

## **Beyond Resolutions**

**Impressions of the international Conference „The Issue of Israeli Settlements: Political Dynamics in the Middle East and EU-Israeli Relations”, organized by the “Israeli European Policy Network (IEPN)” and the University of the Bundeswehr, Munich, with the assistance of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Munich, 7 July 2009**

**by Reiner Bernstein, 9 July 2009**

To begin with: The invited audience felt some impatience and frustration the longer the conference lasted. Despite its valuable presentations and assessments the core question remained without an appropriate response: Have scholarly research and analyses about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a recognizable or even a crucial impact on decision-making processes in Europe according to its intentions expressed in numerous resolutions since the 1980s?

The asymmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian relations – represented in the absence of Palestinian intellectuals in the conference – under the auspices of the settlement policy, the unrestrained violation of human rights and international law, the strangulation of economic progress of the Palestinian society by road blocks, closure patterns, collective punishments, and the separation wall as well as the incapability of the Palestinian factions to overcome their politico-ideological divisions, was well-documented – with the outcome that the word “peace” was carefully ignored. The future of Jerusalem did not gain attention. The same applies to religious concepts which influence political processes substantially to the detriment of results based on rational considerations. Instead, “security” was the main topic.

It was Esra Bulut who in her paper listed in full length the dual track approach of the European Union's and its member states' foreign policy: public declarations here, shortcomings and flaws there. The abundantly repeated rhetoric to confirm one's acknowledgment of the two-state solution is more than tiresome: It is revealing. Words alone do not change realities. Bulut took pains to substantiate the difference between the “considerable amount of [EU] declaratory attention to defining settlements

as illegal under international law” and the helplessness to challenge efficiently the facts on the ground which the Israeli policy has built-up in the last decennia. One is reminded of the Israeli narrative which classifies the West Bank as “disputed territory” at best – a definition Benjamin Netanyahu topped recently when he denounced negotiations about the two-state solution as a “waste of time.” Indeed, the distributed brochure of the IEPN-Team “Historical Political and Economic Impact of Jewish Settlements in the Occupied Territory” of July 2009 by Shaul Arieli, Roby Nathanson, Ziv Rubin, and Hagar Tzameret-Kertcher with its maps demonstrates abundantly that the option of a two-state solution has finally come to an end.

What Benjamin Netanyahu offered instead and apparently with some success is “economic peace.” Accordingly, his government is in its own words interested in Americans and Europeans “who can help build the Palestinians’ capacity to govern themselves *in a responsible way*” [my italics]. According to official figures Nathanson estimated that the settlement enterprise investments amounted until now to 17.9 billion \$. “Haaretz” commented these days that [b]ehind any settlement action there is a planning and thinking mind that has access to the state’s database and maps, and help from sympathetic officers serving in key positions in the IDF and the Civil Administration.”

Furthermore, Bulut highlighted the different European perceptions of “illegal outposts” on the one hand and settlements on the other: “Freezing”, not “dissolving” require European resolution which in practice seems to accept that the existing settlements are justified from an Israeli security point of view, although settlements like Migron north of Ramallah were established on private Palestinian land, which were taken in a deceptive manner. But those sensitivities don’t care at least 25 percent of Israeli settlers have deserted who live in the heart of the West Bank because of national-religious or ultra-orthodox reasons, as Shaul Arieli showed. Arieli underlined the importance of agreed-upon solutions with the Palestinians after the experiences with Egypt and Jordan. Arik Sharon dismissed this lesson intentionally, when he ordered the unilateral evacuation of Gaza – Arieli in 2006: “unilateral stupidity” – to strengthen the Israeli presence in “Judea and Samaria.” Together with Akiva Eldar, Arieli tore down ingrained myths of the defence of Israel’s right to national existence which all

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governments tried to sell successively to the international community. Implicitly the lecturers raised the question whether there is a European policy for the Middle East at all beyond waiting for initiatives from Washington.

Eldar went a step further when he confronted the stance of Robert Rydberg who rejected ideas to impose any type of sanctions on Israel (possibly under the Association Agreement with preferential treatment of Israeli goods originating in the West Bank settlements); apparently Israeli comparative analogies with the Nazi boycott against Jews ("Kauft nicht bei Juden!") is taking deep effects on European governments, ridiculous as they are. Rydberg opined that good relations with Jerusalem are a fundamental precondition for substantial political progress. For Eldar the avoidance of sanctions on the contrary means to encourage Netanyahu and his political entourage to continue unabashed. So, political Zionism is committing suicide, Eldar warned. Rydberg's statement may have been surprising, because the Swedish governments were traditionally inclined to criticize Israeli policies with regard to the Palestinians, and now Stockholm chairs the European Community Council until the end of 2009.

The disunity becomes once again manifest when we compare the EU-Israeli accord of 22 June 2009 to upgrade the bilateral relations alongside the European Neighbourhood Policy and the public statement the European Commission published on 6 July 2009 that the Israeli strangulation of the Palestinian economy leads to the growing foreign reliance of the Palestinian Authority and affects "the European taxpayer who pay most of the price of this dependence." Three days later the media reported that after an intervention of Israel's envoy to Brussels the Commission stepped back: The statement "does not reflect the opinion of the European Commission..."

Nevertheless, for Stefan Kornelius the most important task for German and European diplomacy is to ward off the creeping de-legitimization the state of Israel is facing within international public opinion. Kornelius reached out to the amazing shift of perceptions in the Western world which its governments cannot ignore forever without bowing to a so-called democracy of popular moods. That is why to my mind the critical German public did not succeed to influence considerably the decision-making

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stages in Berlin – which shies away from credible leadership attitudes. International reluctance to engage meticulously has strengthened forces of extremism in the Middle East.

Europe is not taken seriously among the political players in the region – despite their hospitality for official delegations. Especially the German Chancellor has chosen to wait for America – yesterday for George W. Bush and today for Barack Obama – instead of making headway together with Britain and France at least with a diplomatic account of their own. It is worth mentioning that the Administration in Washington notwithstanding personal and professional internal rivalries seems to be ready to ponder proposals from its allies since its parameters of foreign relations are not fully outlined yet.

The two-state solution is disappearing more and more from the political agenda under the prevailing circumstances. Additionally, the disinclination to enhance a sustainable agreement between Fatah and Hamas harm Palestinian claims to national sovereignty; both factions are needed to attain a comprehensive and durable deal with Israel. It is a sign of missing leadership that neither Mahmoud Abbas nor the Arab states have encouraged in an open manner the new U.S. engagement in the Middle East, yet. Furthermore, the detailed proposals for solving the conflict which are incorporated particularly in the Geneva Accord are disregarded on an official level, but should ultimately be reflected seriously, because already in its preamble the Accord confirmed unequivocally the right of both peoples to statehood.

To put abundant weight onto the “demographic factor” means to say goodbye to chances that both peoples can live together side by side peacefully. What remains are several alternatives: the formal annexation of the West Bank, the one-state “solution” (both of them include terms of apartheid), the old Jordanian option – which the Hashemite Kingdom will reject under the provision of the prevailing territorial disintegration patterns – or a mixture which Eldar elaborated: Whereas twenty percent of the Israeli citizens are of Arab-Palestinian descent, so fifteen percent of the Jewish settlers beyond the settlement blocks which should be annexed by Israel in a territorial swap on the 1:1 ratio are obliged to live as law-abiding Palestinian citizens.

Consequently, the definition of Israel as the Jewish state is only justified in the way of acknowledgment that its non-Jewish populace are second-class citizens. Equally so, the following provisions in the Palestinian Basic Law of 2003 are a warning signal for future developments of social and political coexistence: "Arabic and Islam are the official Palestinian language and religion" (Article 4), and "The principles of Islamic Shari'a are a major source of legislation" (Article 7). Equivalent terms on both sides are a prerequisite for the sustainability of respected results.

To conclude: What is missing in the West is the employment of policy instruments to enforce its positions: to safeguard vital national interests as neighbours to the Middle East and to persuade Israel to change the worn-out formula "peace through security" by the qualified outlook "security through peace." A military operation to derail Iranian nuclear capacities would be the disastrous continuation of the failed confrontations in the past which were of no avail linked to the purpose to promote the acceptance of Israel amidst the Arab-Muslim arena. A once hawkish oriented general who today heads the president of the "Council for Peace and Security" lamented recently that Israel is "paying the price of our stubbornness and diplomatic inaction over the years."

Invited lecturers and chairmen:

Col. (ret.) Shaul Arieli, Board Member of the "Council for Peace and Security", Tel Aviv, and former Member of the Israeli delegation to the "Geneva Accord;"

Dr. Esra Bulut, "EU-Institute for Security Studies," Paris;

Akiva Eldar, Senior Columnist of "Haaretz," Tel Aviv;

Dr. Ralf Hexel, Representative of the "Friedrich Ebert Stiftung" in Israel, Tel Aviv;

Stefan Kornelius, Head of the Foreign Relations Desk at the "Süddeutsche Zeitung," Munich;

Christoph Moosbauer, Board Member of "Concilium," Munich, and former Member of the Bundestag;

Dr. Roby Nathanson, "Macro Center for Political Economics," Tel Aviv;

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Ambassador Robert Rydberg, Head of the Department for Middle East and North Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former ambassador in Israel, Stockholm;

Prof.Dr. Friedrich Sell, Vice President of the University of the Bundeswehr, Munich;

Prof.Dr. Stephan Stetter, University of the Bundeswehr, Munich.

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