



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Delegation for relations with Israel

32nd European Parliament-Israel Interparliamentary Meeting
28 October - 2 November 2007

Draft report by Mrs Jana Hybášková, Chair of the delegation

A delegation of the European Parliament, led by the Chair of the EP's standing Delegation for Relations with Israel, Mrs Jana HYBÁŠKOVÁ, and composed of: Mr Bastiaan BELDER, Vice-Chair of the delegation, Mr Gabriele ALBERTINI, Mr Nickolay MLADENOV, Mr Ulrich STOCKMANN, Mr Jelko KACIN, Mr Marek CZARNECKI, Mr Ryszard CZARNECKI, Mr David HAMMERSTEIN, Mr Paul VAN BUITENEN and Mr André BRIE, held talks with its Knesset counterparts, with members of the Prime Minister's office, with Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Mrs Tzipi Livni, with NGOs and representatives of the Arab minority. The visit was of great importance due to preparations for the Annapolis Conference scheduled for end of November 2007.

A Press Conference was held at the end of the visit.

Three major topics were dealt with during the meetings:

I – Bilateral relations

During the briefing meeting with the EU Troika, Ambassadors have indicated that changes are visible in the Israeli priorities mainly regarding its relations with the EU, the UN and NATO. EU Ambassadors recalled that two-thirds of Israeli economic exchanges are with the EU. They informed the MEPs about a "non-paper". This document was also mentioned during the meeting with the Knesset Members and by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who hopes to obtain concrete results before the end of this year and had referred to it as a serious document, which asks for substantial upgrading of bilateral political relations between Israel and EU. Many cooperation areas, such as internal market, research and development, environment, education, culture, agriculture, and mutual investment are seen as essential to enhance bilateral ties. Members were pleased to learn about the decision of the Israeli Government to develop further the bilateral relations with EU and expressed support for the work of both the European Commission and the Council in upgrading the follow-up to the Action Plan along with non-paper, as well as to follow the work of the EU-Israel reflection group, established during and by German presidency to consult and to consider exiting opportunities to enhance mutual relations within the frame of ENP. They noted that since 2004, there is a new dynamic in the European Parliament in support of this process in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

II - International security and Middle East Peace Conference.

The Iranian nuclear issue and the role of this country in supporting Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas was largely debated during the meetings with MKs, Israeli Officials, experts and Mrs Tzipi Livni, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Most of these interlocutors evaluated between 1 to 3 years the technological point-of-no-return. According to MKs and Israeli government officials, Iran will have the capabilities to enrich uranium and then the bomb within a few years. Israel will not tolerate it, assured MK Isaac Ben-Israel. Even if someone like Danny Yatom (Labour leader) considered that time has already run out, most MKs still want to see economic and diplomatic sanctions resolve this major crisis. It seems, however, that the major concerns over Iran's nuclear capabilities are their implications for the regional balance of power. In the long-term a nuclear Iranian regime will fuel a dangerous race of nuclear ambitions in the region as it could be expected that Arab Sunni States would not sit back and do nothing. Meanwhile, in the short term, the Iranian threat is also weighed in the light of its links with Hezbollah and Hamas and the possibilities that these organisations might be supplied with enriched uranium to make "dirty bombs".

Israeli politicians and experts (Marc Heller of the ISSC) called on the international community in general, and the EU in particular, to reinforce their pressure on the Iranian regime. In this regard they insisted on the crucial role of Russia and China. Prime Minister Olmert and Minister Tzipi Livni met respectively President Putin and China Leaders days before meeting the EP delegation. They were satisfied with the outcome of their meetings and hope that Russia and China will not use their veto if stronger sanctions are decided at the UNSC.

The EP Delegation reiterated its support and expressed its understanding of Israeli security concerns. MEPs asked for opportunities to find a peaceful solution, given that peace and stability in the Middle East have similar importance for the EU and the State of Israel.

The rockets shot on Sderot are of special concern for the Israelis. Not only is the current situation unacceptable for the population, but in the future these rockets could have greater fire-power. They could even hinder all peace negotiations. Since Hamas took over power in Gaza, the government has discussed the question of whether a two-State solution is still practicable. As there is no other choice, the only solution is to weaken Hamas, as mentioned by the Prime Minister's adviser. According to him, Ehud Olmert wants to go ahead and will take risks if necessary.

On the Annapolis Conference, the EP delegation had the opportunity to exchange views with the Troika. Ambassadors gave MEPs some feedback on the meetings that Commissioner Waldner had had with Israeli and Palestinian authorities the previous day. They emphasised: i) EU strong support for the efforts of the negotiating teams led by Ms Livni and Mr Qureia; ii) continuing EU humanitarian actions regarding the Palestinian people.

1 - According to the EU Troika, peace talks had stalled for the moment on the timeline question. The Palestinians are seeking an agreement addressing the core issues at the heart of the conflict - final borders, the status of Jerusalem, the refugees' question, the settlements and the creation of a Palestinian State - with a

detailed timetable for their implementation. The Israeli side considered it premature to address many of these issues, saw setting a deadline for establishing a Palestinian State as counterproductive and preferred to agree on a joint general document (statement) which would pave the way for a full resumption of peace talks.

The discussions held by the MEPs with officials, MKs and Ms Livni confirmed this position. To sum up: a timetable which is very often not implemented creates expectations that are not fulfilled which lead on to violence. In addition, Israeli interlocutors (MKs Ben-Israel, Amira Dotan, and FM Livni) reaffirmed that the Road Map was still the framework for peace-making.

In almost all the EP delegation's discussions at political level, the two-State solution was mentioned as being the only relevant one. However, the 1967 line seem to be questioned now by some Israeli officials but any modifications have to be mutually agreed upon with equal exchange of territories. This approach was also mentioned by Professor Ron Pundak of the Peres Center for Peace who believed that before speaking of refugees and Jerusalem, the issues of full withdrawal and an equal exchange of territories must be seriously addressed.

With cautious optimism, the EP Delegation expressed its hope that the meeting in Annapolis would confirm the principles of the Road Map and the political will for a two-State solution. In the event that Annapolis was a success, President Abbas would submit the result to the Palestinians, either by general elections or by referendum. The latter would possibly include the Palestinian voters outside the Territories.

2 - With regard to the **situation in the Occupied Territories**, MEPs, even if they recognised Israel's security concerns, expressed also concern at the affectivity and back side results of Israeli decision to cut off power and water supplies following a rocket attack, gradually increasing the cut-off time if the barrage continues. Collective punishment may not be the best way to stop the rocket attack, said the MEPs.

They expressed concern too about the economic and social consequences of security measures, such as road blocks and check points. At ECTAO (European Commission Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and Gaza Strip), the EP delegation was given an overview of the humanitarian, economic and financial actions regarding the Palestinian people in the Territories and the way financial flow is monitored. At the moment, the EU is dealing with humanitarian aid and temporary assistance to pay PA salaries. The sum of direct EU aid (including Member States) will exceed €900 million in 2007. However, the EU objective remains that of moving towards supporting institutional building projects and sustainable economic development. Tony Blair, as the Quartet representative, is working closely with the ECTAO Team. He has presented to the Israelis 10 important economic projects to be implemented in the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories). However, only 4 of these projects have been considered acceptable by Israel; others were rejected for security measures. Furthermore, some Israeli officials were critical of Mr Blair's work, considering it as not very well synchronised".

Should a follow-up conference of donors take place in Paris by mid-December as announced, in order to finance economic initiatives that will contribute to creating the conditions for a viable Palestinian State, it will first require dealing with the current impact of the security barrier route. In fact, at the UN OCHA (United Nations Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories), the EP delegation received a comprehensive briefing on measures imposed on Palestinians inside the Territories by Israel for security reasons. The fence was built because of the incapability of the Palestinian Authority to stop terrorist actions and after many violent acts close to the Green line, in which according to Israeli Supreme court 1148 people were killed, more than 6 thousand Israelis were wounded in the period of beginning of the second intifada, between September 2000 and September 2002. Fence and barrier even though caused tremendous worsening of humanitarian and economic situation in the West Bank proved to be highly effective. The number of materialised attacks decreased for 95 per cent, as well as it almost entirely stopped the penetration of suicide bombers to Israel. The fence is planned to cover 790 km (the Green line length is 315 km). Since January 2006, 525 km (74,5%) of the total length of the projected fence is inside the West Bank Territories. Last year the Defence Ministry completed 102 km, and 260 km are still planned. However, not a single km has been added since July 2007. It seems that budgetary constraints are not the only reason. In the context of the ongoing dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians, this pause could be seen as a good will gesture.

III – The Situation of migrants and minorities.

One of the working sessions organised in the Knesset tackled the **migration issue**. MEPs and MKs debated on the Israeli experience regarding the integration of newcomers. It has to be remembered that 50% of the Israeli population was born outside the country and that 1989/1991 represented a major turning point. The breakdown of the USSR meant huge challenges to Israel as it had to absorb more than one million Russian Jews. Another experience of integration was mentioned by academics. Ethiopians represent between 30,000 and 40,000 and according to Professor Jack Habib, they are a major focus for the Israeli society. To assist this part of the population, Israel had to reinvent the whole assistance system. The amount of assistance (allowances, duration of assistance, language classes, programme to enhance education and university access) is ten times greater than for the Russians.

Finally, it remains clear that the cohesion of Israeli society depends not only on the immigrants' integration, whatever their origins are, but on the integration of non-Jewish Israelis as well. Nowadays, they represent more than 20% of the population. During the EP delegation visit, a concrete example illustrated this fact. Clashes between police and residents of Piki'in (majority Druze Town in Galilee - seen as a model of coexistence and tranquility) left more than 30 wounded¹. NGOs like Mossaw, *Bt'Salem*, *Ir Amim* and *Arab Association for Human Rights* referred to it when meeting the EP delegation. Some of the NGOs representatives insisted on legal and material discrimination faced by the Arab Israeli population (the existence of laws classifying the population on a cultural and religious basis, the easy withdrawal of Israeli citizenship...). These NGOs asked for strong support from the

¹ More than 200 policemen entered the village of Piki'in at 3 a.m. to arrest seven youths. They were suspected of being involved in civil disorder acts by protesting about a cellular phone antenna placed on the roof of a shop. Arab MKs (among them Majallie Whbee deputy Foreign Minister and Vice Chair of the EMPA Political Committee,) demanded a public committee of enquiry and called for the resignation of district police commander.

EU and the EP. They would like to see for example these issues raised by the Europeans within the framework of bilateral relations.

More than ever, **inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues** are needed. The representative of the Inter-religious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) explained the importance of the "people to people dialogue" as the only way to breach the gap between communities. He believes that all conflicts might end one day and the local religious leaders when they have already been working together in difficult moments can play a major role when implementing peace. This approach was clearly illustrated during the meeting with the Peres Center for Peace as many initiatives bringing together young people, artists, academics, and entrepreneurs were presented. Reconciliation is not a single act: it is a process mentioned by the Parent's Cercal representative. Many interlocutors refer to the EU as the best example of a successful reconciliation process and lessons should be learnt from this experience.

During these intensive sessions with NGOs the EP delegation had the opportunity to understand the complex socio-cultural challenges the Israeli society would have to face on its way to peace. MEPs pledged to continue their commitment to the improvement of the human rights of minorities within the State of Israel.

Two information trips made by the EP delegation.

I - South of Israel (visit to Sderot)

The Deputy Mayor welcomed the EP delegation at its office and described the situation of Sderot people being subjected weekly to attacks from Kassam rockets which started in 2001 and killed the first inhabitant in 2004. Then the delegation moved around the town to see recent civilian targets (school, gas station...) of the Kassams. At the Police station it was possible to see exactly rests of the rocket stocked.

Afterwards, the delegation moved to Sapir College where teachers gave an overview of the daily life in this college, one of the main targets of Kasams' fire. Figures and maps were shown. Between 600 and 700 target the area annually. The Psychological Centre of the College has grown and daily lifestyles have had to change given that, when an alert is given, students and college personnel have less than one minute to reach the shelters. According to one of the teachers the situation changed after the Oslo agreement and the return of Yasser Arafat to the area. Before neighbourhood relations between them and the Gaza population was good, she added.

The teacher expressed worries about the gap this situation is creating between young people on both side. They asked for an initiative to be taken by a third party (the EP for example) to allow students, academics and social workers on both sides to meet in a neutral place and to combat growing mutual disinterest and the subsequent risk of contacts breaking down. MEPs welcomed this suggestion, expressed their solidarity and condemned the continuing attacks from Gaza.

II - North of Israel (visit to view point and Nazareth).

The EP delegation decided to travel to the North to meet representatives of Arab religious communities.

The Archbishop of Nazareth in his speech thanked the EP delegation for its visit and welcomed it as an act of solidarity with a forgotten minority. The situation of the non-Jewish Israeli population is becoming more and more difficult and explained in part why the exodus of Christians is taking place. For instance, of the 65% of the population in Bethlehem 25 years ago, only 6-10% of Christians remained. However, he qualified the recent assassination of a Christian bookshop owner in Gaza as an isolated case which should not be interpreted as a general threat against the Christians.

Another meeting took place with a **representative of the Muslim community** who is at the same time a judge in a Sharia court. All personal matters like birth registration, marriage, divorce, etc. are dealt with in the different religious courts. He raised in particular the question of property (such as land, cemeteries and mosques) which belonged to the Muslim community before 1947. Nowadays, Muslims are no longer allowed to pray in the mosque in Ber Sheva, for example, as the Israeli court expropriated the building which is now used as a museum.

Another concern was the discriminatory education system. Only 7% of the Arab population (Christians and Muslims) have access to universities, whereas they represent 20% of the whole population in Israel. The EU could contribute with scholarships and by offering study trips to Europe. This idea was warmly welcomed by the delegation.

Concluding remarks:

The EP delegation was welcomed by unusual speech of the president of Knesset Dalia Itzik, which clearly proved improvement of relations between both bodies. The visit, due to Annapolis meeting and all development in the region was very timely. Nevertheless, MEPs used the opportunity not only to discuss political development between Palestinians and Israelis, but concentrated on possibilities of mutual EU and Israel, EP and Knesset ties as well. MEPs had the opportunity to hold high-level political talks with Mrs Tzipi Livni, Members of the Knesset, and advisers of Prime Minister Olmert. The main topics, which were discussed in Knesset, were environment and water, immigration, security. MEPs had discussions with representatives of civil society and the religious communities, as well as with experts on security and strategic studies. This visit came at a difficult, but nevertheless crucial and hopeful time for the future of the Middle East.

It has to be underlined that most of the interlocutors expressed the wish to see increased involvement of the European Union in the Peace Process. All believed that the EU would have to play a role (on the ground) in any peace-building process in the event of positive results from the Annapolis Conference.

The delegation reiterated to all interlocutors the support of the European Parliament for all actions and initiatives taken in order to re-launch the peace process and assured them that the European Parliament's commitment to a viable two-State solution in the Middle East would not diminish.

On practical aspects, the delegation would very much welcome the installation of a specialised committee within the Knesset dealing with the European Parliament counterpart.

With regard to the Arab minorities, the delegation asks the Commission to include these minorities in the programme for scholarships and student exchanges.

Delegation will further follow the situation in Sderot, plans to invite people of Sderot to EP.

Annex:

- Programme
- Participants list
- Welcome speech of Ms Dalia Itzik, Speaker of the Knesset
- Press release
- Interview of the Chair in the Jerusalem Post

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Delegation for relations with Israel

28 October - 3 November 2007
Jerusalem
32nd EP/Israel Interparliamentary Meeting

PROGRAMME

Sunday 28 October

Jerusalem

17.00 Meeting between the Secretariat of the Delegation and the EC Delegation to Israel
 at King David Hotel

Individual arrivals and transfer to:

King David Hotel
23, King David Street
94 101 JERUSALEM
Tel: 00 972 2 620 88 88
Fax: 00 972 2 620 88 80

Monday 29 October Jerusalem

8.15 Departure from the Hotel

09.00 Visit of the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque (Lion's Gate)

09.45 Visit of the tunnel (*through the Mugrabi Gate*)

11.30 Briefing with the Troika: *King David Hotel (Olive room)*

12.30 Light Lunch at the hotel

13.00 Departure to Sderot + Visit to Sapir College

14.15 - Meeting with Deputy Mayor
16.00 - Visit to Sapir College

18.00 Leave for Jerusalem

Dinner: own arrangements

Tuesday 30 October**Jerusalem**

- 08.40 Leave for the Prime Minister's Office (Only MEPs and Administrator)
- 09.00 Meeting with Mr. Erna Etzion, Deputy Head of the National Security Council
- 10.00 Meeting with Mr. Shalom Tourgeman, Foreign Policy Adviser to the PM
- 10.45 Proceed to "Yad Vashem" (Memorial of the Holocaust)
Visit to Yad Vashem
- 11.00 - Wreath-laying ceremony at the Remembrance Hall
- 13.00 Lunch at Crown Plaza Hotel offered by Deputy Director General, Mr Raffi Barak (MEPs + 1 administrator)
Lunch, own arrangements for the rest of the participants of the delegation
- 15.15 Official visit to the Knesset:
- 16.40.-18.00 - Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee.
- 18.00-18.45 - Environment Committee
- 18.45- 19.30 - Immigration Committee
- 20.00 King David /Official Dinner hosted by MK Amira Dotan

Wednesday 31 October**Jerusalem**

- 09.00 Meeting with Representatives of NGOs and Civil Society
(*King David Hotel Reading room*)
- 09.00-09.45 Session 1
 - MEMRI (Middle-East Media Research Institute)
 - Keshev media association on threats to democracy, and the conduct of the media in Israel
- 09.45-10.30 Session 2
 - Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI)
- 10.30-11.15 Session 3
 - ICEJ (International Christian Embassy)
- 11.15-13.00 Session 4
 - Ir Amim
 - B'Tselem

- Mossawa Center
 - Arab Association for human rights
 - The Parents Circle
- 14.00 Press Conference : *King David Hotel (Olive room)*
- 15.30 Meeting with ECTAO (European Commission Technical Assistance Office, West Bank and Gaza) and Troika
- 20.00 Departure from Hotel to Dinner hosted by the EP delegation at the restaurant "The Taverna"

Thursday 1 November	Tel Aviv
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- 08.00 Check-out at reception Hotel King David
 08.30 Departure from the Hotel
- 09.00 Debriefing at OCHA and visit to the Security Fence in East Jerusalem
- 11.00 Leave for Kfar-Saba , briefing by an IDF Officer
- 12.00 Visit to the Security Fence in Qalqilyah
- 13.15 Departure for Tel Aviv
- 13.45 Meeting with Prof. Mark Heller at the Institute for National Security Studies
- 17.00 Meeting with Mrs. Tzipi Livni, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs (*Beit Hamot HaMishpat building*)
- 17.45 Meeting with Mr. Ron Pundak , Director General of the Peres Center (*Beit Hamot HaMishpat building*)
- 18.45 Check-in at Dan Hotel in Tel-Aviv:
Dan Tel Aviv Hotel
 99 Hayarkon Street
 63432 TEL AVIV
 Tel: 00 972 3 520 25 25
 Fax: 00 972 3 524 97 55
- 19.30 Cocktail at the Residence of the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission

Friday 2 November	The North
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- 08.00 Departure from the Hotel

- 10.00 Visit of the North and observation point
- 14.00 Meeting and lunch with Archbishop of Nazareth Shakur (representative of Christian Community) (*Restaurant of Father Shofani - Nazareth*)
- 16.00 Meeting with: Judge Mohammed Abed (Representative of Muslim Community) (*Sharia Court - Nazareth*):
- 17.00 Departure for Tel Aviv
- 19.00 Arrival at the Hotel

Saturday 3 November	Tel Aviv
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Departure of the EP Delegation to Europe from Dan Hotel to Ben Gurion airport

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

32nd EP/Israel interparliamentary meeting

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv
28 October - 3 November 2007

Participants list

Members of the European Parliament (11)

		Name	Political Group	Country
Mrs	Jana	HYBÁSKOVÁ (Chair of the Delegation)	EPP-ED	Czech Republic
Mr	Bastiaan	BELDER (Vice-Chair of the Delegation)	IND/DEM	The Netherlands
Mr	Gabriele	ALBERTINI	EPP-ED	Italy
Mr	Nickolay	MLADENOV	EPP-ED	Bulgaria
Mr	Ulrich	STOCKMANN	PSE	Germany
Mr	Jelko	KACIN	ALDE	Slovenia
Mr	Marek	CZARNECKI	UEN	Poland
Mr	Ryszard	CZARNECKI	UEN	Poland
Mr	David	HAMMERSTEIN	Verts/ALE	Spain
Mr	Paul	VAN BUITENEN	Verts/ALE	The Netherlands
Mr	André	BRIE	GUE/NGL	Germany

EPP-ED	-	Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats
PSE	-	Socialist Group in the European Parliament
ALDE	-	Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
UEN	-	Group of the Union for Europe of the Nations
Verts/ALE	-	Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	-	Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
IND/DEM	-	Group of the Independence and Democracy

Secretariat, Interparliamentary Delegations (3)

Mr	Hans-Hermann	KRAUS	Principal Administrator
Mrs	Djamila	CHIKHI	Administrator
Mrs	Vera	BENITO	Administrative Assistant

Political Group Advisors (4)

Mr	Jorge	SOUTULLO	EPP-ED
Mr	Bruno	MARASA	PSE
Mr	Niccolo	RINALDI	ALDE
Mrs	Sylwia	WOJCIECHOWSKA	UEN

Interpreters (4)

Mrs	Gisèle	ABAZON	HE
Mr	Ilan	STEINBERG	HE
Mrs	Regine	STURM	DE
Mrs	Batia	FROST	HE

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Accompanying the Members (3)

Mrs Barbora TREBICKA	Mrs Hybášková's assistant
Mrs Melinda GIJSBERTSE	Mr Belder's assistant
Mrs Giovanna MORERIO	Mr Albertini's assistant

Greetings by the Speaker of the Knesset to the Delegation from the European Parliament

Knesset Plenum, 30 October 2007

(unofficial translation, prepared before the Knesset Session)

Members of Knesset,

Today, the Knesset is hosting a delegation of friends, Members of the European Parliament – headed by Mrs. Jana Hybášková – who have come here to hold an open and frank dialogue on issues of importance that touch on the fundamental issues of our life here in Israel.

Dear guests,

Welcome to the Knesset, the stronghold of Israeli democracy and the only democracy in the whole of the Middle East.

When I glance at the list of your countries of origin, I feel extremely jealous. You, the Members of the European Parliament, represent countries that once fought each other in brutal wars through many years of bloody conflict.

And yet here you are, seated together in one Parliament, working to build a better future and create a better environment for all the residents of Europe.

The deep residue of the wars of the past fought on your land seems to have totally vanished.

Enemies of the past are today partners in the formation of a united, advanced Europe, a Europe that seeks to create prosperity and peace, a flourishing economy, a thriving culture, and global security all on the basis of shared interests – a winning and proven combination.

Distinguished guests,

Ever since the establishment of the State of Israel almost sixty years ago, we have been seeking the path to peace with our neighbours. We have experienced ten wars; we have never known a single day of security and calm.

Yet we remain determined not to give up, not to miss any opportunity to achieve the breakthrough to a solution that will bring peace and security to our citizens. However, that path can never follow a route soaked in blood.

That path can never follow a route paved with acts of murder and terrorism.

We have built a wonderful country, we have many achievements in a number of areas: in the economy, in industry and hi-tech, in technology, in medicine, in jurisprudence, in agriculture and many other areas.

And we did all this while under fire.

Today's security situation is still unstable and dangerous.

I would like to ask you this question:

How can we proceed towards peace when towns and villages within the State of Israel are under daily attack by missiles and Kassam rockets?

This unceasing bombardment takes human life, totally undermines the routine of daily living and threatens the last remaining hope of the chance to live in peace with our neighbours from across the border fence.

Yet this is a hope that we have never and will never give up.

A great many innocent citizens are under a permanent deadly threat.

You must agree that this is intolerable.

Would the countries that you represent accept a situation like this for even a single day? Of course they wouldn't.

Israel has a duty towards its citizens – I believe that if the leaders of Europe had to face such constant shelling, their response would be similar and perhaps harsher.

Allow me to remind you that Israel has already proved she is prepared to make far-reaching and painful concessions in order to achieve peace and calm.

Israel never hesitated to give up assets such as oil and territory – won in wars she did not initiate – in exchange for peace with Egypt and Jordan.

Not long ago we uprooted flourishing settlements and thousands of residents who lived in the Gaza Strip, and what did we receive in exchange from the rulers of Gaza?

Terrorism, terrorism and more terrorism.

The Palestinian Authority has a moderate leadership and we are holding an ongoing and positive dialogue with them.

It is important that the countries of Europe should also learn, as we did, to make the necessary distinction between the moderate and pragmatic forces and those extremist elements that must be isolated and condemned.

Distinguished guests,

We expect the European Parliament to exert all its power to reduce the level of terrorism and not to display tolerance towards those who instigate it.

The countries of Europe should not hold any dialogue with Hamas, whose path is the path of terrorism.

The Hamas regime does indeed threaten our citizens, but let us not forget that it also represents a destructive force for the Palestinians themselves.

* * *

We rebuilt the land of our fathers, the homeland of our nation, our right to which received the recognition of the nations of the world. We created a refuge and a new hope for the survivors of the Holocaust following the annihilation of one third of the Jewish People, and now the President of Iran comes and threatens to send a nuclear bomb to kill and destroy us.

But the nuclear threat is not enough for the Iranian dictator – he also supports, encourages and finances the terrorist organizations, Hizbullah and Hamas, and the countries that sponsor them and give them shelter.

Iran and her satellites do not only endanger Israel, they also threaten the stability of Europe, and I am sure that you are all very aware of this.

We expect the European Union to express its outrage regarding what is happening in Iran and the declared intentions of the Iranian President. We expect the European Union to take determined and energetic action against its acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Empty words are not sufficient – there must also be action.

The nuclear hour-glass is emptying fast.

All of humanity is likely to pay the price of the delay and hesitation in dealing with Iran.

And the price will be very heavy.

Just as the countries of Europe exchanged hatred and bloodshed for prosperity and growth, we seek a similar turning point in our region.

This is the dream of every Israeli.

This is our national dream.

We hope that the meetings you hold with Members of the Knesset and with other Israelis during your visit here in Israel will be constructive and will help to build confidence and promote the relations between Europe and Israel. I believe that these meetings might contribute to an advance towards that breakthrough that we all hope for.

I welcome you all to the State of Israel and wish you a fruitful and successful visit.

EP/Israel Interparliamentary meeting discusses bilateral relations and Middle East peace

31/10/2007 The 32nd EP/Israel Interparliamentary meeting took place yesterday in Israel. An 11-strong delegation of the European Parliament, led by the Chair of the EP's Standing Delegation for Relations with Israel, Jana HYBÁSKOVÁ (EPP-ED, CZ), held talks with its Knesset counterparts on security, environment and immigration issues. In addition, the Delegation met with members of the Prime Minister's office and NGO representatives, and will meet with Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni tomorrow.

The Delegation welcomed the enhancement of bilateral relations between the EU and the State of Israel. Concerned by the Iranian threat to Europe and the Middle East, it expressed its hope that a political settlement will lead to a two-state solution. Visiting Sderot, MEPs expressed their solidarity, and strongly condemned the attacks on Sderot coming from Gaza. They also continued to be critical about the roadblocks and illegal settlements in the West Bank.

The Delegation is in Israel from 28 October to 3 November, visiting Jerusalem, Sderot, Tel Aviv, Tiberias and Nazareth. It was greeted by the Speaker of the Knesset in the Plenum, and attended meetings with members of the Knesset's Environment, Immigration and Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees.

Bilateral relations

Members were pleased to learn about the decision of the Israeli Government to further develop bilateral relations between EU and State of Israel. They noted that since 2004, there is a new dynamic in the European Parliament in support of this process in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Therefore, the Delegation expressed support for the work of both the European Commission and the Council in upgrading the follow-up of the Action Plan, as well as the work of the reflection group. MEPs urged the forthcoming Presidencies of the Council to come up with relevant arrangements in order to strengthen bilateral relations in areas including internal market research and development, environment, education, and mutual investment.

International security and Middle East peace

The European Union and the State of Israel share the same security concern: Iran, an existential threat to the State of Israel, which poses an enormous and increasing danger for the security of Europe and the Mediterranean. The EP Delegation asked for opportunities to find a peaceful solution. Peace and stability of the Middle East are of the same importance for the EU and the State of Israel.

With cautious optimism, the Delegation expressed its hope that the meeting in Annapolis would confirm the principles the Road Map, and the political will for a two-state solution.

While visiting Sderot, Members expressed their solidarity and condemned the continuing attacks from Gaza.

MEPs pledged to continue their commitment to the improvement of human rights of minorities within the State of Israel. They were concerned about the economic and social consequences of security measures, such as road blocks and the security barrier, as well as the negative impact of illegal settlement activities, particularly in East Jerusalem.

The other members of the delegation are:

Bastiaan BELDER (IND/DEM, NL), Gabriele ALBERTINI (EPP-ED, IT), Nickolay MLADENOV (EPP-ED, BG), Ulrich STOCKMANN (PES, DE), Jelko KACIN (ALDE, SL), Marek CZARNECKI (UEN, PL), Ryszard CZARNECKI (UEN, PL), David HAMMERSTEIN-MINTZ (Greens/EFA, ES), Paul VAN BUITENEN (Greens/EFA, NL) and André BRIE (GUE/NGL, DE).

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EU politician: No peace without Syria

**Jerusalem Post,
Sheera Claire Frankel and Tovah Lazaroff**

Syria will not allow any serious peace agreement to be reached without playing a central role in the negotiations, European Parliament member Jana Hybaskova told *The Jerusalem Post* Wednesday.

Hybaskova, chairwoman of the Delegation for Relations with Israel and a member of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) who also sits on the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Budgets, recently met with Syrian President Bashar Assad. She spent this week leading a delegation of European Parliament members in Israel.

"[Syria] has the vision that there is no peace without Syria," Hybaskova said. The Syrians have an "overexaggerated sense" of their own importance, she said, adding, "They want to put themselves in the center... and that is the key," so if they cannot be part of masterminding the peace, "they want to destroy it." "That is a very dangerous message," she said.

Hybaskova said she had been disappointed by the Syrians' "rigid" response on several issues, including the release of Syrian dissidents from jail, negotiations over the Golan Heights and the strengthening relationship with Russia.

"I am very much concerned with the mounting influence of Russia - not only in Syria, but in the whole Middle East," she said.

Hybaskova said she was particularly worried about Russia's ties with Iran and its actions to dissuade the construction of missile defense systems in Central and Eastern Europe.

"Whenever we are active, Russians come and say, 'No, Iran is not that important. Do not build this defense,'" she said. Israel should use its "special relationship" with Russia to persuade Moscow to change its tune on missile defense and Iran in general, she said, citing the number of Russian immigrants in Israel and the trade between the two countries.

"We do not want Iran to come up with a nuclear program. We realize this is a threat to all of Europe," she said.

Turning to the issue of sanctions against Iran, Hybaskova said swaying Russia to support such moves was critical if economic isolation was to be truly effective.

Europe, in general, needs to take a tougher stance on sanctions, she added, noting that more than 200 European Parliament members have called for harsher economic sanctions on Iran.

In addition to diminishing economic ties between Iran and European countries, the European Parliament is also considering enacting measures that would stop Iranian flights from landing in Europe for commercial or private purposes, she said.

As part of her visit to Israel, Hybaskova and half a dozen Parliament members visited Sderot on Monday.

"We were truly shocked to visit places like Sapir College, which is sometimes the target of attacks three times a day.... This should be stopped. There is no democratic country that would sit and watch this happen and not act to protect its citizens," she said.

While expressing doubt over the current methods the government was using in the Gaza Strip to stop terror, such as cutting power and electricity, Hybaskova said she knew of no other solutions.

She said it was clear to her that Egypt could play a more active role in preventing smuggling along its border with the Gaza Strip.

"Egypt [has shown] they have no capacity to control the border," she said. "We need to make them part of the solution and not part of the problem."

"There needs to be a debate about the Egyptian role and Egyptian control of the border, especially the money and devices being smuggled to Egypt from Syria," she said. "Why is this being allowed to happen?"

In search of answers, Hybaskova and the delegation will meet with Palestinian officials on Thursday to discuss expectations for the region and the upcoming Annapolis peace conference.

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