



## The need of Europe in the Middle East peace process

The European Union bears the potentials to act as a fair partner in search of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. This search has been based for decades on the vision of a Palestinian state living in peace and conducting fruitful cooperation with Israel. After a new US administration came into office, much hope was bestowed on President Barack Obama who attempted to infuse into the peace process all the leverage of the only remaining superpower. However, following months of painstaking negotiations, the US-Administration rescinded on its approach of putting pressure on Israel even to accept a temporary settlement freeze. Although this was tantamount to the confession that the Oslo approach based on interim agreements is dead, the idea of the two-state settlement is still alive. Our argument is that the time is ripe to realise it.

In the light of this last failure, rather than continuing hasty actionism, the development of new ideas and approaches needs to be given priority, now. The mistakes of past initiatives must be avoided: the motto that to have (any) talk is preferable to have none has been proven wrong in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rather, a failed talk is very expensive since it diminishes mutual trust between the conflict parties, reduces hope among Palestinians and the Arab world that peaceful negotiations will ever lead to a breakthrough of Palestinian aspirations, and finally it does not reduce the dynamics of occupation in terms of a settlement policy.

US leadership's failures are due also to Europe's weaknesses. At the same time, past experiences in world politics exemplify that together the USA and the EU can reach significant results. Therefore, Europe which had proven in the past that it commands major capabilities complementary to the US role, is now called to step in. Thereby, it must be taken into account that the US leadership's main failure derived from its special relationship to Israel which implied that it was unable to induce Israel to concessions, whereas the EU has developed an approach of even-handedness: The right of Israel to live in secure borders and the Palestinian right of national self-determination are of equal legitimacy. The European Union's strength in the Middle East has always been its soft power skills. Today it is common wisdom, even in the US and in Israel, that what Europe sustained since the early 1970s is that Palestinian national self-determination should be realised and that a Palestinian state living in peaceful co-existence with Israel should be established.

In light of the failure of an approach to realise the idea of a two-state solution, one should first ask whether there are good alternatives to the *idea*. The only options are the establishment of a bi-national Palestinian-Jewish state or the prolongation of the status quo. The former is not a viable solution, the latter is unacceptable. Thus, we should ask whether there is a better alternative to the *approach* and how to achieve the only possible outcome: the creation of two states.



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There is an option indeed. The EU should—if possible in coordination with the USA and the Quartet on the Middle East—announce, firstly, that it will publish a map of the future borders of a Palestinian state at a precisely fixed date, whereby the basic orientation for fixing the borders would be based on those prior to the 1967 June War (including the option of one to one land swaps). Secondly, the EU would at the same time recognize Palestine as a state on the basis of these borders. We hereby ask the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Margaret Ashton, to prioritize EU foreign policy on this approach in order to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

This approach would embark on and should be coordinated with (a revised version of) the plan of EU-backed Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad whose aim to establish the infrastructure of a Palestinian state by August 2011 has achieved major progress. Both the Palestinians and the Israelis would then have strong incentives to do their homework before the deadline ends. Subsequently, the fundamental problem of formal asymmetry between Israel and Palestine which has been the main defect of the Oslo process would be overcome, thereby providing the negotiation process between the two parties with fresh opportunities and dynamics. At the same time, Europe would be committed to condemn any illegitimate use of force by what actor whomsoever and to put all its leverage to immediately end it.

Before the deadline ends, the Palestinians would have strong incentives to re-unify their governments. Hamas would have to declare its readiness to recognize Israel within the boundaries of 1949 without ifs and buts. The Palestinian Authority who already executed that by signing the Oslo Accords would have to convince its constituency to get a democratic mandate which they have so far avoided. The EU would have to support free and fair elections in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, at the same time declaring that it would recognize the government emerging out of them (though not necessarily all its political demands), including a national unity government with representatives from Hamas.

The Israelis would have the incentive to prepare for the end of occupation. They would not only be induced to freeze their settlement activities but to design plans as to which settlements to be dismantled, which to be kept, and what land to be offered to the Palestinians in compensation. By doing so, Israel for the first time in history would be motivated to define its own borders.

Following a European-sponsored international recognition of a Palestinian state, both parties could commence on settling issues that have thus far not been tackled. Thereby, apart from issues which are very difficult to resolve such as the conflict over Palestinian refugees, the parties would also have incentives to cooperate, for example, in terms of joint water, energy and economic projects, which could be realised with European

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support in the approach of the Schuman plan that paved the way for prosperous and long-lasting peace in Europe sixty years ago.

There can be no doubt that the ideas outlined above are ambitious and their implementation will be a complex task. However, when the European Political Cooperation was initialized forty years ago, who would have believed that the European demand for Palestinian self-determination would become common wisdom on the declaratory level? Now the time is ripe for 'walking the talk' by converting the European success on the declaratory level into reality on the ground by promoting the establishment of a Palestinian state living in peaceful coexistence with Israel.

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*Joint statement of Dr Hans-Gert Pöttering, MEP, former President of the European Parliament and Chairman of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Massimo d'Alema, former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Italy, Chairman of Italianieuropei and FEPS on the occasion of the dialogue on "The need of Europe in the Middle East peace process" organised by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Meseuro in Brussels on 25<sup>th</sup> of January, 2011.*