urged the foreign ministers to ensure full compliance with existing EU legislation on labeling products from Israeli settlements and noted that compliance was incumbent on EU members and the appropriate agencies in those countries.

A source in Israel's Foreign Ministry said that after Ashton sent the letter, Israel's ambassadors in EU countries were instructed to unofficially approach the foreign ministries of the countries in which they are serving and ask them not to implement the directives at this time. The ambassadors also asked those countries to urge Ashton to rescind her directive.

Israel's ambassador to the Netherlands, Haim Divon, approached senior officials in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague to express displeasure over Ashton's letter. Divon said that although the directive speaks only of labeling products from the settlements, it will lead to a boycott against such products and perhaps against Israeli products in general.

Divon said that many Dutch companies will not understand the government's recommendation and will interpret it as a binding ban on products from the settlements. Divon told the senior officials that "obsessive preoccupation with the settlements had exceeded all proportion" and that "the European Union is taking out its frustration with the situation in the Middle East on us."

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Divon that the labeling of the products was a logical step in light of EU policy on the matter. They said they do not support a total ban on products from the settlements or on Israeli products in general, and they would work to ensure that this did not happen.

A government recommendation to label products from the settlements has been issued so far only in Britain. The Danish government studied the matter but has yet to take action. The fact that Holland was the second country to issue the directives is surprising, because of the close and friendly relations between Holland and Israel.

The Netherlands, considered one of Israel's key supporters in the EU, has promoted adding Hezbollah to the EU's list of terror groups and supports Israel in votes in various international forums. It has also helped Israel balance anti-Israel decisions in the EU.

Thus, it is believed that the Dutch move will push many other EU countries to take similar steps. The concern is that as early as the coming weeks a wave of such moves will be seen, leading to a dramatic increase in the monitoring of products from the settlements in the EU.

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