



## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

On September 2, 2010, new direct negotiations between Mahmud Abbas and Benjamin Netanjahu started in the USA. The international community is watching these discussions with great interest, but also with some concern.

Following the ambitious talks after the Annapolis Summit in November 2007 – that broke down in the end – there is now concern that the current talks are not going to reach a workable agreement. It is not for a lack of goodwill on both sides, and the goal is also clear: in future, there should be an independent Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state of Israel in the region. And both sovereign nation states should recognize their mutual rights to exist and each other's security interests without any limitation.

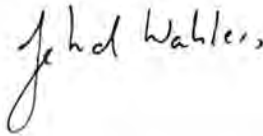
Traditionally, the Palestinian Territories and Israel have shared close economic ties. Netanjahu's policy of "economic peace" is designed to support efforts to achieve shared economic prosperity. An agreement – even in economic terms – would not just mean a peace dividend for Israel and the Palestinians. The entire region would also profit from the new economic dynamic. Israel in particular, which has hardly been affected by the global economic and financial crisis, would become a driver of growth in the region and could represent the nucleus of a structural change in the Middle East – something which is economically necessary, but also politically desirable.

There is little indication, however, that the current negotiations will achieve this breakthrough any time soon. On both sides, in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, but also in other countries in the region, there is strong resistance to necessary, but painful compromises.

In the run-up to the negotiations, it became clear that the political blockades had already had a negative impact on the negotiations for both sides. The limitation of the Israeli moratorium on West Bank settlements, that expired on September 26, from the very beginning raised concern among the Palestinians that the influential Israeli settlement lobby would curtail Netanjahu's room for negotiation. Even though Israeli negotiating strategy traditionally regards the settlements as an important "leverage," the current political situation is suggesting that this question is more of a stumbling block to further talks and that it could even lead to an early breakdown in the negotiations.

On the Palestinian side, the basic conditions are even less favorable. Hamas and Fatah have not given an inch over the past few months, and divisions between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have only widened. Hamas' extremely negative reactions at the start of the peace talks have also made it clear that it will not deviate from its traditional stance of opposition. It prefers to encourage separatist movements within the Gaza Strip and denies Abbas' role as chief negotiator on the Palestinian side. Although the latest surveys indicate that there is indeed declining support for Hamas among the Palestinian people, both in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, this trend will only encourage Hamas to cement its own position. Hamas represents the biggest potential threat to the success of the negotiations. Increased rocket attacks launched from the Gaza Strip at targets within Israeli territory would only make military confrontation more likely and, undoubtedly, mark the end of the current Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

The direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority are a small but significant step in developing a security architecture in the Middle East. If these talks fail, this does not just threaten peace in the region in the short-term. The success of these talks also has an effect – at least indirectly – on longer term security challenges such as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Therefore, it is in the interests of all states in the region that these discussions achieve results – it is in Europe's interest as well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'G'.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers  
Deputy Secretary-General