Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1103 (1996)[1]

Situation in the Middle East: the Israeli-Palestinian peace process

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly deplores the recent violence in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. It extends its warmest sympathy to the bereaved and the injured.

2. The Assembly considers that the deeper cause for the incidents lies in the stagnation of the peace process. The main responsibility in this respect lies with the Israeli Government. It is essential that previous agreements be implemented. Moreover, negotiations must be continued on the basis of the Madrid Conference framework and the declaration of principles. Meanwhile, the parties should refrain from any action affecting the status quo of the Holy Places in Jerusalem.

3. The Assembly firmly supports the French President's initiative aimed at giving Europe a stronger political role in the peace process. It welcomes the appointment of a special European Union envoy to the Middle East.

4. The Assembly, in this context, recalls:

4.1. that the human, cultural and economic potential of the Middle East has for too long been ruined by useless conflict;

4.2. that these conflicts have continually threatened the stability and security of Europe;

4.3. that the 1991 Madrid Conference has given a durable framework for bilateral and multilateral negotiations (bilateral: Israel-Jordan, leading to the 1994 peace treaty, Israel-Lebanon, Israel-Syria and Israel-Palestine; and multilateral: on five issues critical to the future of the region - economic co-operation and development, environment, water, refugees, and arms control and regional security);

4.4. that Israeli-Palestinian bilateral negotiations within this framework are crucial to the success of the whole peace process;

4.5. that in implementation of its Resolution 1013 (1993), five of its committees are contributing to the confidence-building process between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, and have now completed the first phase of their work;

4.6. that pursuant to its Recommendation 1152 (1991), its Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography is monitoring the situation of the Palestine refugees.

1. See Doc. 7700, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr de Puig; Doc. 7641, contribution from the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Blaauw; Doc. 7656, contribution from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Németh; Doc. 7658, contribution from the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, rapporteur: Mr Staes; and Doc. 7660, contribution from the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Mrs Fleetwood. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 7 November 1996.

5. The Assembly further recalls that, in accordance with the declaration of principles signed in Washington on 13 September 1993, the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Washington, 28 September 1995) marked an important step towards the establishment of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, for a transitional period of five years, with a view to a permanent settlement based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338:

5.1. the agreement opened the way for the election, on 20 January 1996, of the eighty-eight members of the Palestinian Council and of the Ra'ees (President) of the Executive Authority of the Council. These elections were internationally observed, including by a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

5.2. henceforth, the Palestinian people have democratically-elected leaders and a democratic basis for the development of self-government institutions;

5.3. further to these elections and the elections held in Israel on 29 May 1996, a basis exists for negotiations on "permanent status" issues to be pursued. These negotiations were opened on 5 May 1996, shortly following revision of the Palestinian Covenant. The issues include Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and co-operation with neighbouring countries.

6. The interim agreement is a great achievement. Both parties must fully respect and build upon the commitments which they have freely entered into under the agreement.

7. The Assembly calls for the timetables of the interim agreement to be respected, and for negotiations to be pursued on "permanent status" issues.

8. The Assembly vigorously condemns the acts of terrorism perpetrated against Israel which have left many victims and created a climate of indignation and anxiety among the Israeli population. While understanding the security concerns which weigh heavily upon it, the Israeli Government must continue to redeploy its forces, in accordance with the agreements concluded, including withdrawal from the Hebron area. This area is becoming a major symbolic issue for Palestinians and Israelis and must be dealt with urgently to avoid further violence. Such redeployments must be based on an objective assessment of security concerns, and must take place in the light of experience gained in co-operation with the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority.

9. The Assembly calls on the Palestinian Authority to stand firm by taking appropriate measures against terrorism and expresses its conviction that winning the battle against terrorists will lead to the opening of borders and to free movement of persons and goods, will confer greater stability on the Palestinian Authority, and will pave the way for urgent and much-needed economic development.

10. Border closures are gravely damaging - economically, psychologically and politically. They seriously weaken the trust of the Palestinian population in the benefits of the peace process, and they undermine the credit of the Palestinian Authority. Both sides should pursue policies for closures to be brought to an end and for borders to remain open in the future.

11. Safe passage of persons and transportation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is essential. In particular, there must be no restrictions on free movement of members of the Palestinian Council. The democratic basis and legitimacy of the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority must be fully respected.

12. Expansion of Jewish settlements on Palestinian territories critically undermines the atmosphere required for constructive negotiations. It endangers the progress of the peace process. It should therefore be discontinued.

13. Furthermore, the Assembly welcomes the already close co-operation among international donors of the countries in the region as regards the allocation of resources, and hopes that it can be further intensified.

14. The Assembly seeks to enhance Europe's contribution to the building of confidence between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, as well as to the improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinian people. To this end, the Assembly notes, on the basis of the work of five of its committees:

14.1. general infrastructure improvement in the Palestinian territories is pursued on the "multilateral track" of the Madrid framework. European governments and the European Union are contributing within this framework. Special attention should be paid to improving the region's infrastructure, in particular as regards ports, roads, telecommunications, energy transmission and water management, the latter being of special importance in the face of an upcoming shortage situation. As an example of the scale of the

efforts required, per capita renewable supplies of water by the year 2025 will be five times less in the Middle East than they were in 1960. Israel is committed under the interim agreement to ensuring increased water supplies in the Palestinian territories;

14.2. the European Union, the most significant donor to the Palestinian territories, has approved further financing for programmes to improve Palestinian municipal infrastructures and for private sector development;

14.3. through trade with Europe the Palestinian territories must be helped to reduce their economic dependence upon Israel. Council of Europe member states should do their utmost to avoid protectionist measures. Today, Israel accounts for over 85% of the territories' trade. Wage remittances of Palestinians working in Israel account for 27% of the territories' gross national product;

14.4. the Council of Europe should contribute in the following areas:

a. youth exchanges, the setting-up of Palestinian youth organisations in liaison with the European Youth Centres (Strasbourg and Budapest) and with the Youth Programme of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre), and promotion of co-operation between Palestinian and Israeli youth organisations;

b. education and teacher training programmes for promoting tolerance and combating racism and xenophobia, for conflict resolution and for promoting human rights, democracy and intercultural coexistence;

c. seminars on the working of democracy, in particular at local level;

d. advice on improvement of Palestinian education, youth and sports facilities and infrastructures and on the development of communications (mass media and telephone);

e. advice to the Palestinian Legislation Council in the drafting of legislation and of a draft temporary constitutional law for the transitional period;

f. training of Palestinian judges, lawyers and law enforcement officers, as well as staff members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and of the Palestinian Authority, and Palestinian local officials;

g. preparation of the forthcoming Palestinian local elections;

h. setting-up of a Palestinian association of local authorities;

i. trilateral arrangements for co-operation between Palestinian, European and Israeli local authorities;

j. contacts and co-operation between the Palestinian authorities and representatives of civil society and their counterparts in Europe.

15. The Assembly resolves:

15.1. to pursue its efforts to build confidence between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, through meetings on specific issues which are organised or sponsored by its committees in implementation of Resolution 1013 (1993), as in 1995 and 1996 through the various task forces;

15.2. to press for action through the appropriate structures of the Council of Europe on proposals which are developed through these meetings _ the intergovernmental programme of the Committee of Ministers, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (Lisbon), the European Commission for Democracy through Law and the European Youth Centres (Strasbourg and Budapest);

15.3. to support stronger relationships between Israel and Europe, whilst recognising that such relationships will be inevitably more fragile while there is an insufficient commitment to the peace process, and to build up contacts and exchanges with the Palestinian people and their elected representatives, as the peace process develops with the full honouring of commitments by either side;

15.4. to promote the concept of an organisation for security and co-operation in the Middle East (OSCME) as a permanent forum for the promotion of security, stability, democracy, human rights, and cultural and economic co-operation in the region;

15.5. to support economic development through foreign investment and the creation of a free trade area between Europe and the Mediterranean region.