



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

**31 October 2021  
Jerusalem**

The 45th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between the Knesset and the European Parliament took place, in Jerusalem, on the 31st of October 2021. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Yossi Shain, the Head of the Knesset Delegation for relations with the European Parliament, and by Mr. Antonio López-Istúriz White, Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Israel. At this first Inter-Parliamentary Meeting held between both Delegations, with the new composition of the Knesset Delegation after elections in Israel, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the Members of the Knesset (MKs) had the opportunity to hold a substantive exchange of views on issues of common interest. This meeting built on the results of the 44th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting which was held remotely on the 30th of November 2020.

Both parties reiterated their close partnership and their common historical ties. In the spirit of their shared values—particularly the respect for democracy, human rights, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and good governance—both delegations underlined the importance of the implementation of a broad range of mutual understandings and objectives. The EP delegation highlighted how important it is to strengthen its bilateral partnership with Israel.

The parties recalled that the EU is Israel's primary trading partner and that the latter stands among the EU's most relevant trading partners in the Mediterranean area, with the most diversified structure of trade. They expressed interest in building closer economic relations and boosting investment by facilitating trade, reducing non-tariff barriers and pursuing scientific and technological cooperation. Both parties recognized the achievements of the Abraham Accords in boosting trade and economic ties between Israel and the signatory Arab states and mentioned the perspective of growth of this trade in the near future. The delegations also agreed that cooperation in the fields of innovation and entrepreneurship among high-tech industries, including innovative start-ups, should be further strengthened.

The Knesset delegation reiterated the message underlined by the Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid that the State of Israel and the European Union had started “a new page,



especially on the economic front” and that “there are opportunities worth billions of euros for Israel that have opened up and that will be developed in the future”.

Both delegations welcomed the strengthening of the EU–Israel relations in many sectors like transportation, tourism, education, industry, justice, and counter-terrorism, while acknowledging that there are still opportunities to enhance cooperation. In the same context, both delegations welcomed the recent agreement on the mutual recognition of Covid-19 vaccine certificates, including its positive impact on tourism. Moreover, the recent conclusion of negotiations for Horizon Europe programme and the consequent participation of Israel in this prestigious EU programme were also warmly welcomed. Both parties welcomed the participation of Israeli researchers in the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme and expressed hope for their participation in the Creative Europe programme.

With regard to research, science and technology, the delegations recalled the key partnership between Israel and the EU in this field, based on more than 25 years of Israel’s participation in the EU Framework Programme on research and innovation, as well as on the increased cooperation under Horizon 2020. Bearing in mind the unique achievements of Israel in technological, scientific and medical innovation 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, and they acknowledge that such cooperation in the fields of research and development will strengthen political and economic ties between Israel and the EU.

The parties stressed that the EU and Israel promote mutual understanding by developing people-to-people contacts, in particular through cooperation between universities and student and staff exchanges, including Israel’s participation in the Erasmus+ programme.

Both delegations welcomed the aim, expressed by EU, to resume meetings of the EU-Israel Association Council—last held in 2012—designed to strengthen the structured dialogue between the two sides, something that the delegations of the European Parliament and of the Knesset have repeatedly requested. They expressed hope that all conditions will be set and a date for the meeting of the Association Council will be announced soon. They underlined that the Association Council remains the key forum for EU–Israel ties, which allows for a high-level dialogue on all the issues of mutual interest. An expeditious convening of the Association Council is of utmost importance for the development of the relationship between European and Israeli partners.

The EP delegation noted the uniqueness of the Israeli government coalition, comprising parties from the entire political spectrum and, for the first time, including an Arab party; it commended this democratic achievement and sign of political unity.

The delegations underlined the importance of communicating more pro-actively to European and Israeli citizens about the mutual benefits of EU–Israel cooperation, in order to improve the public perception of the EU in Israel and of Israel within the European Union. Both parties recalled the importance of communicating to their citizens the many areas of collaboration: trade, transport (Open Skies agreement), tourism (EU is the prime destination for Israeli tourists), research, common fight against the pandemic, as well as the constant and essential collaboration on counter-terrorism.

Taking into consideration the central role of the Knesset and the European Parliament in the relationship between the EU and Israel, the two Parliaments reiterated their commitment to remain engaged in the long-standing and multi-faceted dialogue between



Israel and the European Union. They also committed to exploring new avenues in order to further stimulate the EU-Israel parliamentary dialogue and cooperation.

The EP delegation informed about the recent adoption by the European Commission of the first-ever EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish life. The strategy, acknowledging that antisemitism is worryingly on the rise in Europe and beyond, sets out a series of measures aiming to prevent all forms of antisemitism; protect and foster Jewish life; and promote research, education and remembrance of the Holocaust. The Strategy proposes measures to increase cooperation with Internet companies to curb antisemitism online, to protect better public spaces and places of worship, to set up a European research hub on contemporary antisemitism and to create a network of sites where the Holocaust happened. These measures will be reinforced by the EU's international efforts to lead the global fight against antisemitism.

Both parties reiterated their support for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, stressing that it could be a useful reference for identifying antisemitic hate speech and conspiracy ideologies in the digital sphere. They also agreed on calling upon all Member States to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a legal basis and educational instrument. In this context, the EP delegation reiterated that the EU has a zero tolerance policy regarding hatred, incitement and antisemitism, especially in education.

The EP delegation recalled the message expressed by the European Union High Representative/VP Josep Borrell during talks between the Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and the EU's 27 foreign ministers on 12 July 2021, in Brussels. The message included the EU's readiness for a fresh start in the relations with Israel and the understanding that a "credible engagement and stronger relationship with Israel is needed to revive a path towards peace and justice for Israel and Palestinians both alike" and that the EU "expects Israel to offer a political perspective to end the conflict". Confidence-building measures are important for an engagement towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both Delegations also recalled the discussions between EU ministers on how the EU could help in reviving the peace process with the Palestinians, while noting the challenges on the ground.

The EP delegation referred to the conflict occurred in May 2021 between Israel and Hamas and reiterated their message expressed on the occasion on the escalation of the events. The EP delegation recalled its pledge to stop immediately the launching of rockets from Hamas and other terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip into Israel. The EP delegation also recalled the European Union efforts to de-escalate the situation as a matter of priority and to support efforts aimed at ending further violence from Hamas and other terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip against Israel. It also recalled the EU message acknowledging Israel's right to protect its population from these kind of attacks, and the importance of avoiding civilian casualties. It also underlined that root causes that have led to this situation must be addressed.

The EP delegation recalled that the EU continues to call for the full consolidation of the ceasefire in Gaza, and welcomes the steps that Israel has taken to ease some restrictions on Gaza, notably the expansion of the fishing zone and the issuing of permits for businesspersons to exit Gaza and the expansion of the operation of the Kerem Shalom crossing. The Delegation furthermore recalled that the EU calls for the further lifting of restrictions to allow for early recovery and reconstruction efforts, basic service delivery, as well as for unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza. The EP delegation recalled that



only the good will of all parties can produce the necessary steps towards a fundamental change to the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including a full opening of the crossing points, while always addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. The situation in the Gaza Strip has long been unsustainable: only a political solution will bring an end to the conflict.

Furthermore, the EP delegation welcomed the recently resumed direct contacts between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and strongly encouraged a further expansion of such efforts, which can pave the way for increased Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and for addressing key political, security and economic challenges, towards reinvigorating the peace process. Delegations also noted the steps taken between Defence Minister Benny Gantz and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in a number of encounters, aiming at strengthening economic and personal freedoms of Palestinians. The EP delegation also welcomed the re-engagement between Israeli and Jordanian leaders.

The EP delegation reiterated that the EU welcomes the process of normalization of relations between Israel and its neighbouring countries, supports the progress in the implementation of the Abraham Accords and expresses its willingness to address the issue in diplomatic talks with partners, for an increased positive outcome of this process. It also stressed the importance that efforts are pursued towards progress in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and recalled the well-known EU position on the support of the two-state solution and on the importance of avoiding unilateral measures that could hinder the process.

Both delegations stressed the importance of Abraham Accords towards opening the way to a new era, where the Middle East could eventually turn into a centre of solutions for global challenges, including tackling climate change and managing water and the desired stabilization of the Middle East.

The Knesset delegation informed on Israeli willingness to propose regional projects including Israel and several countries in the region and expressed the hope that the EU would also join and support such projects in a trilateral manner. Both delegations agreed that the EU's initiative "A new agenda for the Mediterranean" is a possible avenue in this endeavour.

The EP delegation recalled the EU's commitment to Israel security, which is non-negotiable. The EU supports a balanced, comprehensive approach with Iran, including dialogue, with a view to addressing all relevant issues. The EU also repeatedly expressed its concern towards the growing tensions in the region and on Iran's role in this context, including the provision of military, financial and political support to non-state actors in countries such as Syria and Lebanon, consequently fuelling tensions in the border between Israel and these states. The EU called upon Iran and all regional actors to play a constructive role in this regard and avoid unhelpful rhetoric.

Regarding Iran, the EP delegation expressed its joint concern with Israelis counterparts following the Iranian non-compliance with JCPOA, its ongoing technological projects promoting the military aspects of the nuclear program, its ongoing support of extremist parties and non-state actors and its destabilising role in the region. The EU noted that, at present, there is a critical point in time for the JCPOA, for bringing the agreement back on track.



The EP delegation reiterated that the EU welcomes Israel's commitment to, and engagement in, the Union for the Mediterranean, in which 43 partners from the EU and the Mediterranean engage with a view to effectively address common regional challenges.

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 developed countries had the crucial and urgent responsibility to take the lead in the implementation of that agreement.

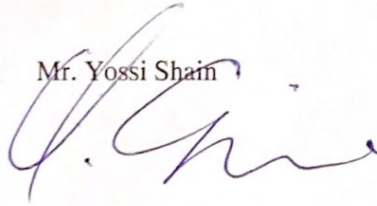
The delegations recalled the significance of the EU–Israel dialogue on energy, focused on a broader deployment of renewables embracing a transition to clean energy, on promoting a wide uptake of energy efficiency measures and on the exploitation of Eastern Mediterranean energy resources in accordance with international law.

The EP Delegation informed on the Joint Communication issued in October 2021 by the European Commission regarding the exceptionally high-energy prices the EU is facing. Acknowledging that this crisis is due to a variety of reasons, it stresses the need to accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal, as well as to improve the EU energy security, to ensure affordable energy, to protect the EU economy and enable the green transition. All these issues are key for EU foreign and security policy.

The EP delegation also informed on the “Strategic Compass” under preparation at the EU level, meant to lay out a strategic approach and a set of concrete steps in the area of security and defence, as a response to the major geopolitical shifts taking place, which put into question Europe’s ability to defend its vision and interests. The strategy should include a greater focus and actions to combating hybrid threats and protecting EU interests in cyber, maritime and outer space. It will also propose more ambitious partnerships in these domains.

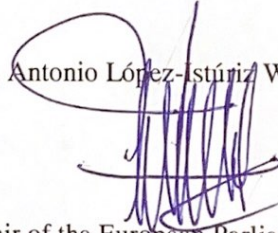
After this 45th fruitful exchange between the Knesset parliament and the European Parliament, the EU and the State of Israel showed their mutual commitment in reinforcing their partnership.

Mr. Yossi Shain



Head of the Knesset Delegation for relations with the European Parliament

Mr. Antonio López-Istúriz White



Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Israel