



## **Peace in the Middle East**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012 the European Parliament hosted a Conference entitled: “Peace in the Middle East”. The latter was organised by the European Foundation for Freedom at the initiative of Mep Andreas Molzer, Mep Fiorello Provera and Mep Philip Claeys. Speakers at the conference included respected leaders from both the Israeli and the Arab side, who, for the first time, were able to discuss the issue of Peace in the Middle East from the point of view of the people who will be most affected by the decision of the political leaders.

The Middle East has always been a political hotspot but has been put even more in the lime light last year with the emergence of the Arab Spring and the power shift that followed in this part of the world. The conference was headed by Andreas Molzer who kick started the conference with his opening remarks. Molzer stated that the West is concerned by the rise of radical Islamists; “We are seeing more and more of a totalitarian threat from fundamentalist Islam”. He also stated that while the respect and rights of the Arabs residing in Israel have to be safeguarded, Israel is the closest to a democracy in the Middle East and so its borders have to be recognised by International law. “The neighbours of Israel are not in a stable situation and the growing influence of radical Islamic players may become a threat. This instability in the region will have a big influence on the peace protest” concluded the liberal MEP Andreas Molzer.

The floor was then passed to the Israeli Speakers: Profs. Hillel Weiss from the Ban-Ilan University, Lia Shemtov (member of the Knesset and the Israel- Beitenu Party) and Gershon Mesika (Governor of Samaria).

The Israeli speakers said that Peace in the Middle East must be based on the principles of global ethics which so far have not been present in any of the attempts to restore peace so far. Prof Weiss argued that “Israel desires legitimacy which it seeks from the nations of the world especially from its neighbours”. Till now the world thought that the lack of stability comes from the settlements and

occupation. In light of recent developments in Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Jordan and throughout the Arab world it has been shown that occupation is not the cause of instability but rather the corruption, inhumanity and lack of human rights in the regimes of the Arab countries. Prof Hillel Weiss stated that "The fall of the Gaddafi regime is having serious repercussions all over Africa and Europe will continue to turn into Eurabia". According to Lia Shemtov, "the principles of global ethics are currently missing from all the attempts that have been made so far to establish peace in the region". Going a step further, Shemtov outlined the ethical principles upon which Peace in the Middle East must be based include:-

- The Rights of the Indigenous people in the land of Israel
- The correction of the one sided narrative on the issue of the refugees in the Middle East
- Development and culture of peace in the Middle East (incorporating UN resolutions in the peace process)
- There is no justification for destroying settlements which were built on ancient homelands as defined by the UN declaration.

Shemtov also said that "Ancient Jewish history is absent from International awareness and the European Union should be the first to understand the rights of the Jewish people." Israeli speakers also argued that there is a historical tie between the Israeli people and their land. In fact, Gershon Mesika, Governor of Samaria, stated that "The Jews have always lived in the land of Israel throughout the Roman, Persian, Greek, Christian and Muslim occupation. The historical link between the nation and the land where even outlined by the League of Nations after the World War."

Speakers from both sides agreed that the Oslo Accords were unsuccessful so much so that they have not allowed both sides to reconcile their differences and have not mitigated any of the suffering. Instead thousands of terrorists and criminals moved from Tunisia and other Arab countries. This created a rotten and corrupt regime that violently takes away the money intended for the Arab population in Judea and Samaria, sabotaging every intention of the two nations to live in peace and fraternity.

Arab speakers included: Paramount-Sheik AL-Jaabri (leader of Palestinians in Hebron), Assi Mahmood (Governor of Kefar Bara Region), Raleb Majadle (Member of Knesset) and Sheik Atef Krinawi (Leader of the Krinawi Bedouin Tribe). These speakers stated that arguments on this important issue cannot be based on religious controversy. Instead priorities have to consider human lives above land. According to Sheik-Al Jaabri "all monotheistic religions have to appreciate human life, because life is more sacred than land itself". He also said that "Israel has called for peace but after 20 years of negotiations we still haven't been able to achieve this peace". According to Sheik-Al Jaabri, the Israelis remain rigid in their positions and refuse all peace solutions, sometimes even denying the existence of the Palestinian people as a nation. He also stated that while peace has to be based on justice and the recognition of rights, "Previous speakers have said that there is no such thing as occupation", Israel cannot deny the existence of the occupation under which Palestinians have been suffering for the past 45 years. Mahmood Assi, highlighted the very real problem which Israeli-palestinians face. "We are part of Israel and the Israeli people since 1948. We are citizens of Israel, but at the same time we suffer because we are Palestinians on the one hand and citizens of Israel on the other". Assi Mahmood went on to say that "this situation has had a lot of negative

social problems in our communities; we are becoming poorer, there is more violence and we have difficulties getting infrastructure developed”.

As the conference went on it became clear that both sides were concerned mostly about mutual recognition and equal rights. Social problems in the region are being caused by poverty due to the inexistence of Industrial developments and Infrastructure. New investments by the Israelis in the Arab-Israeli region would not only generate wealth but will also lead to the building of a genuine long lasting peace between both people.

In his concluding remarks, MEP Provera, stated that both parties have to put geo-politics aside and realise that peoples’ lives are what really matter and that Peace has to be built step by step through people to people contact. After all, the experiences shared by the average citizens can be more effective than many speeches, international treaties and summits.