

Israel and the European Union in the Enlarged Neighborhood

SPEECH BY FOREIGN MINISTER TZIPI LIVNI AT SEMINAR

Thanks

Distinguished Ambassadors and Guests, I would like to express my appreciation to the various partners who helped put this event together, among them: Delegation of the European Commission to the State of Israel, The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Ben Gurion University – Center for the study of European Politics and Society, Bar Ilan University – Center for International Communications and Policy, Jean Monnet Workshop, And Members of my ministry

Opening

This International Workshop entitled "Israel and the European Union in the Enlarged Neighborhood" is most timely, as it has been organized precisely when a renewed thinking process is taking place in both sides, Israel and the EU, regarding the most appropriate formula for our future relations. It is also most appropriate, taking place on the eve of the German Presidency of the EU.

Israel and European Integration

Israel and the EU share common moral principles, heritage and tradition, values of Democracy, the respect of Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

The EU expressed this special relationship in its Declaration, adopted during a previous German Presidency of the EU, in the conclusions of the Essen European Council from December 1994, stating as follows:

"The European Council considers that Israel, on account of its high level of economic development, should enjoy special status in its relations with the EU on the basis of reciprocity and common interest...".

Israel, since its early days, recognized the importance of European Integration, based on these shared values and on the belief that close cooperation between Democratic States is the best guarantee for peace, stability, economic and social prosperity and cultural pluralism.

As a result of our special understanding, partnership and common heritage, our relations have developed significantly. The European Union has become Israel's largest trading partner. We have witnessed a deepening of the relations in the field of Scientific and Technological research.

There has been important progress in the development of mutual agreements, first and foremost the Association Agreement, which entered into force in June 2000, replacing the previous cooperation agreement signed more than 30 years ago, in 1975.

Further accomplishments have also been the association of Israel, as a first non-European country, to the Framework Program for R&D and the agreement on the participation of Israel in the development of Galileo – the European global satellite navigation system.

Recent Strategic Cooperation

The common strategic challenges have brought us even closer. Our political strategic dialogue has developed significantly in the past few years, and we can see the fruits of this dialogue in our increased political and strategic coordination and cooperation.

Contacts This Week

As testimony to our close political and strategic cooperation, I should mention the scope and depth of the Israeli-European contact just over this past week.

Over the past week, I visited France for bilateral discussions and met with the President and the Foreign Minister.

Over the past week I hosted in Israel the Foreign Minister of Austria, the Foreign Minister of Germany, the Candidate for the Presidency in France and the EU Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Solana. As these visits demonstrate, we have many issues of common interest to discuss.

Increased European Involvement in the Region

The developments in the political and strategic dialogue between Israel and the EU has led also to increased European involvement in the regional political issues, including the efforts to stabilize the situation in South Lebanon, in Gaza and in the efforts to challenge the Iranian nuclear threat.

This increased European involvement in the regional issues position Israel and the EU as close strategic partners, cooperating and standing together in facing the common threats which challenge us as a democratic community.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, as part of our efforts to bring about a full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701, Israel not only agreed but even led the idea of increased European involvement. This has led to the deployment of European troops, on Leba-

nese soil, leading the international force in these efforts.

I should stress that these forces are not there to defend Israel or promote pure Israeli interests, but to stabilize Lebanon and help the Lebanese government exercise its control and authority on all parts of Lebanese territory. These interests are shared by Israel and the EU, as well as the Lebanese government led by Seniora.

The most recent war in Lebanon was not a conflict between Israel and Lebanon. Though the war took place in Lebanon, it was the case of a rogue State, Iran, and its well-armed proxy, Hezbollah, taking advantage of a weak State, Lebanon, in an attempt to impose their agenda on the region.

In this challenge posed to us by the forces of extremism, Israel and the EU and the entire moderate community stand together.

Lebanon is still in a crisis situation. The forces of extremism, led by Syria and Iran, wish to topple the Seniora government, and to prevent justice in the form of a genuine international tribunal to investigate the assassination of Hariri. So also they wish to prevent full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701, in order to continue the smuggling in of weapons and the de-stabilization of the entire region.

This is a critical test for Lebanon and the international community. Success in the full and immediate implementation of resolution 1701, including the release of the Israeli hostages and the proper enforcement of the arms embargo, will be a success for the forces of moderation in the region. By the same token, failure will carry a high price.

Gaza

So also, in Gaza we have facilitated increased European involvement. Israel and the EU exchange views frequently, coordinate activity and presently European forces monitor the Rafah crossing.

Here again we see a bond between the camp of the moderates against the forces of extremism.

We face a Hamas led Palestinian Authority, refusing to adopt the three fundamental requirements of: renouncing terror, recognizing the right of Israel to exist and acceptance of all previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements.

These three requirements are fundamental. They are not an obstacle to peace or to the establishment of a responsible Palestinian state, but they are a crucial ingredient for their realization. They should not be open either to negotiation or to vague formulations.

Israel and the EU, together with moderate Palestinians, share the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

At the same time, Israel and the EU share the understanding that we cannot accept a situation in which a terrorist organization is regarded as a legitimate political partner, part of the governing entity of that country, while continuing its involvement in terror.

Therefore, we cannot compromise on the three requirements vis a vis the Hamas led Palestinian Authority, but we can and do work together in strengthening the moderates including the Presidency of Abu Mazen.

The recent declared ceasefire is a further attempt to stabilize the situation, and form a basis for further cooperation in the future.

Although there have been many Palestinian violations of this ceasefire, Israel continues to act with restraint, in order to promote hope in the region.

There is hope, due to the strong message sent out by the EU and the international community, insisting on the implementation of the three requirements and coming to terms with Israel. Due to this firm and uncompromising stand, there is hope for positive change.

We acknowledge EU's principled stand on this issue, and regard it as vitally important to continue in this spirit.

Iran

The EU is a key player in facing the challenge posed by the nuclear aspirations of the rogue state of Iran, and in the prevention of the proliferation of non-conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

This Iranian regime is a clear and present strategic threat to Israel, but it is no less a threat to the values of the EU, the international community and the security of the region and the world as a whole.

In fact, many countries in the Middle East - particularly the Arab/Sunni regimes - have an increasingly acute sense of the threat they face from a nuclear Iran.

As a whole, the EU takes this threat seriously. Yet, the delay tactics of the Iranian regime have bought them significant leverage, and time is of the essence. The breakthrough in their technological capability can happen sooner than we think.

One can still hear - from some capitals - hesitation and doubts. One can hear talk of the possible effect of oil prices, or the need to give more time - which, of course, the Iranian regime exploits only to move closer to nuclear weapon know-how and capability.

There are some who perceive the prospect of a nuclear armed Iran as a single, isolated, and somehow manageable, problem. They are deeply, and dangerously, mistaken.

If it becomes clear that the world is not going to seriously confront this threat, this can lead to a domino effect. Some countries in the region may seek protection in nuclear weapons of their own.

Others may feel compelled to appease or submit to the Iranian regime. In either case, we will face an unacceptably dangerous and volatile situation.

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It has become vital that the EU, as a key player in this issue, increase its efforts in preventing further delays, and proceed to the immediate implementation of effective sanctions, in addition to any other measure effective in preventing a nuclear Iran.

Common Agenda

These three issues which I have mentioned above, Lebanon, Gaza and Iran, demonstrate the necessity of close coordination and cooperation between Israel and the EU.

The common aspect of all three issues is the fact that Israel and the EU, along with other moderate countries, are in the same camp, sharing the same values, facing the same forces of extremism which threaten Israel, the EU and the entire international community alike.

The future of Israel-EU Relations – New Model

On the background of the growing challenges, we have to think about a new model for the relations between Israel and the EU, which will enable a significant upgrade of the Political and Security relations, as well as those in the Economic, Research, Cultural and Social/Human fields.

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Action Plan between Israel and the EU, adopted in December 2004, offer a very important foundation on which we can build the new model for our relations. This model should be based on the principle of "Differentiation" incorporated in the ENP, which enables the EU to structure its relations with the partner countries on the basis of their capabilities and mutual interests.

Important work has already begun in order to implement the Action Plan. For example, in the political chapter, cooperation started in the fields of Counter Terrorism, the reinforcement of cooperation in International Organizations and the fight against Anti-Semitism. Just the same, there is a need to further enhance the Political Dialogue in order to further improve mutual understanding, to overcome misperceptions and to de-

velop common tools needed to confront the Political and Security Challenges.

More hard work is needed – on both sides - to make the most of the existing possibilities for the accession of Israel to European Programs and Agencies in the various fields [such as energy, space cooperation, environment, judicial cooperation, culture, youth and more].

The time has come to implement the Essen Declaration and to accelerate the discussions on the development of a new strategic model for future enhanced relations between Israel and the EU.

This has to be based on the view that such a closer relationship is to the benefit of both sides and can contribute to the improvement of mutual understanding and trust.

As I emphasized during the last EU – Israel Association council, which took place in June this year, I truly believe that the road should ultimately lead us to a significant participation of Israel in the European Integration Project.

Thank You.