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**The Middle East - Partner for Europe**



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I. The relationship between Israel and Germany, between Germans and Jews bears its difficulties due to the past. This will not change. Neither the so-called reparation payments, nor our constant and deeply felt promise to defend Israel's right to existence against any threats will change this. The murder of the Jews of Europe by the Nazi Germans is a fact. It is history, but it is also the present. And it will shape the relationship of our two nations with each other in the future like no other event.

We must not talk too long about the positive aspects of the relationship between Germany and Israel. It goes without saying that in the course of the years since the war Germany has transferred 100 billion Marks to Israel and its citizens. We expect no thanks for that. We are, however, thankful for the fact that the older and also the younger generations have found and are finding the human magnitude to even talk to us Germans again. I myself continue to be astonished and, of course, pleased how non-judgemental Israelis are in their behaviour towards me. We are pleased when any young Israeli comes to Germany as a school pupil or student to form his or her own impression. And if you look at the development of economic relations between our two countries, if nothing else, then you can justifiably say that the development of the relationship between Germans and Israelis is a unique success story. It counts as a perfect example of coming to terms with traumatic historical situations. No one from the generation of our fathers and grandfathers dared reckon that the relationship between Germans and Jews, between Germans and Israelis would ever become as good again as it is today. That cannot be taken for granted. It compares with one of the rare miracles that history occasionally holds up.

And yet. The political differences that presently exist between many Germans and many Israelis are conspicuous. Particularly in relation to the ideas of how the conflict of the century between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East can be resolved.

One of the characteristics of a good friendship is that you do not avoid discussing the delicate points. Only those men who have nothing to say to each other keep silent when it gets difficult. I believe, however, that we have a lot to say to each other, precisely because of the common history which have seen us Germans on the side of the culprits and the Jews on the side of the victims.

What's it all about? Many Germans reproach the Israeli government for being too little in favour of the civil option in the conflict with the Palestinians and too much in favour of the military option. They say that the conflict cannot be resolved by military means and that military pressure merely causes more and more violence.

From the Israeli side, we hear that the Germans would be taken in by the Palestinian propaganda, would have no idea of the laws and peculiarities of the Orient and would improperly apply Central European standards to the conflict in the Middle East.

Occasionally, the tone is even sharper. The Israeli army behaves "like a typical army of occupation" say German newspapers. The "militarization of thinking" in the Israeli people prevents a rational solution to the conflict. It can be heard from the Israeli side meanwhile that there is no need of advice from the Germans. Where German care for the Jews has led can be seen from the years 1933 to 1945.

There is still a great deal of rage evident. And that is no surprise. At that time, it was a matter of the survival of the Jewish people and, in principle, that is what it is still about today. The resolution of the Middle East conflict is an existential issue for the Jews in the literal sense of the word. For us Germans, it is – far more matter-of-factly – a political issue. Even if a very important one that is marked by strong emotions.

The touchiness that is discernible in the publicly held debates as much as in private discussions between Germans and Israelis is for the most part

attributable to the fact that there is no deep understanding of the arguments of the other side.

The central concepts for understanding the Israeli side are security and fear. If no effort is made to realise the different experiences with these two concepts that are essential to political consciousness, a discussion between us will always quickly come to an unproductive end.

It may not be so wrong that Israelis occasionally reproach Germans for not knowing what they are talking about when they demand more civility of the Israelis in dealing with the Palestinians and the political conflict as a whole. In fact, it is not only the latest terrorist attacks that trigger fear and terror in the entire population. The terror time and again blasts awake the collective memories that, like a constant silent reminder, determine the inner attitude in moments of crisis. A strong resonance is triggered: 2000 years of Diaspora, incessant driving out, humiliation, prosecution and murder. This dark side of the memory spreads in moments of crisis like a black cloth over the perception of terrible everyday life. No German could possibly imagine this feeling even if he tried hard.

What results from this is a need for security, which we, as Germans, do not automatically understand. It also goes way beyond the definition of the Bible, in which the natural need for security and peace is dressed in the nice formulation that all men (want to) sit “under their wine and under their fig tree and none shall make them afraid”. The concept of security that the Israelis intend includes above all the experience of more than fifty years of the militant, armed and successful fight for the existence of the state of Israel in the former Palestine. In the eyes of many Israelis, we with our conceptions influenced by pacifism are considered too soft, too idealistic, too naïve, too innocent.

Many Israelis have for their part possibly not really wanted to understand that there are general guidelines, which are valid for any conflict – even for theirs.

And that there certainly exist models and experiences of how to deal with highly charged conflicts and crises.

We in Germany are quite proud for example of our policy of conflict prevention. This involves political – and also civil – prevention in conflict situations so that highly explosive situations do not necessarily turn into militant or military aggression. In the Balkans – especially in Macedonia – we have been able to gather good experiences with it.

Without finding out what the other understands by fear and security, one must not, as a matter of principle, begin to talk about peace or “the peace process”. I sometimes have the impression that we are still right at the beginning.

German foreign policy wants to influence the foreign policy of the European Union in the Middle East, but at the same time follow the discussed and agreed path of a common foreign policy.

II. The European Union is faced in the coming years with two central challenges: the expansion by up to 11 new member states and the reform of its institutions that is to be worked out by the European Convention. In view of the new global challenges in the wake of 11 September 2001, an institutional and political re-evaluation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is among the most urgently needed reforms. In this connection, the Middle East could – after the Balkans – play the most important role in a future common EU foreign policy.

The general conditions for an effective EU-Middle East policy have deteriorated since the re-opening of the bloody conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and the associated raised tensions in the region. At the same time, this means that the EU has a tougher challenge to move from the hitherto mainly driven reaction to current crises to a future-oriented strategy

that combines short-term measures for crisis intervention with a long-term prospect of resolving conflict.

The Middle East conflict between Israelis and Arabs in the past decades has resulted in all the states of the region putting security issues above economic necessities and urgently needed social and political reforms. To this extent, it is equally responsible for the low level of regional cooperation in comparison to other regions of the world and thus affects the endeavours of the EU to contribute to a regional interdependence within the context of the Barcelona Process. The recent outbreak of violence in the so-called second Intifada, the continuing tension at the border between the two countries, despite Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and the increasing danger of escalation of fighting in the region as a whole should move the EU to make a new offer of regional cooperation. This has been taken up to only a limited extent so far and this largely due to the associated financial aid.

The essential aim in this is to preserve a vision of a peaceful and stable Middle East. Europe is especially suited to this, partly - or precisely – because it does not have the same possibilities for influence as the US, for example, but also because it does not – at least not in the first instance – mainly pursue interests relating to power politics in the region. And despite all the weaknesses of the European decision-making mechanism – particularly in foreign and security policy – the following structures and facts have emerged in the past decade on which we can build:

- the EU is (including the bilateral aid of the European countries) by far the largest financial backer of the Palestinian Authority with around 50% of the financial and technical aid;
- it is the first trading partner of Israel (around 40% of foreign trade) and an important partner in the area of science and technology; some member states – Germany in particular – have special relations with the Jewish state;

- it is an important political and economic partner of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon and maintains a special dialogue with Iran;
- 11 Mediterranean and Middle East countries are linked to the EU through an association and cooperation agreement (partly still in the negotiation stage); three of these (Turkey, Cyprus, Malta) are candidates for membership;
- the Barcelona process presents a multilateral platform to 12 Mediterranean countries including Israel that is still limited in effect but which in future could potentially be used to support the peace process;
- with the function of the Middle East Special Representative and the greater involvement of the High Representative for the CFSP in the mediation efforts between the conflicting parties, the EU now has instruments that enable it to play a specific role in for instance the so-called quartet of USA, Russia, the UN and the EU.

Nevertheless, Europe's influence – judged against these facts and structures – on the Middle East conflict and the conflicting parties is anything but satisfactory. This is due above all else to the as ever diverging interests of the member states, the related inability to formulate and implement far-reaching objectives and the unclear division of labour with the United States in the Middle East conflict. The vision of a peaceful and stable Middle East cannot just be invoked in Council declarations and soapbox oratories, for which Europe presents such an outstanding example; it must also be backed up by bold visions and concrete proposals for action.

III. We need a sensible division of labour between the USA and the EU for an effective common Middle East policy

In respect of the Middle East, there are fundamental differences between the USA and the EU in the assessment of the situation there.

Both in the American public and in the political class, there are clear majorities – notwithstanding isolated variations in the assessment of Israeli

military actions – who are on the side of Israel. This is shown by numerous opinion polls and is impressively documented in the resolution of the American Congress on solidarity with Israel that was passed by an overwhelming majority. Besides a structural and to some extent emotionally and religiously based tie with the Jewish state, the 11 September in particular has helped to strengthen the appreciation of Israel as a victim of terrorist attacks. Conversely, criticism in Europe of Israel's actions since the outbreak of the so-called second Intifada in the occupied territories has increased and has resulted in Europe running the risk of being no longer accepted in Israel as an "honest broker" as has conversely happened to the USA in the Arab countries.

The war against worldwide terrorism has been an utmost priority for the USA since 11 September, and this has resulted not only in various Palestinian organisations being added to the list of terrorist organisations but also in an extremely critical judgement of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its chairman Yasser Arafat. Moreover, the US administration under President Bush appears determined to conduct a war against the "axis of evil", with unforeseeable consequences for the stability of the region. On the other hand, the EU – despite all the accusations of corruption, human rights violations and mismanagement – stands by Arafat and criticises the "disproportionateness" of the Israeli military actions. At the same time, the majority of member states opposes a military intervention in Iraq and continues to maintain the dialogue with Iran.

Enough about the differences between the USA and the EU. What has happened to cooperation?

In the first place, there is a perfectly good starting position for such a division of labour if you were to combine the existing strengths of the two sides in a sensible way: Arab-Palestinian trust in Europe, Israeli trust in America on the one hand, and the military strength of the USA, economic presence of the EU on the other.



It therefore seems advisable to start a purposeful dialogue on different levels as soon as possible on a practicable division of labour between America and Europe.

The dialogue would, for psychological and tactical reasons, have to be aimed at American interests in particular, and not only because of the financial burden of a possible solution to the conflict ("Marshall Plan for the Middle East") but also the long-term support that would be required for an enduring peace. The Balkan region, where the Europeans have to assume more and more responsibility, is an example of this from which we could learn a great deal. Ultimately, a not to be underestimated element of European influence lies in the fact that American proposals for mediation only have a chance of acceptance by the Arab-Palestinian side if Europe is completely behind it.

#### IV. We should concentrate on 3 goals

##### 1. "The Barcelona Process" must be strengthened

This network is associated above all with the name Barcelona, since the foundations for the "Euro Mediterranean Partnership EMP" were laid in the Spanish port in 1995. The EMP is based on the lines of the successful Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) between East and West, and tries on a parallel basis to bundle relations between the EU and the 12 partner states around the Mediterranean in three areas ("baskets"):

- political and security matters
- economic relations
- inter-societal relations and human rights.

The Barcelona process constitutes an important platform for dialogue between the conflict parties in the Middle East and thus provides additional support for the peace endeavours. But the collapse of the peace process following the Camp David conference (July 2000) and the (re-)

commencement of the bloody conflict in September of the same year shows that the "soft" support for the peace endeavours can also get into difficulties when the actual "hard" negotiations between the conflicting parties and the American mediation efforts fail.

But this does not mean that Barcelona was a complete failure only fit for the archives. On the contrary, the experiences of the last seven years should bring us to the conclusion that we should reinforce those elements which have a chance of success, and not insist on pursuing initiatives and preserving structures which have proven ineffective. This refers above all to regional cooperation, which most of the partner states were most hesitant in accepting and only did so in rhetorical terms: such cooperation is only possible in limited initial approaches on account of the pronounced striving for sovereignty in the region, the numerous internal and international conflicts and the only slight comparative advantages it offers. Instead of creating artificial structures which remain a foreign entity and only consume large sums of money, preference should be given to a pragmatic approach of small steps, as was the case in the history of European unification. Particularly in the context of the Middle East conflict, already before September 2000 it transpired that real regional cooperation will only be possible after finding a solution to the conflict. In spite of Israel's peace treaty with Egypt and Jordan, it still remains a "cold peace".

Under these conditions, it would seem more appropriate to offer programmes tailor-made specifically to partners willing to cooperate, particularly in non-political areas – partners who don't claim to include the whole Barcelona spectrum. The EU offers an outstanding platform for such programmes between individual states, social groups or professional associations, because its previous efforts in the Barcelona process have clearly demonstrated that it takes the regional cooperation efforts seriously – perhaps the only participant to do so.

## 2. The EU must impose clear conditions for the conflicting parties

If the EU not only wishes to be taken seriously in the Middle East conflict but also play an important role, then it must in the first instance come to an agreement about clear, unequivocal conditions to be imposed on the conflicting parties (including Syria and Lebanon). However, these conditions not only have to be extremely clearly formulated and permit no room for interpretation, they must also be realistic and – in event of not being met – entail rigid consequences. The conflicting parties must know what awaits them and that the Europeans are serious. Only thus can the weakened credibility of Europe in the Middle East – through compliant and too generous conduct in the past – be restored. In addition, this was made worse by some rhetorical swaggering that was out of proportion to the actual resources of the EU. The most recent, hardly purposeful discussions concerning the “boycotting ” of Israel are an example of such useless political noise, which incidentally only harms those who – like the Israeli “peace camp” – pull in the same direction as the EU.

What, however, are the EU’s means of influencing the conflicting parties in order to move these to a peaceful solution in the way the European Council has outlined in its various declarations and which essentially – like all negotiable proposals – is based on the most important UN resolutions on this issue (particularly 242 and 383)?

In the first instance, the EU can exert influence on the diplomatic negotiations and mediations, through its High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, within the bounds of the so-called “quartet” in particular, as has happened to some extent in the past. Furthermore, it can – assuming unity of position – through its member states, play a part in determining voting behaviour in the UN General Assembly and – more important still – in the Security Council in favour of one side or another. More important and effective, however, are any opportunities that arise from contractual agreements, financial aid and the application of international legal norms. These include, among others:

- the clauses and provisions laid down or negotiated in the association agreements with Israel and the Palestinian Authority and in the negotiations with Syria and Lebanon especially in respect of peace policy, democratisation and observance of human rights;
- the participation of Israel as the sole non-European state in the EU research and development programme;
- the possibilities for influence arising from the great financial dependency of the PA on EU funds, especially the monthly financial support amounting to 10 million Euro, which has been paid since November 2000;
- the existing possibility in accordance with international law and together with the USA of fighting terrorist organisations such as Hamas, Hisbollah and others and of taking action against the states that accommodate and/or support them (like Syria, Lebanon).

The range of possibilities is only outlined here; their formulation and application should proceed in the stages I describe now:

- Achievement of a unified position of the member states on the issue of what conditions should be imposed or what possible sanctions should be taken into account;
- Drawing up of a detailed programme of “conditioned cooperation” with agreed schedule and content, and the planned sanctions in the event of non-compliance;
- Confidential talks of a high-ranking EU delegation under the leadership of the High Representative with the conflicting parties in order to point out with the utmost vigour the seriousness of the EU programme and to give the parties the opportunity and timeframe to be able to respond accordingly;
- Official conveying of the list of demands to the conflicting parties and immediate implementation of the steps planned in it.

A complete strategy of the EU in the Middle East conflict cannot be limited, of course, to what is as good as a brief “list of negatives”; it must be

accompanied by the will to participate in wider “interference” and to achieve positive incentives.

3. The EU must be willing to provide an international guarantee of security and development

The bloody confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians has caused the call for international assistance to become even louder – not least in Israel itself, which has totally rejected such assistance in the past. The course of the conflict so far has clearly illustrated that peace will not come for the foreseeable future, let alone a permanent solution be achieved, without massive intervention from outside. So one or another form of international assistance is an essential part of almost all of the peace plans before us and more and more experts inside and outside the Middle East region are occupied with analysing and evaluating relevant international experiences and working out “blueprints” for the “Middle East case”. Besides contemporary experiences such as the Balkans and East Timor, the historic development of the Middle East region itself offers a starting point. After all, most of the states of the region have to thank “international intervention” for their existence in the present borders. The victorious Western powers drew the borders in the Middle East after the First World War and created the basis for a “Jewish homestead”. After the Second World War, it was the United Nations, with its partition resolution, that wanted to enable a Jewish and an Arab-Palestinian state in the British mandated territory of Palestine. The development since then has determined the stance of the conflicting parties to a possible international intervention: whereas in 1947/48 the Palestinians (and their Arab allies) rejected the UN partition resolution, they now quote the relevant UN resolutions and call on the international community to intervene to put these into effect. Conversely, Israel owes its existence to the international community, but subsequently saw itself as unfairly treated by the countless UN resolutions which were seen as a reward for Arab attempts at aggression.

The position of both conflicting parties is, of course, also crucial to the success of an international action and the two parties differ fundamentally in this, especially where the involvement of Europe is concerned:

- the Palestinians support an intervention from outside because they expect from this the end of Israeli occupation, the dismantling of Jewish settlements and the creation of the foundations for a state of their own within the borders of 1967, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions. In the short term, they expect protection against Israeli “aggression” from it and – at least in democratic circles – a guarantee of democratic establishment of their future state founded on the rule of law. A UN-led peace-keeping force with the heavy participation of the Europeans would be the ideal solution for the Palestinians; the USA as leading power would not be so welcome, but would ultimately have to be accepted;
- Israel so far totally rejects an international intervention in the conflict and cites bad experiences such as Lebanon (in the eighties), Somalia (nineties) and Bosnia (Srebrenica). Israel could not consider a UN mandate in particular, largely because the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon has failed in Israeli eyes and has not yet taken any effective measures against the provocations of the fundamentalist Hisbollah on Israel’s northern border. There are also the countless condemnations in various UN committees, which are seen as one-sided. Nevertheless, security circles and think tanks are increasingly examining the possibility of an international intervention, though from the Israeli viewpoint only a US-led action, in which the Europeans should play only a subordinate role because of their supposedly pro-Palestinian stance, would be acceptable.

Under these assumptions, it is difficult to visualise a role for the EU in an international military action. This is not essential, however, in view of a “division of labour” between the US and Europe.

In the event that the EU is willing and prepared to provide assistance in the Middle East, there is the option of setting up of an interim (democratic) administration in the Palestinian territories; in this case, however, the final status striven for (two state solution) would have to be clearly defined (in contrast to Kosovo).

V. The EU must be prepared to open itself up economically to the Middle East region at peace

The events since the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000, which – in contrast to the first Intifada – has long since turned into a guerrilla war, have illustrated in two ways that:

- when their acceptance – if not their integration – in the Middle East in the seven years of the Oslo peace process seemed possible, the Israelis once again feel severely threatened in their state and even physical existence;
- the Arabs/Palestinians in turn feel that their suspicion has been confirmed that deep down Israel has not seriously given up the idea of a Great Israel between Jordan and the Mediterranean.

In this difficult situation, Europe is in great demand. If Israel no longer sees a future for itself in the Middle East and the Arabs again regard Israel more out of place in their region than a decade ago, then the EU will be required to offer the Jewish state a European prospect. If one assumes that Cyprus and Malta will be accepted into the EU in 2004 and Turkey has a clear prospect of accession, then there will only be eight Arab states and Israel left in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

In view of present and future developments, the full membership of Israel in the European economic region will keep on developing into a clear Israeli interest. Such a membership would correspond to the status of non-member states that for different reasons do not wish to join the European Union as a

political unity, such as Norway and Switzerland, or for other reasons cannot, such as the Ukraine, Russia and the Caucasus states, for example.

At the Essen Summit in December 1994, the European Council decided to grant Israel a special status.<sup>1</sup> This is a clear sign of the special nature of the relations between Israel and the European Union that go beyond the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. This point is stressed by Germany in particular, which presently has the greatest say in the European Union. In view of Israel's advanced level of economic and scientific development, the Jewish state should develop its special status with the European Union on a reciprocal basis and taking account of the special relationship.

It is particularly important that Israel seeks to move closer to the European Union and to deepen relations with it. Such a moving together cannot be symmetrical, of course. Efforts in this direction would, in the first instance, have to come from Israel. The European Union will not make an approach to Israel as long as the Middle East conflict continues. On the other hand, the fact that the conflict with the Arab states restricts Israel's chances of utilising its relations with the European Union should not induce Israel to inactivity.

Whether the EU will struggle to realise such a bold vision in the foreseeable future, depends not least on its ability to speak with one voice in relation to foreign policy and security issues and to come to clear decisions.

In the present situation of world politics, in which Europe vehemently complains about the unilateralism of the Americans, an effective EU intervention in the Middle East conflict would be a clear signal that Europe is able, even outside its "back yard", to contribute to the resolution of a conflict that seriously affects medium-term European interests.

To achieve this, the EU must do its homework. With the EU Convention and imminent EU expansion, the topic is on the agenda anyway, and must be resolved.

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<sup>1</sup> In the German version of the agreement, Israel's is described as a "privileged status".