

With open cards!

by Reiner Bernstein, Munich (Germany)¹

Prior to the recent informal meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers in Milan (German Foreign Minister) Frank-Walter Steinmeier demanded from (Russian President) Vladimir Putin that he put his political plans for Eastern Ukraine on the table. Three years ago a high-ranking representative of the Israeli-Palestinian "Geneva Accord" came up to me in Tel Aviv with a similar request: Could you please ask the government in Berlin to make (Israeli Prime Minister) Benjamin Netanyahu reveal his intentions? Behind this demand was the suspicion that the Prime Minister is playing cat and mouse with international diplomacy.

The security structures in the Middle East which were organized after World War I seem doomed to fail with unpredictable consequences for millions of peoples. The conflagration will not stop in front of Israelis and Palestinians, but will contribute to their further destabilization. From a Zionist perspective the British Government and the League of Nations had laid out the seeds, as they recognized "*the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and ... the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country*", but nevertheless within mandatory Palestine established the Emirate of Transjordan east of the Jordan river in 1922/3.

After 1967, the dispute over the legal entitlements beyond the river escalated fully, when internationally renowned lawyers and jurists in Israel called the division of Palestine an injustice against the historical Jewish rights to the whole country and praised the

¹ Concluded on September 10, 2014. I would like to thank Mr. Ralph Deja (Munich) for his help to examine my translation into English.

relinquishment of the areas east of Jordan as a great political concession with no further sacrifices to follow. Thus, the Israeli governments reserve the full strategic and political sovereignty over the entire West Bank and avoid to conclude understandings and agreements with any target dates. With the statement that sergeant Hadar Goldin had been "kidnapped" on August 01 in Rafah, the Israeli version of sovereignty should be extended to include the Gaza Strip.

One of the most important representatives of the national-religious segment within the settler movement, General (res.) Efi "Zambish" Eitam, recently demanded to put an end to this ethnic-religious limbo and ambiguity by annexing "Judea and Samaria" and in return spare the Palestinians the fate of being occupied but to grant them all privileges of citizenship including the right to vote. "For the sake of peace", so his creed of not being afraid of a bi-national state.

In contrast, (Palestinian philosopher and politician) Sari Nusseibeh in 2012 had – at least for the time being – pleaded for giving up the full political participation of his compatriots in a united Palestine. With his manifestation Eitam has renounced the home-made debates about the "demographic threat," while the Palestinians had identified it as a chance because of their higher birth rates.

"Raison d'État '67" or Unity in Diversity?

The secure existence of Israel is an integral part of the German "raison d'état." When (German Chancellor) Angela Merkel delivered this promise to the plenum of the Knesset in March 2008 she overlooked serious constraints: the checks and balances of the German constitution, the necessary approval of the Bundestag before providing Israel with weapons, and the restrictions of the NATO commitments.

Jerusalem herself is not interested – even in case of existential threats – in a robust mandate of defense from the UN Security Council, because it would harm their own freedom of actions. And since Netanyahu with his followers are demanding a "Jewish state" including the West Bank, the political establishment in Berlin is duped furthermore. While in Europe the talk of a "peace process" prevails, in Israel it gave way to the saga of a "political process" – a total turnaround of intentions.

A new narrative of the "raison d'état" would have to deal with several considerations:

1. Do the obligations to protect Israel end at the Green Line of 1967?
2. How should the national and individual rights of the Palestinians be protected from unauthorized infringement, if the conditionality of 1967 is dropped?
3. Does the "raison d'état" take into account that on those 26,000 square kilometers Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians are compelled to live together?
4. Without a final and fair status for Jerusalem everything is lost. Is it here that all resistance against and all chances for a co-existential tolerance for live and let live come together. The Palestinian and Israeli authors of the "Geneva Initiative" knew full well why their 13 articles for Jerusalem go beyond the "Clinton Parameters" of December 2000 and the "Arab Peace Initiative" of March 2002.

The question therefore is whether international diplomacy would really lose its face in case of an increased focus to the territorial unity in historic Palestine in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity. Even the new political agenda among Israel's Arab citizens exposes the deep

cracks that reach out in an aggravated way into the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

If, however, the goal of the two-state solution remains, the upgrading of the Palestinian Mission in Berlin to a full-fledged Embassy is the political consequence. Then the Federal Government can no longer insist on the position that Palestine belongs to the United Nations just as a "Non-Member Observer State."

On the edge and the wall in your head

If new negotiations fail again and offshoots of the "Al-Nour" militias and the "Islamic State" move into the Palestinian territories, the often invoked European security is seriously threatened. The provision to lift the blockade by Israel – which must be followed by Egypt in the south of the Gaza Strip – may offer a bridge to political pluralism within in the realms of "Hamas".

An automatism of military escalation is not in the interests of the diplomacy in Berlin. But in political terms it is not enough to renew the "European Union Border Assistance Mission" to include the safeguarding of Israel's security, at the same time it only lifts restrictions for the Palestinians. Indeed, EUBAM can assume important functions when the final end of the political conflict is in sight.

When we visited Lebanon in May 2009 a senior representative of the "Hezbollah" asserted that a two-state solution is exclusively a decision of Israelis and Palestinians. Meanwhile, this commitment is definitely obsolete – one more reason to use our diplomatic weight to promote coexistence for the two peoples with as little conflict as possible.

The participation of international organizations such as the German "Association for International Cooperation (GIZ)" with their relationships in both civil societies is indispensable.
