

# AN END TO THE STATUS QUO?

## A CONTRIBUTION TO THE NORMALISATION AND ANTI-NORMALISATION DISCOURSE IN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY

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Normalisation is a major topic of discussion in Palestinian society. Opinions as to whether and in which form Palestinians should engage in dialogue with Israelis vary greatly and split Palestinian society into different camps.<sup>1</sup> The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) has coined the most common definition of normalisation as “the participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians [...] and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people.”<sup>2</sup> This definition has also been adopted by other anti-normalisation organisations such as the internationally active Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.<sup>3</sup>

It has been noticeable that the willingness to engage in dialogue has declined markedly in recent years at virtually all levels of Palestinian society and that the anti-normalisation movement is increasingly gaining in influence. A similar development – namely a clearly reduced interest in the Palestinians and in the willingness to engage in dialogue – can also be observed in Israeli



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- 1 | Cf. Walid Salem, “The Anti-Normalization Discourse in the Context of Israeli-Palestinian Peace-Building”, *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 12, Jan 2005, p. 107.
- 2 | PACBI, “Israel’s Exceptionalism: Normalizing the Abnormal”, 31 Oct 2011, <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1749> (accessed 21 Apr 2014).
- 3 | Cf. The BDS movement has made it its aim to exert international pressure on Israel to end the occupation of the Palestinian Territories through boycott, the withholding of finance and sanctions, modelled on the measures used in the case of South Africa.

society.<sup>4</sup> This was demonstrated most recently in the course of the parliamentary elections on 17 March 2015.<sup>5</sup> Generally speaking, anti-normalisation in its present form is a relatively recent phenomenon, linked closely to the stagnating peace process. Events in 2014 have illustrated once again that Israelis and Palestinians are nowhere near a resolution of the conflict; and the first months of 2015 are not promising any improvement either. This prevailing lack of positive prospects is helping to swell the following of the dialogue detractors.

**One needs to take into account that the anti-normalisation activists are not a homogenous group. The movement is far more heterogeneous than it appears at first glance.**

To gain a better understanding of the phenomenon, it is therefore important to briefly recapitulate the political context. One also needs to take into account that the anti-normalisation activists are not a homogenous group. The movement is far more heterogeneous than it appears at first glance, for which reason its different manifestations will be analysed below. Some opponents of normalisation are not entirely averse to engage in dialogue with Israelis under certain circumstances and they manage their activities accordingly. To provide a better understanding, these different manifestations will be illustrated by several short case studies. The question that ultimately needs to be addressed is how the international community should deal with the anti-normalisation phenomenon. This applies in particular to those institutions and organisations working on the ground, which finance and manage dialogue projects. It has become a relatively frequent occurrence for anti-normalisation activists to disrupt dialogue events. Not only does this interfere with the planning of such activities, it is also disruptive to the proceedings themselves. One must assume that the anti-normalisation movement will remain active as long as there is no sustainable resolution to the Middle East conflict within reach. It is therefore important to gain a better understanding of their arguments and motives. The ultimate objectives of the debate must be to ensure

4 | Cf. Moshe Arens, "Five Blows That Shrank Israel's Peace Camp", *Haaretz*, 26 Oct 2010, <http://haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/1.321190> (accessed 13 May 2015). However, the present article deals exclusively with the anti-normalisation movement in the Palestinian Territories.

5 | The conflict with the Palestinians was only a marginal issue in the election campaign, and the re-election victory of Netanyahu, who rejected Palestinian statehood during the election campaign, is an illustration of the waning interest in the Palestinian neighbours. For a detailed analysis see Michael Borchard/Evelyn Gaiser, "Schockstarre versus Euphorie. Israel nach den Wahlen zur 20. Knesset", <http://kas.de/israel/de/publications/40770> (accessed 13 May 2015).

that Israelis and Palestinians can once again engage in purposeful dialogue and to provide the conditions for the two sides to work out a sustainable solution in direct talks.



The European Parliament enacts a resolution on Palestine statehood in its 1967 borders: It supports "in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood and the two state solution, and believes these should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks". | Source: Pietro Naj-Oleari, European Parliament, flickr ©@©©.

## **NORMALISATION IN LIGHT OF CURRENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

The year 2014 brought about many momentous decisions that influenced the framework of the normalisation debate. The failed peace negotiations under the aegis of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at the beginning of the year were followed by the formation of a Palestinian government of national unity between Fatah, which rules the West Bank, and Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, in April 2014. Almost immediately afterwards, Israel and Hamas clashed in the most devastating Gaza War to date, which lasted from 8 July to 26 August.<sup>6</sup> As a result of these developments,<sup>7</sup>

6 | According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2131 Palestinians and 71 Israelis lost their lives in the course of the war. Over 100,000 people were made homeless and are currently living in emergency shelters provided by the United Nations (UN). Cf. OCHA, "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report", OCHA, 4 Sep 2014, [http://ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_sitrep\\_04\\_09\\_2014.pdf](http://ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_sitrep_04_09_2014.pdf) (accessed 13 May 2015).

7 | The Gaza War was triggered by a chain of events, which started with the abduction of three Israeli teenagers close to Hebron. This ▶

there did not seem any hope for political talks to resume in the foreseeable future. During the second half of 2014, the Palestinians received diplomatic encouragement and new hope from the fact that the parliaments of several EU Member States recognised Palestine as a state in the borders of 1967.<sup>8</sup>

Buoyed by this development, the Palestinian leadership around President Mahmoud Abbas surprised everyone shortly before New Year's Eve 2014 by realising its intention to induce the UN Security Council to set a deadline for an end to the Israeli occupation. The resolution, which was put forward by Jordan on behalf of the Palestinians, called for an end to the Israeli occupation by July 2017. The resolution did not, however, receive the required majority of nine votes in a Security Council Meeting on 30 December 2014.<sup>9</sup> In response to the failure of the resolution, the Palestinian leadership decided to aim for membership of numerous international agreements and treaties. The signing of the Treaty of Rome in particular, the contractual basis of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, caused considerable diplomatic rows with Israel and the USA.<sup>10</sup> There was, however, a statutory period of 60 days before the accession to the ICC would officially come into force. The Palestinian Territories became an official state party to the ICC on 1 April 2015, and the Palestinian leadership is already considering lodging complaints against Israeli government representatives or members of the armed forces.<sup>11</sup> These steps are indications of the Palestinian leadership's new strategy aimed at internationalising the conflict with Israel and putting it on a legal footing.<sup>12</sup>

prompted the Israeli military to carry out a massive search and military operation (Brothers' Keeper) against Hamas in the West Bank. In addition, air attacks were carried out against numerous Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, which in turn elicited repeated rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip.

- 8 | Sweden recognised Palestine as an official state in October 2014. Recommendations of Palestine's recognition have been put forward in the parliaments of the UK, Spain, France and Ireland, but the respective governments have not yet followed these.
- 9 | Cf. Michael R. Gordon/Somini Senguptar, "Resolution for Palestinian State Fails in Security Council", *The New York Times*, 30 Dec 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1wzhDDj> (accessed 13 May 2015).
- 10 | Cf. John Hudson, "Israel US Slam Palestinian Bid to Join International Criminal Court", *Foreign Policy*, 31 Dec 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/31/israel-u-s-slam-palestinian-bid-to-join-international-criminal-court> (accessed 21 Apr 2015).
- 11 | The intention is to lodge complaints against Israel's illegal settlement policy on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem as well as its treatment of civilians during last year's Gaza War.
- 12 | The implementation of the strategy began in November 2012, when Palestine applied for observer status in the United Nations and this was granted by the General Assembly.



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and President Abbas met in New York on the occasion of the so called status reevaluation by the United Nations. On November 29, 2012, Palestine was accorded non-Member Observer State status in the United Nations. | Source: Hansine Korslien, Norway – Mission to the UN, flickr ©①③③.

This change in strategy is a clear indication of the fact that trust in negotiations is waning in the political establishment and among the population.<sup>13</sup> President Abbas hesitated too long before taking action after his announcements, and this has diminished his political capital in the Palestinians' eyes. This became very obvious particularly after the Gaza War, when approval ratings for Fatah and President Abbas crashed and support for Hamas and Ismail Haniyeh improved considerably.<sup>14</sup> Seven months on from the war, poll ratings have returned to the pre-war levels and Mahmoud Abbas's approval ratings have recovered.<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may, President Abbas cannot assume that his position is secure, and he will have to continue asserting himself against Hamas.

The government's change in strategy can therefore be taken as an attempt to push beyond the status quo and to win back the population's support. This new political line is met with positive response from Palestinian society. People's hopes for the creation of a sovereign state of their own have been buoyed particularly by the recognition of Palestine by the parliaments of European states.

13 | Cf. Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No 54", Dec 2014, <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/600> (accessed 13 May 2015).

14 | Cf. PSR, "Special Gaza War Poll", Aug 2014, <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/492> (accessed 13 May 2015).

15 | Cf. PSR, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No 55", Mar 2015, <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/605> (accessed 13 May 2015).

In an opinion poll in December 2014, 73 per cent of Palestinians supported the accession to the International Criminal Court,<sup>16</sup> and 86 per cent are in favour of submitting a complaint.<sup>17</sup> By contrast with their political decision-makers, large swathes of Palestinian civil society and many political movements performed this change in strategy some considerable time ago.

For Palestinians, the era since the Oslo Accords (1993 to 1995) has been characterised by disappointment and disillusion. While the frustration among the population about the continuing status quo erupted in violent resistance in the course of the Second Intifada (2000 to 2005), groupings calling for a renunciation of violence have become more prominent in recent years. This has manifested in phenomena such as the BDS movement, which is active at a national and international level.<sup>18</sup> Anti-normalisation is a central component of BDS's agenda and it has also gained in popularity in connection with the growing boycott movement.

**While some officials within the Palestinian Authority may be increasingly sympathetic to the anti-normalisation movement, anti-normalisation has not entered official politics.**

However, there is still a clear discrepancy between the official political line and public opinion. While some officials within the Palestinian Authority (PA) may be increasingly sympathetic to the anti-normalisation movement, anti-normalisation has not entered official politics. BDS groupings and anti-normalisation activists do, in fact, regularly criticise the PA's cooperation with Israel.<sup>19</sup> This applies to various direct political talks<sup>20</sup> as well as the very close security cooperation.<sup>21</sup>

16 | Cf. PSR, n. 13.

17 | Cf. PSR, n. 15.

18 | Cf. Omar Barghouti, "Is BDS' campaign against Israel reaching a turning point?", *Al Jazeera*, 22 Dec 2013, <http://aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/12/bds-campaign-against-israel-reaching-turning-point-201312225320764121> (accessed 13 May 2015).

19 | Cf. Daoud Kuttab, "At Mandela funeral, Abbas says he opposes boycott of Israel", *Al-Monitor*, 13 Dec 2013, <http://al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/abbas-attacks-bds.html> (accessed 13 May 2015); Omar Barghouti, "Israeli-Arab Normalization Hits a Snag", *Al-Akhbar*, 28 Apr 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/6756> (accessed 21 Apr 2015).

20 | Cf. "Abbas to meet with members of Knesset in Ramallah", *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 Apr 2014, <http://jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Abbas-to-meet-with-members-of-Knesset-in-Ramallah-348567> (accessed 13 May 2015).

21 | Cf. Jessica Purkiss, "Will the Palestinian leadership really halt security cooperation with Israel?", *The Middle East Monitor*, 12 Dec 2014, <http://middleeastmonitor.com/articles/middle-east/15796> (accessed 13 May 2015).



A BDS demonstration in 2010: Anti-normalisation plays a central role of the BDS movement and became popular in the growing boycott movement. | Source: Stephanie Law, flickr ©①③.

## ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES OF ANTI-NORMALISATION

As far back as the mid-1980s, Palestinian lawyer Jonathan Kuttab and Israeli political scientist Dr. Edy Kaufman were already engaged in a public debate about the nature of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Kuttab had initiated the discussion with his article "The Pitfalls of Dialogue"<sup>22</sup> in the *al-Fajr* newspaper. In this article, he criticised that any dialogue between oppressor and oppressed was necessarily asymmetrical, while in many cases it seems that the parties were meeting as equals. Furthermore, he maintained that dialogue events frequently ignored central conflict issues (such as the occupation, freedom of movement, natural resources) and were concerned with superficial matters instead. In his eyes, this entailed the risk of conducting the dialogue merely as an end in itself and ultimately in order to entrench the status quo instead of changing it.<sup>23</sup> Kaufman countered this with the argument that dialogue was not a series of isolated events, but a sustained, ongoing activity. He maintained that difficult issues required a dialogue conducted on a sustained basis over time, which could be controlled in an equitable manner. And that it was a central goal of any dialogue to create trust between the

22 | Jonathan Kuttab/Edy Kaufman, "An Exchange on Dialogue", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, No. 2/1988, p. 84-108.

23 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 85 f.

parties in order to allow even major hurdles along the way to be overcome.<sup>24</sup>

**Hope for a prompt resolution of the conflict during the Oslo Peace Process created a willingness on both sides to resume communication. This received generous support, particularly from the international community of states.**

The dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians ceased almost entirely during the First Intifada (1987 to 1993), and so did the debate about its usefulness. It was not until the Oslo Peace Process (1993 to 1995) that there was a renewed rapprochement. Hope

for a prompt resolution of the conflict created a willingness on both sides to resume communication. This received generous support, particularly from the international community of states. Numerous dialogue projects were initiated and a veritable "peace industry" developed. One of the most prominent dialogue programs of that time was the "Seeds of Peace" program aimed at bringing together young people from areas of conflict in a peace camp.<sup>25</sup> The program still exists, but is now coming under heavy criticism from anti-normalisation activists – as are many comparable initiatives.<sup>26</sup>

The Oslo Accords failed to satisfy the high expectations harboured by many of the actors involved. Initial enthusiasm was quickly followed by disenchantment and disillusion.<sup>27</sup> Palestinians have considered the Oslo peace process a failure for a long time.<sup>28</sup> High-ranking Israeli politicians have also come to a similar conclusion.<sup>29</sup> The frustration over the status quo culminated in the Second Intifada in the early 2000s. By the end of that period, many post-conflict dialogue programs going back to the Oslo era had become irrelevant. In addition, fear of further terror attacks caused the Israeli government to impose the physical separation

24 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 94.

25 | The program was initially set up for young Israelis and Palestinians, but has since been expanded to include young people from areas of conflict worldwide.

26 | Cf. Omar H. Rahman, "Co-existence vs. Co-resistance: A case against normalization", +972, 3 Jan 2012, <http://972mag.com/co-existence-vs-co-resistance-a-case-against-normalization/32076> (accessed 13 May 2015).

27 | Palestine is still not a sovereign state, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem is increasing steadily, the Palestinians have no control over natural resources such as water, etc.

28 | Cf. Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process. Oslo and After*, London, 2000; Salam Fayyad, "Oslo is Dead", *Foreign Affairs*, 2 Oct 2014, <http://foreignaffairs.com/articles/142134/salam-fayyad/oslo-is-dead> (accessed 21 Apr 2015).

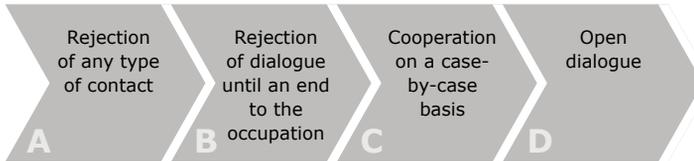
29 | Cf. Barak Ravid, "Lieberman: Palestinian moves at ICC show Oslo Accords have collapsed", *Haaretz*, 4 Jan 2015, <http://haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/1.635216> (accessed 13 May 2015).

of Palestinians and Israelis, which has made the dialogue more difficult in practical terms as well. Consequently, there are now hardly any encounters taking place between the two conflicting parties outside specially organised dialogue events.

Based on the definition of normalisation mentioned at the beginning of this article, anti-normalisation activists have made it their purpose to publicly denounce, prevent or even reverse instances of normalisation. It is their declared aim to "[...] strip the conflict of many illusions and pleasantries in favor of exposing the raw truth."<sup>30</sup> In abstract terms, the opponents of normalisation can be divided into four camps (see Fig. 1).<sup>31</sup>

Fig. 1

**Spectrum of the anti-normalisation and normalisation movement**



Source: Own illustration.

- A. Rigorous proponents of anti-normalisation reject any contact with Israelis. They do not consider Israel an appropriate party to interact with and regard any dialogue with Israelis as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. This form of anti-normalisation does, however, not enjoy much support within the Palestinian population and can be regarded as a minority position.
- B. A more widespread view is that normalisation of relations with Israel should not be a condition but rather a consequence of negotiations. Supporters of this stance argue that it is simply impossible in the current situation to maintain that Israelis and Palestinians can meet on an equal footing. Any exchange between them would therefore have to be considered an exchange between occupiers and occupied. Acting as if that was not the case during joint events would thus be a waste of time. This view underlies the demand that any dialogue should be avoided until the occupation comes to an end. Once the

30 | Rahman, n. 25.

31 | Cf. Riman Barakat/Dan Goldenblatt, "Coping with Anti-Normalization", *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 18, Feb/Mar 2012, pp. 86-95.

occupation has ended, the sides should meet and enter into an exchange on an equal footing.

- C. The majority of the opponents of normalisation evaluate opportunities for dialogue with Israelis on a case-by-case basis. They stress that the problem is not with the dialogue with Israelis as such but with its quality. Many supporters of this group rely on guidelines devised by PACBI for evaluating projects and activities,<sup>32</sup> based essentially on the recognition of fundamental rights for the Palestinians.<sup>33</sup> These guidelines/criteria represent a framework for the agendas and contents of the events.
- D. Proponents of open dialogue, on the other hand, stipulate no conditions for encounters with Israelis. To them, talks between the two sides represent an important channel to effect understanding and reconciliation.

### **ANTI-NORMALISATION IN PRACTICE**

In practice, the boundaries between the different camps are fluid. The strictness with which the guidelines are applied also varies from person to person. Contradictory views are no rarity. To illustrate the above categorisation, here are some practical examples:

1. In 2014, PACBI put out a call for a boycott of the appearance of an Indian dance troupe, which had accepted an invitation to a Palestinian book fair in Ramallah.<sup>34</sup> As the troupe had already performed in front of members of the Indian Society in Tel Aviv beforehand, the event was denounced as a form of normalisation. Anti-normalisation activists called upon the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Culture to call the performance off. However, the PA did not comply with this call, whereupon BDS supporters took action to disrupt the performance. They shouted abuse not only at the organisers and the participants

32 | Further information on the "co-resistance framework" in: PACBI, "Israel's Exceptionalism: Normalizing the Abnormal", *PACBI*, 31 Oct 2011, <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1749> (accessed 21 Apr 2015).

33 | Criteria include the right to resistance against the occupation, the establishment of full and equal civil rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel and the right of return of the Palestinians driven out of Israel in 1948.

34 | Cf. Khaled Abu Toameh, "Palestinians' 'Anti-Normalization' Movement", *Gatestone Institute*, 14 Apr 2014, <http://gatestoneinstitute.org/4270/palestinians-normalization-dancers> (accessed 13 May 2015).

but also at Palestinian and Indian government officials. Several activists were arrested during the ensuing melee. The Ministry of Culture subsequently put out

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an official statement, apologising to the organisers and participants for the incident. A spokesman for the BDS movement countered this by accusing the Authority of supporting the Israeli occupation by having the demonstrators arrested.<sup>35</sup> Not only does this incident demonstrate the different points of view in this area, it also illustrates how far the position of the Palestinian government differs from that taken by the anti-normalisation activists. This state of affairs has given rise to repeated clashes between the two sides.

2. Another incident, which was also picked up in the German media, involved disputes connected to the TV documentary *24h Jerusalem*.<sup>36</sup> After filming for the joint production of *Arte* and *Bayerischer Rundfunk* had begun, there were several attempts before it could be completed. To encourage an exchange and improve networking, the idea had been for both Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers to work on the production. However, the realisation of the project was repeatedly delayed by anti-normalisation activists who argued that the film did not show Jerusalem in all its facets and represented the occupation of the Palestinian East Jerusalem in a distorted light as something of a normal situation. In addition to calls for an immediate stop to cooperation, the Palestinian directors, film crews and protagonists also received direct and personal threats. And these took their toll, causing the Palestinians to withdraw from the project. Filming was stopped completely, as the producers did not want to make a film that presented the situation entirely from the Israeli perspective. While the project was given the go-ahead one year later, in April 2013, this was done on condition that Palestinians and Israelis would work in complete isolation from each other during the planning and filming. The film about Jerusalem thus unintentionally reflected a great deal of the city's everyday reality.

35 | Cf. Khaled Abu Toameh, "Palestinians: BDS Activists Are Troublemakers, Criminals", Gatestone Institute, 30 May 2014, <http://gatestoneinstitute.org/4334/palestinians-bds-trial> (accessed 13 May 2015).

36 | Cf. Hans-Christian Rössler, "Zwischen den Fronten des Nahost-Konflikts", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 Apr 2014, <http://faz.net/-gqz-7o8iw> (accessed 13 May 2015).

3. One example where cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis is not considered as falling into the category of normalisation involves the joint protests against the construction of the barriers. In this instance, Israeli and Palestinian organisations, representatives of civil society and frequently also religious representatives are working hand in hand. However, these instances represent exceptions rather than the rule. One of the reasons is the extensive list of criteria the anti-normalisation activists apply to their own evaluations. If interpreted strictly, these hardly leave any leeway, which means that even the slightest indication of normalisation is likely to provoke resistance. Also, opportunities for cooperation are very limited, as the group of Israelis prepared to engage in dialogue has also diminished steadily over recent years.
  
4. That said, there are groupings on both sides which deem the "cross-border" dialogue and cooperation necessary or which try to further them in their work. In many cases, this entails specialist events and projects promoting issue-specific dialogue, not so much for its own sake but usually to make progress in an area of joint interest. Issues that are of current interest to both sides, which should be discussed under consideration of political reality, tend to be at the forefront in this context. The Jordan River Rehabilitation Project is one example of successful cooperation between Palestinians, Israelis and Jordanians.<sup>37</sup> The organisers' main goal is to protect the joint ecological heritage in the Jordan Valley, which would be of benefit to all sides. Initiatives of this type engage local scientists for relevant environmental projects in order to obtain a regional understanding of the problem and then develop a joint strategy of how to reach decision-makers, the media and the broad public. The argument in favour of this issue-specific cooperation is that acute problems, particularly in the area of the environment, cannot wait for a political solution and require prompt joint action. However, even in the case of issue-specific dialogue projects, the complex political reality frequently hampers smooth cooperation, with the result that the realisation of projects of this type always faces great challenges.<sup>38</sup>

37 | Jordan River Rehabilitation Project/EcoPeace Middle East, [http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record\\_id=23](http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record_id=23) (accessed 21 Apr 2015).

38 | On the one hand, there are logistical problems, on the other hand it is increasingly difficult to find suitable new willing parties. The issue is not only whether people are interested in taking part in such projects, but also whether this might label them as "normalisers".



Members of the Young Group of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group find out about the situation of cross-border cooperation in the areas of environment and water on location at the Jordan river. | Source: © KAS Ramallah.

## IMPACTS

In view of the current political stalemate and the widening gulf between Israelis and Palestinians, it is likely that the Palestinian anti-normalisation movement will gain further support. Also, there is no indication that the evaluation criteria for what is classed as normalisation will be softened any time soon. However, the influence of the anti-normalisation activists on the government remains ambivalent. While frustration over the failed peace process and the lack of political progress can also be felt at government level, as illustrated by the change in political strategy, this has not led to the PA excluding the possibility of future dialogue with Israel or Israeli organisations at a political level. President Abbas still expresses his willingness to engage in political dialogue, even though the government thereby incurs the displeasure of the Palestinian population. Particularly where issues of basic services are concerned, the Palestinian leadership will have to continue negotiating with Israel in the medium term as well. Existing agreements cannot simply be terminated, nor will the Palestinians be in a position to become self-sufficient in the foreseeable future, in large part due to the occupation; Palestinians import some 98 per cent of electricity from Israel, the water supply in the West Bank is linked to Israel, and the security cooperation between the two sides is in the interest of both the PA and Israel.

**The anti-normalisation movement must give some thought to the question of whether and to what extent their position is weakening the peace camp on the Israeli side.**

There is currently no way to foresee where the internationalisation strategy pursued by the Palestinians will lead. A lasting and sustainable resolution of the conflict can only be achieved in bilateral negotiations. By that time at the latest, it will be necessary for both sides to have a partner in the respective other camp. But that can only happen if the two sides enter into an honest and open dialogue at an early stage. The anti-normalisation movement must therefore give some thought to the question of whether and to what extent their position is weakening the peace camp on the Israeli side. Because that stance is only likely to strengthen the forces that wish to maintain the status quo.<sup>39</sup>

The organisations involved in furthering Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, for their part, must be prepared to deal with the rise of the anti-normalisation movement. Dialogue projects have already become more complicated in terms of both planning and execution. For instance, it is increasingly difficult to find Palestinians prepared to take part in dialogue projects,<sup>40</sup> as this may make them direct targets of anti-normalisation campaigns. The resulting scepticism causes many Palestinians to refuse to participate in dialogue projects on principle. And those who are prepared to be less stringent in applying the evaluation criteria must reckon with hostility from anti-normalisation activists even if the government has officially approved their participation.

Ultimately, the willingness of Israelis and Palestinians to engage in dialogue can only be increased if a clear vision and willingness to find a resolution to the conflict are demonstrated at the political level. This is where external actors in particular – including Germany – can make a valuable contribution. As a recent survey conducted by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has shown,<sup>41</sup> no other country surpasses Germany in popularity among Israelis and Palestinians. Despite the Palestinians' realistic assessment of the close German-Israeli relations, many people in the West Bank and particularly in the Gaza Strip would like to see closer bilateral

39 | Cf. Dan Goldenblatt, "On anti-normalization: Joint Israeli-Palestinian activism must continue", +972, 16 Feb 2012, <http://972mag.com/on-anti-normalization-joint-israeli-palestinian-activism-must-not-be-stopped/35524> (accessed 13 May 2015).

40 | It is similarly difficult to find participants on the Israeli side, even though the Israelis may be motivated by different reasons.

41 | Cf. Michael Borchard/Hans Maria Heÿn, "The Holy Land and the Germans", KAS Study, Jan 2015, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.40104> (accessed 21 Jan 2015).

relations and a stronger German engagement in the Middle East. This important political capital and the high level of acceptance on both sides can be leveraged to reduce resentment on both sides, to strengthen existing channels of dialogue and to create new means of dialogue.

This paper was completed in April 2015.