



THE KNESSET

Draft Joint Statement following the Meeting between the Delegations of the European Parliament and of the Knesset

**30 November 2020
(Remote meeting)**

The 44th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between the European Parliament and the Knesset took place, remotely, on 30 November 2020. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Antonio López-Istúriz White, the Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Israel and by Mr. Uzi Dayan, Head of the Knesset Delegation for relations with the European Parliament. At this first Inter-Parliamentary Meeting held between the Delegations with their new composition following elections in both parliaments, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the Members of the Knesset (MKs) had the opportunity to hold a first substantive exchange of views on issues of common interest, building on the results of the 43rd Inter-Parliamentary Meeting which had been held in October-November 2017 in the premises of the Knesset, in Israel.

Both parties stressed that the EU and Israel are close partners sharing common history and values. In the spirit of a common awareness of their shared values, - particularly respect for democracy, human rights, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, good governance -, the delegations underlined the importance of the implementation of the broad range of common interests and objectives.

The EP delegation recalled that the EU is fully aware of Israel's security challenges. The EP delegation shares Israel's concerns for the growing tensions in the Middle East and the increased risks to regional stability. The European Union is firmly opposed to the illicit arms build-up by militant groups and denounces the fact that rockets continue to be launched from the Gaza Strip towards Israel. The EU reiterates its fundamental commitment to Israel's security, including with regards to vital regional threats, including Israel's right to exist, which is best guaranteed through peace agreements between Israel and its neighbours.

The Members of both delegations discussed the regional security situation. The Knesset Delegation recalled their concerns regarding the Iranian regime nuclear ambitions, including the ballistic missiles program and the use of proxy organizations in order to perpetrate acts of aggression against Israel. The EP Delegation reiterated the EU

commitment to Israel security, which is non-negotiable; it confirmed that the EU shares Israel's legitimate security concerns about regional stability and security including Iran's role and actions. The EU continues to call for de-escalation and restraint by all actors.

The two parties share the same goal of a safer and more stable region. In this respect, the parties welcomed the normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrein and Sudan, which are beneficial to these countries and should contribute to the stabilisation of the whole region.

This positive development represents an opportunity to build confidence and restore cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, along the lines of previous agreements and in full respect of international law.

Both parties welcomed the successful EU-Israel dialogue on counter-terrorism and their shared determination to prevent and fight terrorism. They stressed the importance of looking forward to developing practical actions, from addressing root causes to establishing and sharing best counter-terrorism methods, including in the area of financing of terrorism, "non-conventional" threats, CBRN, transport and aviation security, as well as countering the promotion of violent extremism online and, more generally, the cyber-dimension of terrorism. They recalled that all counter-terrorism measures must comply with the rule of law and international obligations of the EU and Israel.

The delegations underlined the importance of communicating more pro-actively to the European and Israeli citizens about the mutual benefits of the EU - Israel cooperation, in order to improve the public perception of the EU in Israel and of Israel within the EU.

Taking into consideration the central role of the Knesset and the European Parliament to that end, the two Parliaments reiterate their commitment to remain engaged in the long-standing and multi-faceted dialogue between Israel and the European Union. They also undertake to explore new avenues in order to stimulate further the EU-Israel parliamentary dialogue and cooperation.

The parties referred to the structured dialogue at the executive level, noting with satisfaction the regular subcommittee meetings, which are held under the EU-Israel Association Agreement as well as the cooperation-taking place within the framework of the ENP Action Plan.

At the same time, the delegations regretted that a meeting of the EU - Israel Association Council has not been held since 2012, and called on both sides to redouble efforts to find, as soon as possible, a mutually convenient date. They underlined that the Association Council remains the key forum, which allows for a high-level dialogue on all the issues of mutual interest. A rapid convening of the Association Council is of utmost importance for the development of the relationship between the European and Israeli partners.

Vibrant democracy and respect for human rights are an integral part of the values, which Israel and the EU hold dear. In this respect, it is important to support a thriving and diverse NGO sector and civil society.

The two delegations expressed their serious concern about the rise of anti-Semitism and recalled that the EU and Israel remain determined to pursue their fruitful cooperation in fighting xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism. They remain also committed to continue working together in order to protect the Jewish communities and institutions as well as the Jewish cultural heritage throughout Europe, as demonstrated, inter alia, by the

mandate and activities of the European Commission Coordinator on Combating Anti-Semitism.

Both parties reiterated their support for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, stressing that it could be a useful reference including for identifying anti-Semitic hate speech and conspiracy ideologies in the digital sphere. In this regards, they welcomed the recent High Level EU-Israel Seminar on combating racism, xenophobia and antisemitism online, which discussed upon its actual impact, as well as measures to address the challenges of online hatred. Both Delegations agreed on calling upon all Member States to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a legal and educational instrument.

The covid-19 pandemic is a significant challenge for everyone and calls for increased international solidarity. The partnership between the EU and Israel, including on research cooperation, is a key element in these efforts. The recent EU grant of €18 million to nine Israeli companies under Horizon 2020 to advance research against covid-19 is a tangible sign of that joint endeavour.

The parties stressed the importance of fighting climate change, praising the fact that both the EU countries and Israel had swiftly signed and ratified the Paris agreement within the UN framework convention on climate change. They recalled that that developed countries had the crucial and urgent responsibility to take the lead in the implementation of that agreement.

The delegations recalled the significance of the EU - Israel dialogue on energy, focused on a broader deployment of renewables embracing clean energy transition, on promoting a wide uptake of energy efficiency measures and on the exploitation of Eastern Mediterranean energy resources in accordance with international law. Hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean region could become a tool to further enhance regional cooperation and synergies contributing to long-lasting peace and regional stability.

The parties welcomed the very positive impact of the comprehensive EU-Israel Air Transport Agreement "Open Skies", which had been signed in 2013 and approved by the European Parliament in June 2020. It contributes significantly to reducing the airfares and to increase the number of passengers flying between the EU and Israel.

With regard to research, science and technology, the delegations recalled the key partnership between Israel and the EU in this field, based on the 20 year-old participation of Israel in the EU Framework Programme on research and innovation, as well as on the increased cooperation under Horizon 2020. Bearing in mind the unique achievement of Israel in technological, scientific, medical and innovation field and the potential for cooperation with the EU to this effect, the Delegations discussed and strongly believe that the strengthening of the formal relations between the EU and Israel would be beneficial to both parties.

The parties recalled that the EU is Israel's first trading partner and that Israel stands among the EU's biggest trading partners in the Mediterranean area, with the most diversified structure of trade. They expressed interest for building closer economic relations and boosting investment by facilitating trade, reducing non-tariff barriers and pursuing technical cooperation. The cooperation on innovation and entrepreneurship among high-tech industries, including innovative start-ups, should be further strengthened.

The parties stressed that the EU and Israel promote mutual understanding by developing people-to-people contacts, in particular through promoting cooperation between universities, student and staff exchanges, including as part of the Erasmus+ programme, as well as through youth exchanges and networking.

Confidence-building measures are important for an engagement towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In this context, the EP delegation recalled the EU position that Israel's commitment to suspend plans to unilaterally annex areas of the occupied Palestinian territory is a positive step. The Israeli delegation recalled the centrality of Israel's security constraints and the need to take into account the realities on the ground. The EP Delegation also recalled the longstanding EU position that a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict requires a regional inclusive approach and direct engagement between both parties, with the aim of living side by side in peace and security. It noted that the EU remains firm in its commitment to a negotiated and viable two-state solution. In this regard, both Delegations reaffirmed the need to strive to direct bilateral negotiations on all final status issues in order to achieve a lasting peace. We welcome the announcement to resume coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

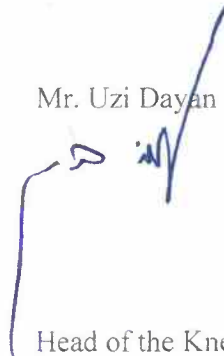
The EU also welcomes Israel's commitment to, and engagement in, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), in which 43 partners from the EU and the Mediterranean engage with a view to effectively address common regional challenges. The Delegations took note of the 5th UfM Regional Forum, where members reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of the Barcelona Process and reiterated their engagement in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and cooperation. The EP counts on the active participation of the Knesset within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, notably in view of the next plenary meeting, under the European Parliament presidency.

Mr. Antonio López-Istúriz White



Chair of the European Parliament
Delegation for relations with Israel

Mr. Uzi Dayan



Head of the Knesset Delegation for
relations with the European Parliament