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## The Israeli-Palestinian peace process: the role of the Council of Europe

### Report<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Rapporteur: Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN, Romania, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

### Summary

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy reiterates its support for a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the 1967 borders, which could be accompanied by limited land swap, as has been accepted by the Arab countries.

Regretting the declaration of the President of the United States of America on 6 December 2017 on Jerusalem, the committee continues to take an interest in the progress of the peace process and hopes that Europe will be able to play a meaningful role.

The committee stresses once again its support for two equally legitimate aspirations: Israel's right to be recognised and live in security, and the Palestinians' right to have an independent, viable and contiguous State, and it calls on the Israeli authorities and on all Palestinian forces to take the appropriate measures to fulfil these aspirations.

Finally the committee proposes that the Assembly continues to promote dialogue and confidence building between representatives of the Knesset and of the Palestinian National Council, in particular in the framework of its Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World.

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1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4359 of 22 January 2018.



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## A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its [Resolution 1940 \(2013\)](#) on the situation in the Middle East, where it “reiterates its support for a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the 1967 borders, which, in view of the new realities on the ground, could be accompanied by limited land swap, as has recently been accepted by the Arab countries”. It adds that Jerusalem could well become the capital of both the State of Israel and the future Palestinian State, as a result of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

2. The Assembly regrets the declaration of the President of the United States of America on 6 December 2017 that it was “time to officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel” and that preparations would start “to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem”. At the same time, the Assembly notes that in the same declaration, the US President stated that the United States was “not taking a position of any final status issues” and underlined that “those questions are up to the parties involved”, and that “the United States would support a two-State solution if agreed to by both sides”.

3. The Assembly recalls the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the necessity for all parties involved to abide by their legal obligations and responsibilities under international law and to refrain from any unilateral measures that undermine the prospects of the peace process, including the status of Jerusalem, which should be decided by common agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, taking into consideration the Hashemite historical custodianship over Christian and Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem.

4. The international community as a whole expressed serious concerns about the consequences of this declaration on Jerusalem for the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and the prospects for a solution to their conflict.

5. The Parliamentary Assembly shares such concerns and regrets that the peace process has been discontinued. It no longer seems to be a priority for the United States, for Europe and for some Arab States. It feels however that the present context could provide an opportunity to re-launch the peace process. It is the responsibility of the international community, including the Council of Europe, to act decisively in order to create the proper conditions to attain this goal.

6. The role of the United States as a serious broker in the peace process was undoubtedly undermined by the declaration of its President on Jerusalem. Its future role should be based on a renewed attitude of neutrality in the peace process. In this context, Europe should play a major role in the sponsorship and resumption of the peace process.

7. The Assembly is aware of the fact that this is a complex issue and that the Council of Europe continues to take an interest in the progress of the peace process and could play a helpful role. The Parliamentary Assembly is unique, having both an Israeli observer delegation and a Palestinian partner for democracy delegation. It also has contacts with other parliaments in the area, such as those of Jordan, which also has partner for democracy status, Egypt and Lebanon.

8. The Assembly regrets that the Palestinian reconciliation, announced so many times, has not yet produced concrete results, thus undermining the prospects of re-launching negotiations. It also regrets the ongoing building of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, thus undermining the feasibility of the two-State solution.

9. The Assembly therefore reiterates its [Resolution 1940 \(2013\)](#), in particular, its support for two equally legitimate aspirations: Israel’s right to be recognised and live in security, and the Palestinians’ right to have an independent, viable and contiguous State, and:

9.1. calls on the Israeli authorities to stop the building of new settlements and the extension of old ones, cease all home demolitions, forced evictions and confiscation of land in the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem.

9.2. calls on all Palestinian forces to conclude, without further delay and in a transparent manner, the reconciliation, already announced several times, between Fatah and Hamas, based on the Quartet principles, thus also enhancing the credibility of the Palestinian side in the negotiations with Israel.

9.3. resolves to continue to promote dialogue and confidence building between representatives of the Knesset and the Palestinian National Council, in particular in the framework of the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World, and to make available to both representative bodies its own

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 23 January 2018.

experience in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. For this purpose it could consider using the tripartite forum referred to in [Resolutions 1420 \(2005\)](#) and [1550 \(2007\)](#), allowing parliamentarians from those two delegations and the Parliamentary Assembly to sit together on an equal footing and engage in meaningful dialogue leading to concrete proposals. The Assembly should therefore find ways of concretely supporting the re-launching of the peace process including through contacts with the directly concerned parties and other stakeholders of the process, mainly in the fields of competence of the Council of Europe.

## B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Titus Corlăţean, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. On 6 December 2017, United States President Trump, acting on a policy embodied in US federal law since 1995, announced that it was “time to officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel” and gave instructions to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In his statement, he stressed that “we are no closer to a lasting peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. It would be folly to assume that repeating the exact same formula would now produce a different or better result”. He added that America was not “taking a position of any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, or the resolution of contested borders” and that it remained “deeply committed to helping facilitate a peace agreement that is acceptable to both sides”.<sup>3</sup>

2. Three months earlier, on 6 September 2017, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy appointed me as rapporteur on “A two-State solution in Israel and Palestine”, and it held a first exchange of views at its meeting on 14 December 2017 in Paris, the week after President Trump’s announcement. Recent international developments have added topicality to this issue and, following a discussion in the presence of the Palestinian and Israeli delegations, the committee decided to also request a debate under urgent procedure on “The Israeli-Palestinian peace process: the role of the Council of Europe” at its January 2018 part-session and appointed me rapporteur for this debate, subject to the final decision of the Parliamentary Assembly.

3. The Assembly last discussed the situation in the Middle East in June 2013 and in [Resolution 1940 \(2013\)](#) reiterated its support to the “two States for two peoples” solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the 1967 borders, with limited and mutually agreed land swaps. The Assembly regretted the lack of progress in the peace process since 2010 and noted that, in parallel to status issues, those of standards should also be addressed so that, ultimately, whether in territories under Israeli or Palestinian control, all people, Arabs and Jews, Israeli and Palestinian citizens, could equally enjoy respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Therefore, it proposed that the requirement of “two States for two peoples” be further qualified as a requirement for “two democratic and pluralist States”.

4. The Assembly has continued to promote dialogue and confidence building between representatives of the Knesset and the Palestinian National Council, in particular in the framework of its Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World, which I chaired until last Monday. The Assembly also pursued efforts to establish relations with other parliaments in the region, notably in Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon in light of the prospects for co-operation offered by the partner for democracy status, which was granted to the Palestinian National Council on October 2011 and to the Parliament of Jordan on January 2016.<sup>4</sup>

5. Over the past years,<sup>5</sup> the United Nations Security Council has repeatedly referred to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and called on all parties to continue, in the interest of the promotion of peace and security, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process.

6. It also urged the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967.<sup>6</sup>

7. In this memorandum, I shall discuss some of the consequences of President Trump’s announcement and major international reactions to it, as well as recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In my view, the report should not serve to criticise, but to identify constructively the way forward for the peace process and to understand how the Council of Europe can be more relevant in this arena, by keeping engaged in the process of dialogue all the directly concerned parties.

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3. Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem, 6 December 2017: <https://it.usembassy.gov/statement-president-trump-jerusalem-december-6-2017/>.

4. The Moroccan Parliament and the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan also have this status, designed to establish institutional co-operation with parliaments of non-member States in neighbouring regions wishing to benefit from the Assembly’s experience in democracy building and to participate in the political debate on common challenges which transcend European boundaries.

5. [UN Security Council Resolutions for Israel/Palestine](#).

6. [S/RES/2334](#), 23 December 2016.

## 2. International reactions

### 2.1. Israel and Palestine

8. President Trump's announcement led to protests and clashes in the whole region, in particular in the Gaza Strip. Sixteen Palestinians and one Israeli have reportedly died in the violence since Mr Trump's announcement. Most of the Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli forces.<sup>7</sup>

9. President Mahmoud Abbas said the decision was tantamount to the United States "abdicating its role as a peace mediator" and "deliberately undermining all peace efforts". The leader of the Islamist movement Hamas, Ismail Haniya, called for a new "intifada", or uprising against what he called "a declaration of war against our Palestinian people".<sup>8</sup>

10. Speaking before our committee on 14 December, Mr Bernard Sabella, Chairperson of the Palestinian delegation, felt that Mr Trump's declaration pre-empted the peace process and took it off course. Palestinians could no longer believe in his good faith, which was not good for the United States. Jerusalem was a city for the three religions and the two national groups and a call for these two peoples to agree on this would have been appropriate instead. Its timing was wrong, as such a decision should have come at the end of negotiations. He felt that emotive reactions should be avoided, as the United States would still have a role to play in bringing peace to the Middle East, even if Mr Abbas had said that the United States could no longer be seen as an honest broker. Europe too had a role and it should convince the United States to restore its neutrality in the peace process. He also referred to the 1994 Memorandum of the Patriarchs and of the heads of Christian communities in Jerusalem, which was still topical in referring to Jerusalem as a "symbol of peace".

11. Mr Yoel Hasson, member of the Israeli delegation, pointed out that the declaration of President Trump was an opportunity to bring the peace process back to the table. All moderate countries should co-operate on this. Mr Trump had declared the obvious, as everyone knew that Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, but he had not mentioned the borders of Jerusalem. The announced American initiative should be considered and there was a need to go back to direct negotiations. Israelis and Palestinians knew each other and could speak to each other. His own party, the Zionist camp, believed in the peace process and he knew that some Arab countries were also interested in renewed negotiations.

12. On 2 January 2018, Israel's parliament passed an amendment to the "Basic Law" (1980 "Jerusalem Law") that would make it harder for it to cede control over parts of Jerusalem in any peace deal with the Palestinians, who condemned the move as undermining any chance to revive talks on statehood.<sup>9</sup> On the following day, it approved in a first reading a bill which would make it easier for military courts to sentence terrorists to death.

### 2.2. United Nations

13. On 6 December 2017, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres argued that President Trump's statement "would jeopardise the prospect of peace for Israelis and Palestinians" and that Jerusalem was "a final status issue that must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties".<sup>10</sup>

14. On 22 December 2017, the UN General Assembly backed a resolution, put forward by Turkey and Yemen and approved by 128 States<sup>11</sup>, with 35 abstaining and nine voting against,<sup>12</sup> expressing "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem". It also stressed that "any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council".<sup>13</sup> The day before, the United States had vetoed a similar Security Council resolution.<sup>14</sup>

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7. [www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-5259821/Two-Palestinians-killed-clashes-Israeli-forces-officials.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-5259821/Two-Palestinians-killed-clashes-Israeli-forces-officials.html).

8. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/hamas-leader-jerusalem-decision-war-declaration-171207083427072.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/hamas-leader-jerusalem-decision-war-declaration-171207083427072.html).

9. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-jerusalem/israel-changes-law-to-make-it-harder-to-cede-jerusalem-control-idUSKBN1ER0B1>.

10. [www.unmultimedia.org/tv/unifeed/asset/2053/2053953/](http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/unifeed/asset/2053/2053953/).

11. Including the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council, China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom.

12. United States, Israel, Guatemala, Honduras, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Togo.

13. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/ga11995.doc.htm>.

14. [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58307#.WkzmYnlG0Y0](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58307#.WkzmYnlG0Y0).

15. Before the vote, President Trump warned he might cut financial aid to States who voted in favour of the resolution. United States permanent representative to the United Nations Nikki Haley stressed that the United States decision did not prejudice any final status issues, and did not preclude a two-State solution if the parties agreed to that.

### **2.3. European Union**

16. The European Union called for the “resumption of a meaningful peace process towards a two-State solution” and said “a way must be found, through negotiations, to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, so that the aspiration of both parties can be fulfilled”. High Representative Federica Mogherini said the United States announcement “has a very worrying potential impact”.<sup>15</sup> In the same vein, on 12 December 2017, the 28 EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs had an informal meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in which they reiterated that the only realistic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was based on two States, with Jerusalem as the capital of both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine.<sup>16</sup>

### **2.4. Other reactions**

17. On 6 December 2017, the Asian Parliamentary Assembly issued a declaration in which it condemned the statement of the United States President as a null and void and stressed that the “preservation of the sanctity and the historical status of Jerusalem bears great sensitivity for all humanity”.<sup>17</sup>

18. On 13 December 2017, the leaders of 57 Muslim nations, meeting under the aegis of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation, called on the world to recognise “the State of Palestine and East Jerusalem as its occupied capital”.<sup>18</sup> President Abbas asked for the withdrawal of the United States from its role in the Middle East peace process to be replaced by the United Nations.

19. On 25 December 2017, Guatemala’s President, Jimmy Morales, followed the lead of President Trump in announcing plans to move his country’s embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

20. On 2 January 2018, President Trump said in tweets that the United States may withhold future aid payments to Palestinians, accusing them of being “no longer willing to talk peace” with Israel and on 17 January the United States announced its decision to withhold more than half its annual funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides aid for Palestinian refugees.<sup>19</sup>

## **3. Recent developments in peace negotiations**

21. In the more than 45 years since the Middle East war of June 1967, there have been many peace plans and many negotiations, but a settlement has still not been reached in the core conflict, the dispute between the Israelis and Palestinians.

22. In recent decades, the United States has been a key facilitator of efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States has been a member of the “Middle East Quartet”, with the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, which in 2002 launched a “road map for peace” aimed at resolving the conflict.

23. The last peace proposal dates back to 2010, following the election of US President Barack Obama. In November 2009, President Obama persuaded Prime Minister Netanyahu to agree to a 10-month partial freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank. President Abbas said this plan did not cover East Jerusalem and wanted a guarantee of a Palestinian State based on 1967 lines.

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15. [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/36910/statement-hrvp-federica-mogherini-announcement-us-president-trump-jerusalem\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/36910/statement-hrvp-federica-mogherini-announcement-us-president-trump-jerusalem_en).

[https://twitter.com/EU\\_Commission/status/938744617469726721](https://twitter.com/EU_Commission/status/938744617469726721).

16. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/37249/netanyahu-realised-there-full-eu-unity-jerusalem-mogherini-says-after-eu-foreign-affairs\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/37249/netanyahu-realised-there-full-eu-unity-jerusalem-mogherini-says-after-eu-foreign-affairs_en).

17. [www.asianparliament.org/newsgroup/news/detail/apa--39-s-president-issues-statement-on-us--39-s-jerusalem-decision/3933/view/](http://www.asianparliament.org/newsgroup/news/detail/apa--39-s-president-issues-statement-on-us--39-s-jerusalem-decision/3933/view/).

18. Final communiqué of the extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference: <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=1699&refID=1073>.

19. [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58437#.WmMfeGeWxRA](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58437#.WmMfeGeWxRA).

24. Eventually, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas agreed to “re-launch direct negotiations to resolve all final status issues” and that they believed the talks could “be completed within one year”.<sup>20</sup> The talks, also attended by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan, began in Washington on 2 September 2010 but did not bring about any results. US negotiators subsequently failed to persuade Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition government to renew the moratorium, or to convince President Abbas to resume negotiations without an end to all settlement activities on occupied territory.<sup>21</sup> In 2013 and 2014, the diplomatic efforts by US Secretary of State John Kerry strove to foster direct Israeli–Palestinian negotiations.

25. The Arab Peace Initiative is a proposal endorsed by the Arab League in 2002 at the Beirut Summit and re-endorsed at the 2007 and 2017 Arab League Summits. The Initiative was also endorsed by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

26. At a meeting in April 2013, hosted by Secretary of State John Kerry, a delegation representing the Arab League expressed the Arab States' interest in putting an end to the conflict, stating that the Arab League would approve the introduction in the further peace talks of “the [possibility] of comparable and mutual agreed minor swap of the land”. The land swap proposal was not, however, introduced in the text of the Arab Peace Initiative which was re-endorsed in the 2017 Arab League summit in Amman.

27. The European Union has repeatedly stated that “the only way to resolve the conflict is through an agreement that ends the occupation which began in 1967, that ends all claims and that fulfils the aspirations of both parties. A one-State reality would not be compatible with these aspirations. A lasting solution must be achieved on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the Roadmap, agreements previously reached by the parties and of the Arab Peace Initiative.”<sup>22</sup>

28. On 7 December 2017, High Representative Mogherini confirmed that the European Union and its 28 member States would continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem, until the final status of the Holy City is resolved through direct negotiations between the parties. She announced that the European Union would renew efforts to work with regional and international partners, including the Middle East Quartet and Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to re-launch direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative. The European Parliament, in its resolution of 18 May 2017 on achieving the two-State solution in the Middle East, reiterated its strong support for the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. This follows European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2014 on recognition of Palestine statehood.<sup>23</sup> The European Union has also encouraged the Palestinian Authority to progressively assume its government function in the Gaza Strip, including in the field of security, civil administration and through its presence at the Gaza crossing points.

29. The prospects for peace are closely intertwined with critical issues afflicting the region, such as Saudi Arabia's growing confrontation with Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel is worried about Hezbollah as well as efforts by Iran to establish a land corridor across southern Syria.

30. It has been said that the current regional turmoil could serve as the catalyst to bring to an end a long conflict and that new international efforts to resume the peace negotiations must consider the popular demand of the majority on both sides to live in peace.

31. Although some progress was made through US mediation, peace negotiations over the past years have failed to produce an agreement. During our discussions in December, I stressed that despite the complexity of the issue, the Council of Europe could play a helpful role and the challenge was to define such role. The Parliamentary Assembly, in particular, can offer a unique platform for discussion, having both an Israeli and a Palestinian delegation.

#### **4. Activities of the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World 2014-2017**

32. Since 2014, the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World – and before that the Sub-Committee on the Middle East – have made efforts to build bridges between the Israeli and the Palestinian delegations.

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20. [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11103745](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11103745).

21. Ibid.

22. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/337/Middle%20East%20Peace%20process](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/337/Middle%20East%20Peace%20process).

23. European Parliament, At a glance, US recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel, December 2017, [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614636/EPRS\\_ATA\(2017\)614636\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/614636/EPRS_ATA(2017)614636_EN.pdf).

33. On 4 September 2014, on the proposal of Lord Anderson, then Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab world, the committee held an exchange of views with Ms Rosemary Hollis, Professor of Middle East Policy Studies at City University, London, and Director of the Olive Tree Programme, and Mr Daniel Levy, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. They both pointed to the serious humanitarian situation of the people living in Gaza, with problems related to access to water, electricity, health and education services. Mr Levy also stressed that the occupation of the territories by Israel and the impunity of the latter were drivers for radicalisation and not stability. Europe should be more consistent on the settlements issue and should strengthen dialogue with the Palestinians. Israel should be clearer on its agenda.

34. Upon invitations by the Palestinian and Israeli delegations, the Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World met in the Palestinian Territories and Israel from 28 to 30 November 2014. The sub-committee held meetings in Ramallah and in Jerusalem, notably at the Knesset with parliamentarians, members of government, diplomats and representatives of civil society and of the media. However, it expressed deep regret at not being able to visit the Gaza strip, due to the position of the Israeli authorities, and its disappointment at not being able to meet some of the high-level personalities, both Palestinian and Israeli.

35. On 14 February 2017, Mr Sabella, Chairperson of the Palestinian partner for democracy delegation, addressed a letter to the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, in which he expressed his concern about the Israeli "Settlement Regulation Law" passed on 6 February 2017, aimed at retroactively legalising Israeli settlements in the West Bank built on private lands belonging to Palestinians. He believed the law made the "two-State solution" impossible. Following a discussion, the committee agreed to request a debate under urgent procedure on "Political consequences of the new Israeli Settlement Regulation Law" during the April 2017 part-session of the Assembly, which was subsequently not accepted by the Bureau and the Assembly in April.

36. On 24 April 2017, our committee felt that it was important to hold an exchange of views on the political consequences of the new Israeli Settlement Regulation Law, with the participation of Mr Majed Bamyra, first counsellor at the Palestinian Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations, indicated by the Palestinian delegation. Unfortunately the Knesset decided not to indicate an expert and therefore it was not possible to have a balanced panel. Mr Bamyra argued that this was the first time that a country passed a law which applied in another country. There were 600 000 settlers in the West Bank today, compared with 100 000 at the beginning of the peace process. 43% of the West Bank was allocated to settlements. Mr Elalouf, member of the Israeli delegation, pointed out that the new law was unconstitutional and would be annulled, and confirmed his support for the two-State solution.

## 5. Council of Europe relations with Israel and Palestine

37. At the institutional level, the Knesset has enjoyed observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly since 1957 and the Union of Local Authorities in Israel (ULAI) was granted observer status with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 1994. Israel has signed and ratified 11 Council of Europe conventions and has signed but not ratified a further two. Israel participates in four partial agreements and in 18 intergovernmental committees. A co-operation agreement between the Council of Europe and Yad Vashem was signed in 2012 and Haifa became the first city in the Middle East to join the Intercultural Cities network in 2014.

38. With respect to high-level meetings, the Secretary General paid an official visit to Israel in 2012 and met with, *inter alia*, the President, the Speaker of the Knesset and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Deputy Secretary General paid an official visit to Israel in 2014 and met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. Meetings were also organised at Yad Vashem and at the Municipality of Haifa. In addition, the Speaker of the Knesset met with the Secretary General in Strasbourg in 2016. Regular political dialogue, including with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Embassy of Israel in Paris, is carried out by the Directorate of External Relations.

39. The Palestinian National Council was granted partner of democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly in October 2011. The Association of Palestinian Local Authorities was granted observer status with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in 2005. Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities (NCPs) for 2016-2017 were endorsed in 2016, covering the following topics: preventing domestic violence; justice reform; preventing and combating corruption; and inter-parliamentary-co-operation. These co-operation activities have been prolonged until the end of 2018.

40. With respect to high-level meetings, the Secretary General paid an official visit in 2012 and met with the President and the Prime Minister. He also met separately with the Speaker of the Palestinian National Council. Regular political dialogue, including with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is carried out by the Directorate of External Relations. The latest meeting took place in Brussels in November 2017 with the participation of the Assistant Minister for European Affairs. The Palestinian side indicated they would submit proposals for new fields of co-operation.

## **6. Conclusions**

41. The city of Jerusalem has religious and historic significance for the people of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Jerusalem is not and should never become the property of one single group of people and its status should be decided by common agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

42. Our Assembly must regret that the peace process has been discontinued, as it no longer seems to be a priority for the United States, for Europe and for some Arab States. However, this could also be the right moment to bring the peace process back to the table and re-start direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

43. The peace process is a complex issue and the Council of Europe is not a major player. However, I do believe that it could play a helpful role. Our Assembly is unique, having both an Israeli observer delegation and a Palestinian partner for democracy delegation. It also has contacts with other parliaments in the area, such as those of Jordan, which also has partner for democracy status, Egypt and Lebanon.