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# MOVING TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL **PEACE** CONFERENCE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Socialist Group Conference  
European Parliament  
Brussels 2-3 July 2007

MOVING TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

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Socialist Group in the  
European Parliament

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Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament

Gareth Evans, President and Chief Executive Officer  
of the International Crisis Group

Martin Schulz, PSE Group President

# Foreword



The Socialist Group in the European Parliament on 2-3 July 2007 organised a Conference in Brussels entitled "Moving towards an International Peace Conference for the Middle East". The aim of the event was to provide a forum for politicians, academics and high-level experts from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, the

United States, Norway, EU Member States, the Arab League and the United Nations to discuss in an informal environment the main political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the conflicts and the peace process in the Middle East.

We had the honour to welcome Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament, and Gareth Evans, President of the International Crisis Group, among the keynote speakers of the opening and closing sessions. However, in line with the aforementioned main aim of the event, the Conference was based on a series of round table discussions with the participation of the invited panel members and Members of the European Parliament. We were therefore most pleased to follow the intensive and fruitful exchange of views during the various panels as well as the working dinner.

In this booklet you will find the speeches delivered by the keynote speakers at the opening and closing sessions as well as a summary of the panel debates. Attached to the booklet you will find a brief video, prepared by the Secretariat of the Socialist Group, on the informal and friendly atmosphere of the Conference.

Many of the participants of the event have urged our Group to take further initiatives to support the peace process in the Middle East in order to contribute to a better understanding and an improved intercultural dialogue between Europe and the Arab world. We therefore have already decided to organise, in 2008, further meetings, seminars and conferences in this field and we very much hope that this Conference was only a first step in a long-term cooperation with all the participants and other like-minded partners who contributed to the success of the event.

*Pasqualina Napoletano*

*Jan Marinus Wiersma*

PSE Group Vice-Presidents



## Panel participants

ABU RASHID, Mansour	Chairman of the Amman Centre for Peace and Development
ALMEIDA SAMPAIO, Luis	EU Presidency Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Ambassador of Portugal to Algeria
ALPHER, Yossi	Co-editor of bitterlemons Palestinian-Israeli Crossfire, Former Special Adviser to Israeli PM Ehud Barak
ATOUT, Samah	Coordinator of the Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace
CASSINI, Giuseppe	Political Adviser to the Italian forces in UNIFIL
CHAZAN, Naomi	Former Member of the Knesset
CINGOLI, Janiki	Director of CIPMO Italian Centre for Peace in the Middle East
DAOUDI, Riad	Legal Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Syria
EVANS, Gareth	President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Crisis Group, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia
GARBER, Andrä	Head of Department at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
HADDADIN, Munther	Former Minister of Water and Irrigation of Jordan
KADRY SAID, Mohamed	Head of Military Studies Unit at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies
KARNI, Boaz	Treasurer of the Economic Cooperation Foundation
KINGSLEY-NYINAH, Michael	Head of the Executive Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

LEVY, Daniel	Director of Prospects for Peace Initiative
LIEL, Alon	Former Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel
MAHER, Ahmed	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt
MURPHY, Michael	Regional Director of the National Democratic Institute for International Relations in the West Bank and Gaza
OMIETANSKI, Janusz	Senior Expert on the Middle East
OTTE, Marc	EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process
PINEZ-PAZ, Ophir	Member of the Knesset
REIDGELUTH, Stuart	Project Manager at Toledo International Centre for Peace
RUDMAN, Mara Rudman	Senior Fellow at Center for American Progress
SBIH, Mohamed	Deputy Secretary General of the League of Arab States in charge of Palestine
SEVJE, Svein	Special Envoy for the Middle East at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway
SHTAYYEH, Mohamed	Director of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction, Former Minister of Public Works and Housing
SOLIMAN, Ibrahim	Director of Syria-Israel Project at the Institut for Middle East Peace and Development
STETTER, Ernst	Head of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Brussels Office
SUCHAREWICZ, Melody	Goodwill Ambassador of the Israeli TV
SUSSKIND, Simone	President of Actions in the Mediterranean
VIGILANTE, Antonio	Director of the United Nations Office in Brussels
ZAKOUT, Jamal	Former Member of the PLC, Director of the Palestinian Peace Coalition

# Opening session









## Pasqualina Napoletano PSE Group Vice-President Introductory Remarks

Dear Guests, dear High Representative, dear Members,

First of all I want to give you my warm thanks for being here today. This is something we usually do at the end of a conference, but in this case I think it is necessary to start from here. We are delighted to have such a large number of key people here for our discussions, experts and politicians that have come from different countries and different contexts, all of whom are ready to sit around a table to exchange ideas. As you can see, we chose a room that will allow us to have an open discussion – a discussion which, I am sure, will be very deep and fruitful, about an issue that is made extremely difficult by the seriousness of the current situation and, of course, the burden of history.

Evidently I'm talking about the conflict in the Middle East and about its core: the conflict that for too many decades has set Israelis and Palestinians against each other.

We are all aware of the fact that we have gone far beyond any limit in terms of the number of victims, the levels of insecurity for citizens and the suffering for the people involved. The occupation and the collective humiliation of a population

cannot create an environment where trust can flourish. If this is true, we need to start thinking not of conflict management but of the way to reach concrete solutions.

We all know the peace plans in detail: the Oslo Agreements, the Road Map, the Geneva Initiative. In this context, I would like to underline the importance of re-launching the Arab Plan – this Plan which includes the recognition of Israel, also has symbolic value regarding the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

At every decisive step these plans failed, or they now risk giving no result. There is an absence of the key elements needed for them to succeed – an absence of trust and an absence of the availability of each side to negotiate with the “other”, so often seen as the “enemy”.

Putting preconditions to agreements has not been helpful. It didn't help, for instance, by insisting that the Palestinians held free elections to vote for their Parliament if then we didn't recognise the results; as it wasn't equally useful to decide the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza without negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

We really need a turning-point. The bloody break-down between Palestinian factions will lead nowhere. This event is also the terrible fruit of the aggravation of the humanitarian crisis, of the social and economical situation in the Gaza Strip and of its unacceptable isolation.

The constitution of an emergency government in Ramallah, which the whole international community suddenly gave his support to, does not have to create any illusions for us. It is not certain that this could bring more security. This deep division between the Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank, if it is to be long-lasting, will make any negotiation process unsustainable.



We cannot imagine – and I am sure that our friends are also thinking the same – that Fatah will change back again into a single party, that Hamas is cancelled out and that, at the same time, we will be able to guarantee Israel's security. We can't ignore, finally, the risk of radicalisation and the possible penetration of external extreme forces linked to the terrorism of Al-Qaeda.

The solution that we all want – two states living in peace and security side by side – needs bigger ambition and stronger determination to be realised, and it must, above all, be part of a regional solution. This will also require the Israeli government's commitment. On top of this, it is clear that without an agreement with Syria and without the strengthening of Lebanon's democratic institutions a peaceful solution will not be able to progress seriously.

The negotiations with Syria could have positive consequences not only on the Golan issue and on Hezbollah's strategies but it could also have an impact on Hamas. It would also be proof for Israel of the positive effects of the Arab League Initiative.

The efforts to stabilise the situation in Iraq, after the tragic war and all the negative consequences that it has brought, and the need for a deal with Iran, are also key elements that need to be tackled in the context of pursuing peace in the Middle East. We also need to take into account the increasing role of Iran and of the Shiite influence in the whole region.

We will have a deep discussion on these issues, and also on the basis of the contribution that Mr Javier Solana will make in his speech.

The four panels in the programme contribute in developing the same topic.

We have decided, therefore, upon a very informal approach to our work here today, and we have asked the participants to take part in the debate freely.

I want to say very frankly that we would like to go further than the reiterating of your own points of view, as legitimate as these views are. We are looking for the introduction of new analysis and suggestions.

We know that our friends from the countries involved in the conflict in particular are waiting for a different, stronger commitment from Europe and the international community. Also for this, we will carefully evaluate the future work of Mr Tony Blair in his role as representative of the Quartet.

On behalf of the Socialist group in the European Parliament, it would give us great satisfaction and hope if we could succeed in the role of "facilitator", the role we have chosen to take on.

Thank you.



## Javier Solana

### EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

*Javier Solana opens the session by expressing his thanks to the Socialist Group for initiating the conference. In his speech he mentions all the relevant factors which define the situation on the ground and offers a clear analysis*

*on the way forward to a peaceful solution of the Middle East conflict recalling the continuous and significant role of the European Union, also inside the Quartet.*

*Following is a short summary of his speech:*

You have to look at the Middle East from the regional perspective in order to really understand what is taking place. Events are connected. You cannot take what happened in Gaza separately from what happened in Lebanon.

It is very important that all the countries in the Arab League voted unanimously to condemn what Abbas characterised as a coup in Gaza. Abbas has asked us for our political support. Egypt and Jordan responded positively and organised a meeting for Abbas and Olmert in Sharm El Sheikh. It is the right approach. We will work with the Arab League. Abbas does not need our love – he needs our help. We hope this meeting will not be a one-off but rather start a process that can eventually lead to a conference on the Middle East and provide help to Abbas.



We will not abandon the people in Gaza. Europe will continue to help alleviate the humanitarian situation.

A political horizon is fundamental. Abbas must be able to offer the people a political perspective. We have to help him now – the government of Fayyad will not last forever. In the past we did too little too late. We must avoid falling into the same traps of the past. Abbas has mentioned holding early elections but has not fixed a date which is difficult given the circumstances with the legislative council. At some point we will probably see some form of national reconciliation through an electoral process.

Is this the right time for a Madrid style peace conference? I have my doubts. This requires preparation that should be led by the Quartet and Arab countries. The last meeting of the Quartet plus the Arabs and the parties themselves did not take place. We

hope to resume this mechanism by the end of the month – this is the right kind of mechanism to convene an international conference.

It is 40 years after the 1967 war. A solution will be based on something close to those borders as agreed by the Arab Peace Initiative. We support this initiative whole-heartedly.

*Following his speech High Representative Javier Solana replied to a number of questions from the floor on a variety of topics ranging from, among others, the assistance to the Palestinians, a possible international UN force or the situation in Lebanon to the mandate of Tony Blair, the Arab Peace Initiative or the role of Syria in the peace process*

## Answers to questions:

- 1. Our assistance to the Palestinians has kept the institutions of the Palestinian afloat – we should not be ashamed of that.*
- 2. An international presence on the ground will ultimately be necessary – we already have people on the ground in the Palestinian Territories. The backbone of UNIFIL is European. If we do it right in Lebanon, it will be a good example of an international force under a UN banner.*
- 3. What happens in Lebanon is crucial. The process to elect a president will start in September. We will have between then and December to try and broaden the scope for agreement.*
- 4. The European Union is committed to playing a political role as well as economic and development assistance role.*





5. *The mandate of Tony Blair is clear. It is to help with the construction of a Palestinian state.*
6. *I do not agree with everything that the former UN Envoy to the Middle East, Alvaro de Soto, said about the Quartet. It would not be fair to say we have committed grave errors every day.*
7. *We support the Arab Peace Initiative whole-heartedly. Although the Arab League as an institution has a mixed record, the Peace Initiative belongs to them and is a sign of progress.*
8. *We agreed to move to direct assistance from day one. This is already taking place through certain UN agencies. We are providing extra money and we have the TIM. TIM will be maintained for some time. We will see for how long to keep it.*
9. *Abbas was careful not to mention a date for new elections. I expect that we would recognise these elections. We must recognise elected governments but we do not have to help every elected government. We will have to decide collectively how we decide to assist.*

10. *Syria could be a lot more constructive. Syria showed a new and positive approach at the Iraq neighbours meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh. I hope this will be a trend. Their role in Lebanon however is a source of great concern. I would like to see that change. We support a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.*



# Panel summaries





Monday 2 July

## Panel I : The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the plans for peace

Chairwoman: **Véronique de Keyser** MEP, PSE Group, Belgium

Key questions in the focus of the panel:

### *The West Bank first?*

Which are the consequences of the “Gaza is dead – long life to the West Bank” approach? Which strategy can prevent the de facto partitioning of the Palestinian Territories in the long run?

### *President Abbas: who's leader?*

In order to keep the situation in Palestine under control and to hold efficient peace talks with Israel, President Abbas wants and needs to be viewed as the leader of all Palestinians instead of being a geographically and politically limited actor. The current ways of supporting him, by providing financial assistance without giving a real vision of a permanent status agreement, may have controversial or even counterproductive effects.

### *How to restart the interpalestinian dialogue?*

Many think, in line with the recent appeal made by President Mubarak in Sharm El Sheikh, that the interpalestinian dialogue, with the participation of the main Palestinian factions, should be urgently revived. What are the main conditions and obstacles in this field?

### *How to deal with Hamas?*

Regarding Hamas, it is a legitimate question to ask of how successful the international community's strategy of isolation after the elections in 2006 was, including the isolation of Hamas ministers in the National Unity Government. Is the further isolation of Hamas a solution, or will this result in further radicalisation built on desperation?

### *Financial and economic assistance in Gaza: which consequences?*

The economic problems in Gaza have resulted in a deep humanitarian crisis. This humanitarian crisis has strong political impacts. The population of Gaza therefore needs financial and economic assistance both to survive and to restart the inter-palestinian dialogue. This economic assistance therefore is essential to restart the political process.

### *Prime Minister Olmert: does he have the power to offer peace?*

With regard to recent political developments in Israel many are afraid that Prime Minister Olmert does not have the power to think – as published in a recent article by Daniel Levy – “big, regional and realistic”, instead of thinking “narrow, parochial and dogmatic”, any more? Is this true? If it is, what will be the mid-term consequences of this situation?

Véronique de Keyser observes that since the Oslo Agreements there has been a succession of peace plans and each time one tends to believe in them. But the real question today is to know whether the context is favourable to a new peace initiative. The situation is very difficult and one has to come back to the question of peace: a just and durable peace. The question of refugees must also be addressed in order to create peace. Nevertheless, the current conditions are unfavourable in this regard. According to Ms De Keyser we are today confronted with



a divided Palestine and the question is how to launch dialogue between the Palestinians again. New democratic elections in Palestine may raise further problems, namely the problem of recognising Hamas in case they would win again.

**Marc Otte** is of the view that the problem is not linked to a “shortage” of peace plans. The lack of political will, the shortage of capacity and the lack of strong political leaders are the real obstacles. The possibility of a just and lasting peace without Hamas is uncertain. This question becomes crucial as Hamas is an important grouping with powerful support. Palestinians need to decide themselves without any paternalism.



**Ophir Pinez-Paz** stresses that following the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, Israel has obtained a “Hamastan”. He expresses deep concerns regarding “little Iran” which is being established in Gaza including all the risks linked to the presence of Al-Qaeda acting behind the scenes. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this: Israel cannot accept the events currently taking place in Gaza, a peace with Hamas is impossible, President Abbas is being considered as a valid partner by Israel, it is in the interest of Israel to reinforce the position of President Abbas and to work towards the creation of a modern Palestinian state which is not fundamentalist. Peace needs to be build on an international base with the participation of the regional powers and the Quartet and based on a multilateral and regional approach.

**Mohamed Shtayyeh** calls for prudence and says that President Abbas is not on an equal footing with Prime Minister Olmert. Palestine is the “last colony of this planet” and an end needs to be put to the Israeli occupation. Other aspects are nothing but details. If Hamas wins the elections it will gain even more legitimacy. If the Quartet is unable to impose the roadmap, its efficiency will be questionable. Europe must play a more active role and use its economical weight.

**Mohamed Sbih** stresses that the peace process must be kept alive. The Palestinian people has suffered a lot and humiliation and poverty has pushed some into extremism and fundamentalism. The Arab League is engaged on the peace process and its initiative is not without content but it is the result of previous initiatives. While the Arab League is showing great commitment to the peace process Israel has rejected the Arab Peace Initiative. He questions the way of how to talk to the Israeli government if the latter has announced the construction of 20.000 colonies of supplementary housings between Jerusalem and the West Bank. He emphasises the continued efforts in



order to persuade Hamas to return to the negotiations in parallel to the desperation of the population because, on the one hand, the result of the elections has not been recognized and, on the other hand, because the colonisation and the occupation remain. As for the reasons that all these peace initiatives have failed, Europe has not yet played its role and has not fully supported the Arab League. That goes to show that there is no real political will. European policy based on double standards in favour of Israel must be stopped.

**Janiki Cingoli** emphasises that the international community did not sufficiently support the Palestinian National Unity Government: this government was considered legal but was never properly recognised by the international community. The lack of international support has resulted in a dramatic situation in Gaza. A comprehensive approach as well as solutions are



needed including both Gaza and the West Bank. Negotiations cannot be held only with Fatah: Hamas must be involved. A regional approach has to be elaborated and applied: Lebanon and Syria have an important role to play in these negotiations.

**Naomi Chazan** stresses that the situation nowadays is more and more complicated but this cannot be used as an excuse for doing nothing on a diplomatic level. Many agreements have already been adopted on the principles and the main objectives but no agreement has been reached on the details and the way leading to these goals. A concrete initiative precisising the nature of the relations between the two states living side by side in peace and stability is very much needed. The Palestinian Authority is considered a quasi-state but statehood cannot be acknowledged as long as occupation continues.

**Munther Haddadin** wonders why everyone is talking about Hamas terrorism and extremism while no one is worried about Jewish fanaticism as well as the settlements. No UN Security Council resolution has been adopted against Israel and the international community continues with its policy based on double standards in favour of Israel, especially in the field of the annexation and confiscation of land which should be punished under international law.

**Jamal Zakout** stresses that we live the destruction and deterioration of the situation in Gaza since 60 years. If hope is given to the population, there would be neither fundamentalism nor terrorism.

**Mohamed Kadry Said** stresses the extremism of the Israeli state which favours the extremism of Hamas.

**Proinsias de Rossa**, in closing the work of the first panel, underlines that leading a dialogue and to make efforts for mutual understanding and confidence is essential. A timetable to end occupation and to build a Palestinian state must be put in place.



## Panel II: The political and regional dimension of the conflicts in the Middle East

Chairwoman: **Lilli Gruber** MEP, PSE Group, Italy

Key questions in the focus of the panel:

### *Syria first?*

Talks with Syria may not only have an impact on the future of the Golan Heights and on Hezbollah's options but also on a series of other key aspects, including Hamas' role and Israel's position to reap benefits from the Arab Peace Initiative.

### *A Peace Park on the Golan Heights: wishful thinking?*

Several of the participants were involved in the elaboration of the idea of establishing a peace park (or international park or nature reserve) on the Golan Heights, with the aim of protecting the area's exceptional richness and water resources. What is the future of the Golan Heights and this plan? Which other confidence-building measures may be foreseen in this area?

### *Lebanon: what is on the horizon?*

What is on the horizon in Lebanese politics: stabilisation or increased political tensions with the risk of returning to civil war? What is the impact of other factors, notably the political influence of Syria and the explosion of violence in the Palestinian refugee camps, on the Lebanese political arena?

### *The role of the Arab states*

The Arab League has proved its readiness and capacity to be a leading and key actor in finding a lasting peace in the Middle East. How can the moderate Arab states – notably Egypt and Jordan, which have a relationship with both the USA and Israel – and Saudi Arabia, which was especially active in the past months, support the peace process? What is the impact of the relations between Sunni and Shia communities, following the conflict in Iraq in particular, on the efforts aimed finding a lasting peace in the region?

*What is the impact of the increasing political influence of Iran in the Middle East on the peace process?*

### *Stabilisation vs. destabilisation*

The difficult process of stabilisation in Iraq and the fragile situation in some other areas of the region give room for manoeuvre to terrorist organisations and networks. Which steps should be taken in order to prevent intensified terrorist activities in the Middle East, contributing to the destabilisation of the region?

Lilli Gruber underlines the role of political Islam in shaping the peace process in the Middle East. According to a survey published by the Richard Harris Research Centre, a majority of EU citizens are convinced that President Bush and his government constitute a major obstacle to achieving peace and stability in the region. This survey shows again that the majority of the population in the Arab world thinks that the US has lost its credibility in the Middle East. Europe should therefore play a bigger role in promoting peace and stability and tackling the existing conflicts in the region. The West has to be realistic and talk to all countries and groups concerned, including Syria and Iran, and examine the role of Shia communities in the region and in Iraq in particular. The dangerous situation in Iraq may have a considerably negative impact on the region as a whole.



**Riad Daoudi** underlines the fact that the situation in Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict is a serious threat to international peace and security. The policy adopted by the US administration has worsened the situation and resulted in an increase of fundamentalist groups' activities in the region. Part of the responsibility for the situation should be attributed to Israel. Syrian leadership supports the re-activation of the peace process seeking a comprehensive settlement for all conflicts and disputes. The peace process launched in 1991 is the most appropriate framework of this process and the US must be an active participant. An international conference for the Middle East is needed in order to resume bilateral negotiations. The EU can play a major role in promoting this international forum and give new dynamic to the peace process. Syria is ready to re-open the negotiations if two conditions are being met: if Israel is ready to do so and if no preconditions are introduced. It would be an



illusion to think that it is possible to sign a peace agreement in the name of all Palestinians with Mahmud Abbas. Nevertheless, other parts of the Arab Plan are realistic and the opportunity to sign an agreement with Syria is unique. Both Israel and Syria are ready to negotiate.

**Alon Liel** finds Mr Daoudi's words very encouraging. Israel is ready for peace talks with Syria. There is a unique opportunity to reach peace on the basis of a regional agreement solving the issue of the Golan Heights as well. US interference in Syrian-Israeli relations may be extremely dangerous and even lead to war. The EU and Tony Blair should be key mediators facilitating peace talks. The situation in Palestine is very complicated. Nevertheless this cannot be an excuse to abandon or slow down the peace process which should reflect the Arab Plan. The Palestinian issue cannot be solved in the near future. The occupation is the key problem and the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza is a positive step forward. However, it will be impossible to persuade the Israeli public opinion to evacuate the settlements and leave the West Bank to President Abbas as long as the Gaza Strip is under the control of Hamas.

**Giuseppe Cassini** gives an overview on the situation in Lebanon and refers to a recent attack on UNIFIL soldiers. One out of seven Lebanese citizens is armed. The source of the attack against UNIFIL was not Hezbollah: it could be either a terrorist group or a group of Palestinians living outside the camps. Due to the difficult living conditions the refugee camps are easily infiltrated by terrorist groups. There are sources of danger which can provoke a civil war in Lebanon: both the majority and the opposition have adopted a more rigid position towards each other, Lebanese population is resorting to fatalism, the police and the army will not cooperate with each other in case of hostilities, various factions are re-arming and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities are not being respected. In the Riyadh



Declaration the Arab League made it clear that it did not want to play an active role in Lebanese internal affairs. The EU should convince Lebanon to dismiss the government and create a new one which stands for national unity. Lebanon is an independent country and its neighbours have to respect this fact. Europeans could be efficient mediators between Lebanon and Syria.

**Ibrahim Soliman** describes the situation in the Middle East as “a mess”. The Middle East is facing a dramatic crisis, especially in Iraq, the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon. With regard to the current favourable conditions, settling the Israel-Syria conflict should be a priority due to the fact that resolving the Palestinian problem is impossible in the near future. Therefore, if both issues were to be discussed at one single international conference, there is a serious risk of not solving any of them. Peace between Israel and Syria is possible and is not a matter



of a peace process but a decision by the leaders of both countries. Israel must declare its readiness to talk to the Syrian President. Once Syria will be involved in the peace process, this will help Israel and the United States to solve the Palestinian problem as well. Syria is the key player in stabilizing the situation in the region but the country will not act unless the West in general and the United States in particular engage in talks with the country. Although the Palestinian problems are too complicated to be solved in the near future Syria is willing to support the efforts aiming at settling the issue. The United States failed in Iraq and, having presented no evidence, put the blame for all the problems on Syria. The West must talk to Syria and not dictate to Syria.

**Joseph Alpher** agrees that the vast majority of the issues between Israel and Syria have already been negotiated but that there are new issues to be discussed: e.g. Syria's relations with

Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas. Syria and Israel could and should start negotiations without American participation, at least in the beginning. When it comes to the Arab Peace Initiative, it is obvious that problems cannot be solved overnight. Israeli citizens need a positive signal from the Arab countries. Israelis and Arabs have to engage in a dialogue over the issue of Palestinian refugees. Regarding the regional dimension even some Arab states advise Israel not to negotiate with Syria. The threat of Iran and the fragile situation in Iraq have to be discussed as well. Europe may be a key partner in facilitating this dialogue.

**Mohammed Sbih** underlines that a peace agreement will take a long time to be achieved. Syria has always supported the Arab Peace Initiative. Those claims stating that some Arab countries are against Syria's engagement in the peace process are not true.

**Melody Sucharewich** says that the situation in Palestine, and the fragmented political scene in particular, does not favour peace talks. However, the current situation could be a positive momentum which could give new impetus to political developments. New channels of communication should be created, such as the economic channel through which entrepreneurial regional confederations between Israeli, Palestinians and Lebanese people should be encouraged – with the support of the EU. This initiative could pave the way for peace talks in the future.

**Mohammed Shtayyeh** emphasises that all peace tracks are interrelated. None of them should be favoured to the disadvantage of another. There are two divergent military strategies confronting each other: that of Iran and of Israel, and a political one, expressed by the Arab Peace Initiative. The two military

strategies are trying to dominate to the detriment of the political strategy proposed by the Arab League which can only be judged on the basis of concrete implementation experiences.

**Riad Daoudi** underlines that the various tracks of the peace process have to be reflected by any international peace conference on the Middle East. An agreement between Syria and Israel will create a better atmosphere to deal also with the issues of Hezbollah and Iran. When it comes to US participation in the negotiations, this is an Israeli precondition. Peace with Syria and Iran are among the Israeli-Arab issues to be discussed.

**Jamila Madeira** concludes that none of the parties should avoid responsibility and all of them should be actively involved in the peace process. Political developments and negotiations should always reflect on the situation and the everyday's life of the people in the region.



## Working dinner

Introductory remarks: **Hannes Swoboda**  
MEP, PSE Group Vice-President

**Hannes Swoboda** emphasizes some key points and requirements related to the efforts aimed at finding a lasting peace in the Middle East. First and foremost, the right for all people to live in peace in their own viable state, within secure and internationally recognized borders, with special regard to Israelis, and Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. If the Quartet wants to achieve this goal it must consider the Arab Peace Initiative as the basis of these efforts and must support its implementation. Key aspects in this field are the question of 1967 borders and the refugees' right to return. The European Union, the Quartet and the international community must realize that they made several mistakes in the past years and months. One of these was the blockade against the Palestinian Authority, following the elections in 2006, which contributed to the fall of the Palestinian National Unity Government as well. We have to learn from these mistakes and we have to listen too, and seriously think about those opinions criticizing the Quartet's policy, such as Mr De Soto's recent report. Based on these experiences we must guarantee that the result of democratic and fair elections will always be respected as a means of expression of the people's will. On the other hand,



we always have to insist on the rejection of violence and terrorism of all kinds. Violence is also the confiscation of land or homes, or the separation of families by building a wall or a fence. Last but not least, with regard to the extremely complex nature of the various interlinked conflicts in the Middle East, the contribution of all states that want to participate in the dialogue and support the common efforts to find a just and lasting peace in the region must be welcomed. The door should be open to everybody, including Syria and Iran if they are ready to contribute to a lasting peace . Nevertheless, it must be clear that no country has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country. This will always be rejected by the European Union and the international community.

Tuesday 3 July

## Panel III: The human dimension of the conflicts in the Middle East

Chairman: **Carlos Carnero González** MEP, PSE Group, Spain

Key questions in the focus of the panel:

### *The human dimension of the conflicts: a missing puzzle?*

Discussion about peace and democracy in the Middle East is concentrating on “high-politics” in general and less attention is being paid to people’s daily life. On the other hand, efforts aimed at finding a just and lasting peace in the region can lose both their potency and their mass appeal if they do not deliver the necessary goods to the people. The dehumanisation of the various conflicts in the region may have serious consequences on the population in general and on the young generation in particular.

### *Israel: what are the consequences?*

What are the consequences of decades of conflicts and the current situation on the Israeli society? What are the experiences and effects of the existing people to people initiatives?

### *Social dimension: the Islamic groups’ arena?*

Various Islamic groups have been effective advocates for, and implementers of social programs in many of the countries in the region, and have won considerable public support through the



provision of public services. What are the reasons that, by contrast, the secular and democratic parties are sometimes less successful in developing and implementing an adequate social policy?

*Religious dimension: myths and reality*

Viewing Islam through a monolithic lens and forgetting about the various contexts and the major differences in ideology and outlook is a major mistake. When it comes to political Islam, it is important therefore to make a distinction between forces of violent radical Islam and political Islam. While the proliferation of Islamist groups is an inevitable consequence of democratisation, their radicalism is not. On the other hand, externally imposed regime change is inevitably leading to Islamist radicalism.

*A common ground*

Dialogue between civilisations and religions must be based on common ground. We are convinced that aspirations for social progress and social justice, the fight against corruption, and the democratic fight against inequality and abuse are key elements of such a common ground. One especially important factor in this field is the respect for human rights, with special regard to the rights of women and their role in society.

**Carlos Carnero González** points to the human dimension of the Middle East conflict and stresses that the main problem is to reach a satisfying level of quality of life for the populations of the region. The notion of “satisfying level of quality of life” comprises all the problems linked to poverty, the survival of a population confronted with daily dangers, citizenship, the consequences for Israel after so many years of conflict, the future of the Gaza strip etc. The religious dimension, above all, must be an element of dialogue and not of confrontation as stated in the theory of the “Alliance of Cultures”. This theory is an antidote against



radicalism. Last but not least he communicates his emotion and solidarity with the families of the Spanish victims who recently were killed in attacks in Yemen and with the families of the soldiers killed in Lebanon.

**Jamal Zakout** reminds that the promises of dialogue made to the Palestinians at the time of the Oslo Agreements were replaced by an embargo policy and the destruction of the Palestinian institutions which was aggravated by the building of the separation wall or the instalment of colonies. This has led to an isolation of the Palestinian territories and to a reduction of natural resources by 50 per cent. The unemployment rate is at 70 per cent and the access points to the Gaza strip are closed. Mr Zakout stresses the urgent need of elementary services in that zone in which the state attorney has been sacked by Hamas. Assuring the elementary needs to the population of Gaza is a means of putting an end to the Hamas putsch which will survive

as long as aid is not arriving. Nevertheless, the Palestinian question and the catastrophic situation in Palestine is not only a humanitarian issue. The success of the urgency government brought in by President Abbas depends on the police forces and the action taken on the ground.

**Yossi Alpher** comes back to the errors committed by Israel such as the construction of the wall and the presence of colonies but also mentions the suicide attacks and the violent acts of Palestinians. The consequence for Israel is to face an enhanced extremism. The Palestinian attempt to build a state has failed because of internal clashes and violence. Radical groups have taken control and shown their real aims and agenda. When Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, Palestinians responded with terror, rockets and violence. Yet there are more human contacts and more interaction between the actors in the region than in any other conflict past or present. Contacts between Palestinians and Israelis have taken place more on a humanitarian level than on a political one. Informal gatherings and meetings of representatives of NGOs and the civil society are regularly being organised. Such meetings certainly have to be encouraged but cannot solve the conflict. Terrorism and violence is not necessarily the product of poverty and misery. Human suffering can indeed lead to a sense of frustration and have a tremendous impact on the population but terror has to be considered as something apart: it is rooted in an ideology based on its supporters. One has to think globally and identify the links between all terror attacks: the suicide car bomber which has killed at least 7 people in Yemen, 9/11, attacks in London and in Madrid etc., all of which are the result of widespread corruption and poor leadership. The key problem today is the shortage of political capacity and the lack of leadership. One solution to tackle the issue of violence and menace to which Israel is confronted would be to find genuine leaders for the Palestinian nation. The boycott against Israel, which encourages not to buy Israeli goods or to get in contact with Israeli academics only is



hindering the peace process as it hits the most productive aspects of human interaction. A dialogue between Syria and Israel is essential and the readiness of Syria to talk to Israel is what everyone in this meeting room is wishing for.

**Michael Kingsley-Nyinah** mentions the humanitarian needs and the necessity to establish the conditions for the independence and autonomy of Palestine. The growing demand of the Palestinian population towards NGO's is a direct consequence of the absence of strong institutions. A just solution only can be found if the principle that peace cannot coexist with occupation and colonisation is universally recognised. Palestinians have the right to an independent and sovereign state. Their aspiration is deeply rooted in the fundamental rights for freedom, self-determination and independence. The lack of these fundamental rights has resulted in frustration and misery. The daily life of the Palestinians has been shattered by the wall and the growth of the colonies. The rise of the number of colons resulted into a

rise of violence committed by the colonisers themselves such as physical attacks and the poisoning of wells and cattle. Preoccupation about the human dimension must be predominant on all other preoccupations. It is necessary to put an end to occupation and thus lead the Palestinians out of their isolation. The international community must re-evaluate its role and become a credible mediator bringing all interlocutors together and providing that the human dimension is always recognised and respected. A lasting peace can only be based on the freedom and dignity of all Palestinians.

**Naomi Chazan** underlines that those imposing the boycott on Israel are entirely missing the basic target as such boycotts are not encouraging dialogue. Palestine is not a state: it has no sovereignty and independence so it cannot be called a failed state either. As long as there is no Palestinian statehood, Israel is responsible for what is going in Gaza and the West Bank.

**Mohamed Sbih** is of the view that the starting point for dialogue is an "alliance of cultures". The Arab League is working on promoting dialogue between cultures while Israel is pushing for a clash of cultures and is using this concept as an excuse to justify occupation, colonisation, annexation of land and settlement-building. This is the real problem and at the core of the conflict. Terrorism does not stem from 11 September 2001. Every destructive act on someone else is terrorism whatever the method used: there is no major difference between terrorist attacks or killings of Palestinian political leaders on the one hand and the bombing of the Palestinian population on the other.

**Proinsias de Rossa** refers to the situation in Northern Ireland and says it is regrettable that during a conflict one always looks for a victim rather than for a common ground of understanding.



Poverty does not create terrorism as its roots are foremost of ideological nature. The problem of terrorism also has its roots in the recruitment of youngsters coming often from underprivileged families and who have nothing to lose. Refugee camps are the largest “pools” of recruitment. This does not mean at all that terrorists are necessarily poor or badly educated but it is obvious that people living in miserable conditions are more vulnerable and may easily be charmed by terrorist ideologies.

**Luisa Morgantini** underlines the importance of Israeli doctors who treat the population on the ground, regardless of their nationality or their religion. Thousands of young Israelis condemn the wall of separation. Nevertheless, neither should one forget about cases such as the one of a Palestinian girl who died at an Israeli checkpoint because Israeli soldiers did not let her reach the nearest hospital. Talking about the human



dimension involves also considering the situation of all Palestinians who are denied access to the Territories. There are many examples of people being tortured because they think that only peace can be the solution to the conflict. A solution to the conflict cannot be brought about if justice is not rendered.

**Munther Haddadin** condemns those who refuse to acknowledge certain aspects of the conflict: for instance the Palestinian ambulances which cannot go everywhere. The wall of separation in the first instance separates Palestinians from other Palestinians. Israel has considerably contributed to strengthening Hamas in order to combat President Arafat. The ideology fostered by Israel is resulting in terrorising children, destroying houses and committing targeted killings. It is true that the Syrians have refused to talk to Israel for a while but one should not forget that Israel has refused to talk to the Palestinian Authority as well.

**Mohammed Shtayyeh** reminds that daily violence and tremendous abuses are perpetrated against the Palestinian people whose sufferings are ignored by the international community. Such negative elements cannot but avert all chances for a long term peace: Palestinian ambulances are not allowed to reach hospitals and the wall not only separates Palestinian from Israelis but also Palestinians from Palestinians. The international community should react immediately by giving up ignoring Israel's discrimination and racism. Europe should intervene and foresee a boycott in order to teach Israel "the lesson Israel has never been taught". This solution worked out in South Africa, and so will it work out in Israel.





## Panel IV: The role of the European Union and the international community in finding a just and lasting peace in the Middle East

Chairman: **Richard Howitt** MEP, PSE Group, United Kingdom

Key questions in the focus of the panel:

*Is this perhaps not too late?*

The European Union and the international community have recently changed their policy towards the Palestinian Authority and its government. Nevertheless, it is still a legitimate question: is this perhaps not too late? Would this breakdown of civil order not have been preventable had we funded aid earlier and not submitted to the strategy of not talking with Hamas?

*Preconditions and unilateralism do not help*

According to the experiences, neither preconditions nor unilateralism help finding peace in the Middle East. They did not work in the case of the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from Gaza or the elections in Palestine in 2006 and they did not help in the case of the Palestinian National Unity Government either. What is an adequate way and forum of finding a solution to the various conflicts in the Middle East, with special regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Which role can an international peace conference for the Middle East play in this process?



*Which are the right steps to take?*

Peace will arrive to the Middle East as a result of a complicated process of negotiation. The first step must be a stabilisation of the situation in the crisis areas, notably in Gaza and in Lebanon, by reaching a cease-fire and implementing existing agreements. This requires, in the case of Gaza, a direct or indirect dialogue with Hamas. The stabilisation should be followed by a series of honest confidence-building measures. Nevertheless, confidence-building can only be helpful if it is resulting in a permanent status agreement for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also for other conflicts in the region.

*International peacekeeping forces in the region?*

Which role should international peacekeeping forces play in stabilising the situation and in implementing existing agreements in the Middle East?

### *A UNSC resolution?*

Should the parameters of a permanent status agreement be elaborated by the Quartet, with the active participation of the European Union, and in close cooperation with the Arab League and key countries in the region? How could the European Union find its own voice within the Quartet? Should the parameters of a permanent status agreement be endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution?

**Richard Howitt** points to some basic questions that need to be discussed: how and when can the direct aid to the Palestinian Authority be re-established, what kind of role can the EU play in order to facilitate creating stability in the region, should the EU's position towards Hamas change, what should be the EU's role and approach if new elections will take place in Palestine, what other contributions could be made to promote peace etc.?

**Luis de Almeida Sampaio** underlines that one should concentrate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict indeed but should also consider other interconnected crises in the region as all these crises have to be tackled at the same time. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the key element: no other crisis in the region can be solved unless a solution has been found to that conflict. There is need for a new engagement. The support of leading Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia is crucial in this process. We have to face a volatile situation in the region. Thus, it is very difficult to lead the process towards a lasting peace. The first challenge is to assure that any going backwards should be avoided. It is fundamental that Palestinians renounce to terrorism and Israel engages in a constructive dialogue leading to the settlement of the conflict and stop any violation of international law. Further steps should consist in the elaboration and the implementation of confidence-building measures and the creation of a "climate of reconciliation" in which an improved and



intensified cooperation between governments and civil society organisations is possible. The EU should give support to President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority. An efficient border management system should be introduced, assuring sufficient freedom of movement but also the necessary security requirements. The recent General Affairs Council meeting showed strong commitment to the Palestinian Authority which is currently of the greatest importance. Gaza should be supported by immediate humanitarian assistance. The financial support provided to the transition government should be diversified and the Palestinian private sector should be reconstructed. The civil police should be strengthened and Palestinians should be assisted and supported in their efforts aimed at restoring law and order. The institution-building, with a view to a future Palestinian state, should be accelerated. Short term priorities are the elaboration and implementation of confidence-building

measures and the setting up of a political framework for the solution of the conflict. Three key aspects must be focused on: the dynamics of bilateral relations, the central role of the Quartet in monitoring cooperation between bilateral partners and the reinforcement of EU's role within the Quartet, and the involvement of Arab partners, notably of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt. The Arab Peace Initiative is to be considered the basis of peace in the region.

**Mara Rudman** underlines that the next 18 months will be critical for the EU. The EU should try to combine its priorities with the Bush administration's preferences. When it comes to the situation in Iraq, the US will need help from the countries of the region but also from those countries that are represented at the Conference. The US administration will come back, sooner or later to what the Iraq Study Group recommends in the Baker-Hamilton report. Nevertheless, the EU should go ahead and cooperate closely with Tony Blair as well. Private diplomacy works better than public diplomacy. The EU could therefore make use of Blair's personal contacts and political reputation in the region. The EU should frame benchmarks in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as for other conflicts. This is true also for an international peace conference for the Middle East. For these efforts the EU should follow a practical approach and consider the upcoming 18 months as decisive.

**Ahmed Maher** reminds that the EU's role is still too closely associated with the policy and the US position in the Middle East. Europe should not only be active but also be independent and should stop implementing a policy based on double standards in favour of Israel. US policy is not helpful as it is clearly one-sided. The counterproductive consequences of the latter were also to be seen during the war in Lebanon. The EU should play an independent role within the Quartet, not the role

that Blair assigned to Great Britain and later to the EU as a whole. The EU seems to show some more sympathy towards Palestinians nowadays but this has not improved peace prospects. The EU should forget about Baker and Hamilton and should address the Israeli position as well. Israel believes that it is holding the ultimate truth. Nevertheless a boycott does not help to find a political solution.

**Mohamed Kadry Said** notes that even if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key factor, a regional approach must be applied to overcome the current conflicts in the Middle East. The Madrid Conference was based on both a bilateral and a multilateral track. The EU should make efforts to revive the multilateral one. A new wave of confidence-building measures should be encouraged, starting with “easy matters”. A multilateral approach is crucial in dealing with the human dimension, with special regard to Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. The Arab Peace Initiative must be a priority and the basis for further steps. This could be strengthened by Israeli initiatives and complementary actions.

**Melody Sucharewich** underlines that a further element that needs to be dealt with is political identity. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is based on two entirely opposite narratives. People get socialized into a certain interpretation and this entirely determines which narrative they believe in. This identity has proven to be stronger than everything, even stronger than facts, terror, extremism and international politics. This factor should therefore be overcome and joint efforts should focus on dialogue and future generations.

**Janiki Cingoli** raises the question of the Sheeba Farms. The UN Security Council has a mandate to come up with proposals on this issue. The situation in the Lebanon has as yet not been stabilized. The EU should be an active player taking initiatives in this field and Syria should definitely be engaged in this process.



**Margrete Auken** underlines that MEPs should regularly inform and consult their governments on these questions. However words are always present but in the end little happens. Double standards only lead to frustration. Israel and Palestine are not able to solve the crisis alone. The fact that Israel is not fulfilling § 2 of the ENP agreement must certainly be worth a reflection.

**Mohammed Shtayyeh** notes that the EU should support the idea of a protective force intended as a political initiative ending the Israeli occupation. It also should support new presidential and parliamentary elections in Palestine. The period of confidence-building measures is over: supporting negotiations with the aim of adopting a final status agreement and of putting an end to occupation must be the priorities. It is important to support President Abbas but it is even more important to stabilize his situation.

**Daniel Levy** stresses that it is important to check whether the money given to the Palestinian Authority is being used efficiently. When it comes to the De Soto report, it might be time



to review the efficiency of the Quartet. There used to exist a Security Envoy of the EU to the Quartet whose position could be re-introduced. When it comes to Hamas, the Quartet should follow a common but differentiated approach. Europe is not benefiting from not talking to key actors in the region. The condition to recognize Israel imposed on Hamas does not make any sense. The engagement with Syria should also be strengthened.

**Ophir Pinez-Paz** declares that an independent position of the EU might be counterproductive. It is essential that moderate political forces inside and outside the Middle East work together, otherwise extreme forces will dominate the political scene. It is impossible to promote peace through bilateral negotiations: the only effective way is a multilateral approach.

**Boaz Karni** stresses that when it comes to concrete actions, “immediately” means “in the next weeks” and not “in the next months”. The mandate of the EUBAM mission in Rafah should be extended territorially. If this initiative comes from the EU the parties concerned will accept it. In a long-term perspective the Palestinian National Unity Government should be resumed with the support of the EU. The EU should concentrate on the developments during the upcoming two or three months. The conditions imposed on Hamas should be revised: the recognition of Israel should not be a pre-condition but a condition in the context of a final status agreement.

**Véronique de Keyser** says that the EP’s views are often divergent from the Council’s position. This was the case of the economic sanctions as well. The EP did not approve those measures introduced by the Council: there was no resolution and the subject has never been discussed in a plenary session.



It is extremely difficult to define the right approach towards Hamas, which represents in fact a legitimate government, as the Palestinian population cannot be sanctioned for the outcome of democratic elections. There is a proposal in the EP to set up a special working group dealing with the Middle East. In this context it is necessary that the EP holds regular meetings with Tony Blair and other representatives of the Quartet.

**Luis de Almeida Sampaio** informs that the Portuguese Presidency will cooperate closely with the EP. The EU can not be accused for doing too much and too little at the same time. The Presidency is trying to focus on concrete issues and on both the broader regional context and the specific conflicts as it is impossible to make a distinction between these tracks.

**Richard Howitt** closes the IVth session of the conference by summarising the interventions of the participants. Several people have underlined the importance of organising an international conference in a multilateral framework. Others have stressed the important role the EU needs to play within the Quartet and which Tony Blair needs to point to as special envoy to the Middle East. The issue of installing a force which could secure peace in the region was also mentioned. Participants insisted on the independence of EU policy and the need to review its politics with other actors in the region.

# Closing session







## Hans-Gert Pöttering

### President of the European Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Colleagues,  
Guests,

At this conference today it is of particular importance to me to say a few closing words about possible ways of obtaining peace in the Middle East.

#### 1. The European Parliament's long campaign for peace in the Middle East

For a long time now the European Parliament has been working for a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East. In this context, my first official foreign visit as President of the European Parliament was to the Middle East. I went to Israel, Palestine and Jordan, and there I was able to have many discussions with, among others, King Abdullah and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, as well as the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his then headquarters in Gaza.

In my speech to the Knesset I spoke out for what is the same topic as the subject of today's conference: convening an international peace conference on the Middle East.

The 1991 Madrid Conference showed us just how successful an international forum can be. Although the circumstances are different today, I am convinced that multilateral approaches are urgently needed for the current situation.

Before my trip to the Middle East, a Special Presidential Conference took place in the European Parliament with Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the Arab League, and several Arab ministers including Ziad Abu Amr, the then Palestinian Foreign Minister. The main topic at this meeting was support for the Beirut Peace Initiative, which was unanimously revived by the Arab League at the Riad Conference in March.

Since the beginning of my time in office I have also held numerous discussions in Brussels with Arab and Israeli contacts, such as Amr Moussa and Tzipi Livni to name but two, and I also welcome the excellent collaboration with Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Now the path to peace, which we thought we had in our sights, is blocked once again. The hopes for national unity which arose from the Mecca Agreement have bled to death in the Palestinian civil war. It was in this context that I gave my statement at the European Parliament's June plenary session on the situation in the Palestinian Territories after the fall of the national unity government.

## 2. Strengthening the European Parliament's contribution

Gaza and the West Bank are not just anywhere; they are our Mediterranean next-door neighbours. You can hear the echo of a resounding call to Europe from all sides in this region: the European Union has a role to play. Today, not only the Palestinians but also the Israelis are calling increasingly insistently for a European contribution. We, as the European Parliament and more generally as the European Union, can and

must contribute our share to finding potential paths towards a peaceful solution.

I welcome and support the PSE Group's initiative in convening this conference. Many members of our Parliament want to take action and do something to alleviate the Palestinians' catastrophic humanitarian situation as soon as possible. But I am also aware that many of you want to contribute to reaching a sustainable and stable political situation in the region in the foreseeable future.

While short-term humanitarian aid is important and must not be disregarded under any circumstances, today it is just as important to propose and plan possible political solutions for tomorrow.

At the end of the day, there can be only a political solution for the Middle East. Neither violence and retaliation, nor excessive security measures that create a permanent feeling of fear and insecurity for the people in the region, are long-term solutions. We must repeatedly remind both our Israeli friends and the radical branches of Hamas of this.

From all sides, all the European Parliament political groups and official bodies, the relevant committees and interparliamentary delegations, as well as the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly, of which I have the honour of being Vice-President, comes an abundance of good ideas and long-lasting evidence of good will.

We must endeavour to ensure that this multitude of ideas and the high level of commitment are not used up in one-off measures, thereby diminishing the impact of the European Parliament's power. On the contrary, it should be our common concern to channel and combine our efforts in the interests of this issue.

In connection with this I would like to mention a letter from several Members of our Parliament requesting the creation of



a special European Parliament structure to deal specifically with these questions.

I would have nothing against, for instance, the proposal to form a working group, headed by a Vice-President within the framework of either the Committee on Foreign Affairs or the Bureau, to focus specifically on this topic.

Moreover, in the coming weeks and months I would like to propose a few specific initiatives and/or support proposals that have already been made.

### 3. Specific Proposals

In my speech to the Knesset on 30 May I addressed a number of important issues, on which it seems action is already being taken. Appropriate support and even political pressure from the international community and the European Union would be necessary here:

(a) Unconditional support for Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, with Israel following suit.

The task falls to us Europeans, together with our American partners in the Middle East Quartet, to convince Israel of this. Tony Blair – whose appointment could have been made much more transparent and with more team spirit within the Quartet – can and must play a crucial role here.

Israel must not make the mistake of pushing Mahmoud Abbas against the wall and taking away all his room for manoeuvre, as in 2006 and 2007. Quite the reverse: Israel must give Mahmoud Abbas the opportunity to win the trust of the 65% of Palestinians who voted him in as President in 2006. Mahmoud Abbas must have the chance to demonstrate his capabilities.

Now that he is surrounded by a cabinet which deserves our trust, we have even more reason to move forward together,



both politically and financially. In Brussels I had the opportunity to meet Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, in his then capacity as Finance Minister of the unity government, and greatly appreciated his honesty and remarkable judgement. I have the utmost confidence in him.

On 18 June the Council of Ministers confirmed inter alia its readiness to resume direct aid – a move which should be welcomed. However, a further priority for us must be to avoid at all costs the long-term division of the Palestinian Territories which some already see as inevitable.

(b) Refunding of withheld Palestinian customs duties by Israel. Prime Minister Olmert has said he is prepared to do this – we should insist that it is fully effected as soon as possible;

(c) Releasing Palestinian members of parliament and other politicians being held by Israel. This is a key step towards consolidating the democracy's credibility and its core values in this region.

(d) Strengthening the multilateral aspects of the peace process:

This involves consolidating the important role and momentum of the Quartet, who, at their meeting of 30 May in Berlin, discussed, inter alia, this very topic that I spoke about in my speech to the Knesset on the same day. This also includes the need for a comprehensive peace settlement for the region, based on the principle of a two-state solution.

The basis for this is well-known: firstly, recognising the 1967 borders, finding a solution for Jerusalem and dealing with the refugee question while working towards financial balance. For all these issues, what is needed above all is the political will to come to an agreement.

However, involving our partners from the Arab world is just as necessary. This implies the active role that the Arab League has to play, as well as those neighbouring countries with which live in peace with Israel. Saudi Arabia's involvement is also important, even if just to convince Hamas and other radical Islamic groups that it is time to take action.

It should be our goal to achieve the convening of an international conference under the patronage of the Quartet.

At parliamentary level, support is necessary for an extraordinary meeting of the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly on the topic of the Middle East, which should take place in Egypt this autumn with Israel's active participation. I already called for this in my speech to the Knesset.

The last specific point I would like to discuss is a project, which is currently being worked on intensively and which is also to take place in the European Parliament itself. The aim is to bring together Israeli and Palestinian experts to discuss, above all, the question of how trust and dialogue between the two conflicting parties can be reinstated.

To finish please allow me to draw an analogy between the peaceful route that we desire for the Middle East and the path that we have gone down in Europe over the last fifty years.

In the European Union, we have arrived where we are now because, after centuries of war, we chose a path where right is right, and not where might is right. A path based on reconciliation, mutual respect and cooperation that leads us together towards the future.

In essence, 50 years of European integration have had the effect of redefining the term security: we no longer mean security from each other, but security with each other.

It is precisely because we have learnt from our continent's history, that it is our concern and duty to promote the pursuit of peaceful coexistence through tolerance and cooperation even outside the Union's borders.

There are some important words in the Berlin Declaration adopted on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the European Union. 'That hope (for peace and understanding) has been fulfilled. We, the citizens of the European Union, have united for the better.'

It would be a dream come true to be able to read the same words one day in a common declaration by the people of the Middle East. We must work together so that this dream can become a reality.

Thank you for your attention.





## Gareth Evans

### President of the ICG

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure, a privilege for an outsider to be given the floor on this occasion. Let me begin though by telling you about an email I received from an Australian diplomatic colleague of mine, who had served in many

posts in the Middle East, who wrote to me yesterday saying that he had been feeling rather unwell recently and that doctors were taking a long time to diagnose what it was, but after a lot of prodding and poking and testing, the source of his troubles were identified as MEDS – Middle East Depressive Syndrome –, something which has only relatively recently been discovered by medical science, but in fact it is capable of doing more damage than cigarettes and alcohol combined, worse than clogged arteries, maybe even worse than bowel cancer, and there is only one way to deal with MEDS, and that is to leave the Middle East well alone.

Well, I suspect that many of us around this table are also suffering from Middle East Depressive Syndrome, but we have not the luxury of leaving the Middle East alone. We either live there or it is our job in my case, or it is our passion, as it is the case for many others of us. But maybe particularly for policy

makers here in Europe, there are some ways to break out of the depressive cycle we are constantly getting ourselves into, and actually getting some results.

So let me spell out on the basis of the work that the International Crisis Group has been doing now for a number of years in the region, my own many visits there, and also what I have heard around this conference table and many like them, what I think are the main lessons that European policy makers and those of us who hope to persuade you should have learned by now, and which if we take to heart, may just make a difference.

In interest of time, I'll reduce those lessons to just three, there as follows :

First of all, do not lose sight of the main game, the main objectives. Think not just tactically but strategically. This is something that I think came through very clearly in Hans-Gert Pöttering's contribution today, but I fear it doesn't come through nearly clearly enough, in many of the contributions that are made by European spokesmen in particular.

We have to remember that the objectives of this whole enterprise are not to have this or that language incorporated in a quoted communiqué or in any summer tour security council resolution ; it is not to have this or that mandate achieved for this or that envoy. It is not even a measure of having this or that particular individual or group as a negotiating partner; or even having this or that confidence-building measure who will step towards a road map put in place.

The objective is to have a comprehensive solution, a two-state solution in which Israelis can live in safety behind secure and recognised borders, at peace not just with Palestinians but with all their neighbours and in which the Palestinians have a recognized and viable state of their own, based broadly on 1967 borders, the capital in East Jerusalem, with a just resolution of the refugee issue.

That is what the objective is, and we must not ever forget it, because looking back, it is really quite extraordinary to recall just how often the tactical considerations of the moment have obscured what has been necessary to advance the main game, the main objective. I think of the failure twice now, to really acknowledge and recognize the historic significance of the Arab Initiative, the insistence on pouring over the detailed language of this Arab resolution without beginning to really appreciate as we should the really quite extraordinary bargain which is historically on offer with this.

I think of the failure to support Abu Mazen in 2005, when he had won a landslide election, when he was the uncontested leader of all the Palestinians, when he was capable of advancing some really serious compromises, and compare that with the condition in which we find ourselves now, supporting a rather diminished Abu Mazen.

I think over and over again of our failure to learn from the lessons of the Oslo Process, the reality that incremental, sequential solutions are just not going to get us there. We are always going to be the prisoner of the last extremist on either side. There has to be a focus, as Mr. Pöttering said, on the in-game first, and working back from there.

So, first lesson: keep our eye on the main game.

Secondly: do not apply double standards. Be consistent.

Those of us in politics – and I was in politics in Australia for 21 years – know that there is a fair chance that we will be forgiven by our electorates for most of the seven deadly sins, if not all of them : gluttony, greed, sloth, anger, lust – yes –, envy, pride. All of them, we can get away with.

But what we cannot get away with as politicians – we know that, all of us in this business –, is hypocrisy, is being perceived by our electorates as pushing double standards, constantly saying one thing, doing something else. And as it is in domestic politics or European politics, so it is in international affairs.



And I think we have to be frank with ourselves and to acknowledge that in the West – and all of us have been guilty of this to a greater or lesser extent –, there has been a very regular pattern to our behavior over many years in just setting the bar higher for the Palestinian in Arab side than we have been prepared to set it for the Israeli side.

We have always had good reasons for doing that, which we'd been able to point to, because there is lots of stupid and dangerous and counterproductive language and behavior that has been advanced from time to time by Palestinians, Arabs from the Arab-Islamic world. We know that.

But let us just think about the extent to which we have been prepared to be tolerant in the West of Israeli settlement building, in breach of Oslo and also in breach of agreements since Oslo, which have placed more emphasis on parallelism rather than sequentialism. Even in that context, we have been tolerant of those breaches.

We have made over and over again I think many more demands on the Palestinian administrators' side to maintain absolute self-restraint, absolute disciplin, absolute security in response to provocations of one kind or another, compared with the standards that we have been prepared to apply comparatively in similar-provoking situations to the Israelis.

I think we need to think about how tolerant we have tended to be over the level of civilian casualties, so-called "collateral damage", which has occurred over and over again when there have been security breakdowns, and how indifferent we have tended to be by the really quite extraordinary magnitude of those casualties on the Palestinian side.

The way in which again I think most of us most of the time have seen nothing terribly unreasonable, in Israel demanding recognition from its interlocutors of its own right to exist, its own existence as a state.



But without thinking, as most of us do not think most of the time, that really, Israelis have never been offering any kind of recognition to any kind of Palestinian entity as a state so far, they have just said they are prepared to discuss and negotiate that as an outcome, and nor of the Israelis being willing to demand from others in the Arab World, former recognition without there having been a formal peace treaty. And you just do not have that from anyone else, except Egypt and Jordan, except I think now Mauritania, but not from others.

There is a constant recurring inconsistency, the way in which we have been reluctant to take Syria at its face value when it has offered negotiations without preconditions, something which a few years ago we probably would have begged for and grabbed and given our eye and teeth for.

Now we are very critical and I heard this again around the table this morning and rightly so of the Syrian government's insistence that its representatives not talk, not sully themselves in conversation with Israeli interlocutors. But we have failed to acknowledge until Alvaro De Soto made it public a few days ago, that he, the United Nations representative, was instructed not to talk to Syrians and not to talk to representatives of the Palestinian Authority so long as Hamas was in charge.

So, over and over and over again, there have been these inconsistencies and we pay the price for those inconsistencies when we are trying to reach results. Of course, the most egregious and damaging – and I know opinions are very divided on this –, but the most damaging inconsistency of all has been in the response to Hamas's election victory.

It really has not been a pretty sight to watch the almost universal Western disavowal of Hamas after it won the Palestinian election that the West had so enthusiastically supported taking place. Shortly after that election – the initial election –, Crisis Group, my own organization issued a report arguing strongly that the International Community needed to focus on recognizing the reality of Hamas as a political force, on engaging with it and encouraging it to govern responsibly, not to try to force it out of government or make the government unworkable by imposing conditions that nobody frankly believed could be immediately met.

We summarized the situation as we thought, we summarized the Hamas response then as being "let us govern or watch us fight". And I am afraid that events since then have done absolutely nothing but reinforce the accuracy of that assessment. Have we learnt the lesson about double standards this time around? I am not yet sure.

And my final message, my final lesson I think we should have learnt – European policy makers – from the events of this last decade or more is: "do not be whimps". Use the weight, use the

leverage that Europe unquestionably has. It really has been – and I will say this as an outsider I know, and outsiders have a luxury, which insiders probably do not –, but it has been really I think the most consistently depressing feature of the whole peace process over the last decade or so, has been the failure of the European Union to punch at its weight. I am not talking about punching above your weight, that is unrealistic, but just punch at it.

The truth of the matter is that the EU brings a hell of a lot of assets to the table. You bring the moral authority of a region that after generations of the most horrible war has found ways to live in peace. You bring the authority of a region, an organization whose main weapon of international influence is after all soft power, not hard power, not military might. It is the power of the democratic values, the power of persuasion, the power of a civilized culture being brought to bear in these situations.

And of course, you also have the asset of the enormous financial resources, which have been and continue to be available to address the humanitarian needs, the relief, the reconstruction, the economic development needs of the region.

But have you been getting value for all those assets, have you been using those assets?

I do not underestimate the difficulty of finding a single voice to speak with on behalf of this union, and of course the treaty is not going to change that, but the truth is, when we think about it, that over and again, in recent years, the EU has spoken with a single voice by accepting without demure in the Quartet and in another international contexts, the dominant voice of the United States on these issues. It is not for nothing that so many of us refer in the International Community to the Quartet, as the “Quartet sans trois”, a Quartet minus three. It is not just the Europeans of course that have some responsibility in this respect. The UN has not covered itself with glory in its representation there, and the Russians have played a pretty marginal role.

But the truth of the matter is that we know that there are many voices in Europe, perhaps even a majority of voices who did want full engagement with the Palestinian Authority, after the Hamas' victory, did want to reflect and represent and respond to that reality.

We know, again to take just one other example, that there is plenty of support for getting started on the Syrian track, just as indeed there is within the Syrian defense and intelligence establishment, if not as political establishment. But in the face of United States' resistance to getting anything moving on that track, the European voice is just simply not being heard to that effect.

So, maybe sometimes, for all the difficulty of finding a single voice, speaking with a divided voice might just be better than speaking with one voice and getting it wrong.

So, as to what the EU can do in this environment, there is all sorts of things and remember the words spelled out by Daniel Levy in his earlier very specific contribution, and others around the table have been making the same points. Crafting and articulating a full-scale in-game strategy, working out its implications, sticking to it, advocating it, supporting and giving resources to those who are the real players in the game, not just those who we would like to think are or could be, using the soft power approach by genuinely engaging, not necessarily supporting – and the distinction was well made – but engaging with those who have to be brought into the peace process and become committed to it, working to get some overdue value added; Tony Blair would be another very useful thing the EU could do in the period ahead.

The short point is this: I fear, as many of us do, that we are heading back into a further cycle of despair in the Middle East. I see recent events not so much as an opportunity now for jumping onto a new bandwagon, but as a bandwagon that has run badly off course and is going to take a hell of a lot of howling to get it back on the rails.

I am not saying I do not think any of us around this table can say that Europe single-handedly can take that sort of leadership role. But I certainly think we can do in Europe a hell of a lot more to push things in the right direction by prodding and pushing and challenging and putting alternative use on the table when so obviously that voice needs to be heard.

It will be great to see some of my own socialist political colleagues taking the lead role in this respect. I hope that will happen as a result of today's meeting and more power to your arm.

Thank you.





## Martin Schulz

### President of the PSE

#### Closing remarks

Honourable guests, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, let me greet you all.

First of all let me thank you for your participation to the conference. It is a great honour for the Socialist Group that you are all here with us.

Let me first thank you very much, Mr President of the European Parliament, for your words and your suggestions which we will certainly have to take up and deepen in the relevant bodies of this House. Let me just make one remark: The President of the European Parliament does not normally take part in events of individual groups if it is not in a direct representative or diplomatic context. But there is a special reason why President Pöttering honours us today. With his presence the President underlines the topic and the importance to endeavour for peace in the Middle East.

This is a topic that most political forces of this House share as a common project: to contribute whatever we can to make peace in the Middle East possible. Therefore, Mr President, I am thankful to you that you have found the way to us.





I will try – from the standpoint of the President of the Socialist Group – to give stock of the past two days, if necessary also with one or the other small outlook on future consequences of this conference. I think that this conference has by far surpassed the expectations that we had. Our expectations of this dialogue, as shown in the debates that we had during the past two days, have been more than fulfilled. We are really thankful, content and pleased by your presence.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have successfully achieved to gather politicians, academics and high-level experts from all countries in the Middle East region, from the United States, Norway, the EU Member States, the Arab League and the United Nations around one table in order to informally discuss the main political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the conflict and the peace process in the region. Your presence around this table, regardless of all the different opinions that have been voiced here, clearly shows your will to contribute – through dialogue and open discussion – to more peace. It is perhaps a small contribution but even the smallest contribution of dialogue is needed.

We have organized this 2-day-debate under the title “Moving towards an International Peace Conference for the Middle East” with a specific reason: we are of the view that only an international conference involving all political actors could result in a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian and the other related conflicts in the region. So what was our goal with this conference? We wanted to discuss and look for possible solutions. But a same time we cannot wait, at least in terms of showing the capacity to produce viable proposals, for such an international conference. And this in particular when we look at a situation on the ground which goes from bad to worse.

As you surely are aware, at present we are confronted with a deep humanitarian crisis both in Gaza and the West Bank. It is the result of a deadlock in negotiations as well as the political process between Palestinians and Israelis and also between the Palestinians themselves.

Before we reached this painful situation there had been calls to disburse the aid of the international community, notably the European Union, directly to the Palestinians. But is this perhaps not too late? Would the breakdown of civil order not have been preventable had we funded aid earlier and not submitted to the strategy of not talking with Hamas? I don't have an answer to the question and we certainly do not have the right to say, had we acted differently, things would have been better. But we do have to allow ourselves to ask these questions.

In January 2006 the Palestinian people elected a new parliament. A parliament with a majority to form a government which was not to our likings. We did not appreciate the outcome of the ballot, even though our own election observers said the elections were conducted in a free and fair manner. But the conclusion that the international community drew conducted to a blockade, a total blockade in fact. Nevertheless, a few months later, as a result of the international pressure, in particular the Quartet, a new National Unity government was

appointed by President Abu Mazen. Why did we then not talk to those members of the government of National Unity who do not belong to Hamas? There were many government members who did not belong to either Hamas or Fatah. Yet dialogue, even with powers that do not – in the short term – necessarily suit us, is the only possible way to reach peaceful solutions.

I remember as a young man a time when Yassir Arafat was considered to be the world's number one terrorist. But later the same man would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. I thought it was right to begin dialogue with him. History has demonstrated that dialogue is a way out of violence. Today Fatah is seen as our partner. Fatah was once seen as the world's main terrorist organisation. This goes to show that we should learn from the past.

When we look at the reality of the present situation, my view remains – and it is the view of my Group as well as of the social democratic family as a whole- that there is only one possible way forward: we have to strive to reunite all powers, interest groups and countries involved around one table.

Take Syria. Anyone who talks to Syria risks to be ostracised. Yet – as we heard today from some of the participants of this conference – we know that in the foreseeable future negotiations between Israel and Syria will take place. Preparations are already underway. We know that the Israeli government tried last year to make contact with Syria. So why are we not a little bit more honest and say, yes of course Syria belongs at the negotiating table – especially if we want to influence Hamas.

Let's also not forget Lebanon in this context. After the war in summer 2006 the country fell into a very critical situation. That is why we have to stress that political stability in Lebanon can be built neither on violence nor on external influence and that is why we call for a re-launch of the dialogue for national unity in order to reconcile differences and to participate in efforts for new peace negotiations.

No conflict in the world – and this we need to communicate to all those involved in the Middle East – has ever been solved through violent means. In fact there is no historic example for the violent solution of a conflict. Certainly, in the short term violence may win, but it is my conviction that it can never do so in the long term.

The only way to lasting peace is through lasting dialogue. This is why we have engaged on the road a long time ago to bringing peace about. And this is why we have made the fight for durable peace and democracy in the Middle East one of the main emphases of our work.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to finish in expressing my very warm thanks to one of my colleagues representing all the others colleagues in our Group. It is my Vice-President Pasqualina Napoletano who has devoted all of her political life to peace in the Middle East and who has also been the main inspiration to this conference.

Thank you very much for your attention.









# MOVING TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

2 and 3 July 2007 Room A5G2 European Parliament Brussels

**MONDAY 2 JULY 15h00**

- > Opening session
- > The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the plans for peace
- > Political and regional dimensions of the conflicts in the Middle East

**TUESDAY 3 JULY 09h00**

- > The human dimension of the conflicts in the Middle East
- > The role of the European Union and the international community
- > Closing session

**With participants and speakers from**

Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Norway, Palestine, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United States, the Arab League, the European Union, the United Nations and the NGO sector

## **Info / Registration**

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**Pre-registration is required**



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