

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Ana Maria BOLBORICI¹

Abstract: *The theme of the work focus upon the problematic of the Middle East Peace Process and the implication on the European Union. The European Union plays a significant role in the context of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) as a member of the international Quartet, as a major founder and through its operational missions. This paper presents a few European policies and strategies concerning the states directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also in terms of countries with interest in the evolution of the Middle East peace process.*

Key words: *European Union, Middle East Peace Process, security.*

Regional conflicts recorded since 1990 and the fight against international terrorism have led the European leaders to create tools for implementing both formal diplomatic measures and the intervention mechanism.

Over the last decade, the European Security and Defense Policy, as part of the EU foreign policy and security policy, has acquired more experience and expanded its capacity by over 20 missions carried out as a response to crises in different regions of Europe and the world. [3]

The EU is working to ensure security by "reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, supporting development and combating the causes of conflict and the insecurity of life". [3]

From the beginning, the European Union asserted itself and still remains the most important donor to countries in need, most security measures are linked to UN goals (currently, all 16 EU support UN peacekeeping missions underway).

The European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) is a relatively recent EU Intergovernmental policy, subsumed to the Foreign and Security Policy, conceptual evolving since 1998 (starting with the Franco-British summit, in Saint Malo) and made operational in 2003, when it was adopted by the European Security Strategy (ESS) and launched the first missions (for achieving the objectives defined by the ESS).

From the perspective of the European Security Strategy (ESS/Solana doctrine), the EU has a priority role in the development of common security and defense policy to enhance a strategic culture that promotes early, rapid and robust intervention (if necessary); these EU policies cover a variety of tools and capabilities, such as EU assistance programs, military and civilian capabilities from Member States and other tools, such as the European Development Fund. The European Union attempts to develop more resources for defense, more capacity to

¹ Department of Sociology, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

bring civilian resources into crisis and post-crisis and a stronger diplomatic capability. [2]

Regarding the security policy, the EU created a system of co-management of security and regional security partnership based on multilateral institutions and structures inspired by the concept of cooperative and comprehensive security.

EU has opted for solving the security problems through regional security arrangements, considering that this European security model can also be exported to other regions.

Currently, the Neighborhood Policy represents a priority of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), but the most important EU programs in this regard are: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EEP/1995) and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP/2003).

The Middle East regions, Gulf and North Africa (both are part of the broader Middle East) are important areas in terms of strategy and priority of the EU external relations.

The European Union policy towards the extended neighborhood is governed by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EEP/known as the Barcelona Process, the conference held between the 27th and the 28th of November 1995), which is a cooperation initiative between Europe, the Mediterranean and Middle East states; the signatory States of this partnership are: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus and Malta; since 1999, Libya has the observer status.

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership aims to improve security in neighboring EU states, ensuring the Mediterranean area enjoys peace and stability based on the principles of democracy and human rights, creating a zone of prosperity through economic and financial partnerships and the gradual

establishment of a free trading area (FTA) and human resources development by the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on the social and cultural civil society level.

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is a new approach in relations between the EU and its neighbors, an approach that goes beyond the traditional cooperative approach. This policy provides a framework to strengthen neighborhood relations and cooperation with neighboring states aimed at enhancing the enlarged European Union to create an area of prosperity and good neighborliness Union border; amongst the main goals of the ENP: sharing the benefits of its enlargement with neighboring countries and increase security near the area where Union extended (under the European Security Strategy, 2003). The European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) is still being developed, coming to complete (from 2007) existing sources of assistance for targeted countries in the EU neighborhood policy. [4]

The included states in the European Neighborhood Policy are in Eastern Europe: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus; European Union and Russia have established a strategic partnership for developing the existing ones, according to decisions taken at the summit in St. Petersburg/Russia (May 2003); the South Caucasus: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; in the Mediterranean: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, the Palestinian Authority. [5]

The region of Middle East has great political and economic importance for the external relations of the European Union. Because the tensions in the Arab-Israeli conflict escalated substantially, European Union countries have decided that regional crisis needed a comprehensive solution as soon as possible.

Until 1980, policy towards the Middle East was largely the province of individual Member States, with the then European Community (EC) restricting itself to issuing statements at key points, such as the 1973, joint Resolution by the 9 EC States following the Yom Kippur war. Attempts were also made to build a relationship between the EC and the Arab world with, for example, the foundation in 1974 of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation.

Concerning the Middle East peace process, European Union seeks to play an active role since 1980, when the European Community (EC) signed the Venice Declaration. That declaration called for the acknowledgment of the Palestinians' right to self-government and the PLO's right to be connected to peace initiatives, based on Security Council Resolution 242 and Security Council Resolution 338. [6]

The Venice Declaration accentuated that the EU was concerned with "the two principles universally accepted by the international community: the right to existence and to security of all States in the region, including Israel and justice for all the people, which implies the recognition of legitimate rights of the Palestinian people". [6]

That declaration also stated the need to establish boundaries in the Middle East and to maintain peace within. While they said it was important to resettle the Palestinian refugees, the European leaders also stressed the value of self-government for Palestinians and that, like the Israelis, they should be involved in the process of peace settlement. Furthermore, the Declaration asserts that these principles were necessary for the establishment of peace and that everyone involved (both Palestinian and Israeli) should have access to Jerusalem. The European powers determined that Israel should "put an end

to the territorial occupation which it has maintained since the conflict of 1967". [6]

From 1980, the European states decided to take the responsibility to play a direct and active role in seeking a solution. Therefore, the European Union has initiated a set of programs for economic and political cooperation with the states within Middle East, especially with Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory but also with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.

The EU's consistent support since 1980 for a negotiated two-state solution as the basis for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has subsequently gained the adherence of the majority of the international community and, above all, since 2002, of the US.

Regarding the situation in the Middle East, under the European Security Strategy (2003) "the Arab-Israeli conflict represents a strategic priority for Europe. Without this, there would be fewer chances to solve other problems in the Middle East". [7]

Recent violent events in the Middle East demonstrate once again the desperate problems for both people in the Israel/Palestine dispute and in the wider region.

The European Union has repeatedly pointed out that the violence in the Palestinian territories constitute the real obstacles to the peace process; however, the EU also acknowledges and accepts the right of Israel to protect its citizens from any attacks, stressing that the Israeli government should exercise this right within the limits imposed by international law.

In recent years, the EU has been (and is) involved in post-conflict reconstruction of Gaza, in supporting the professional development of democratic forces and Palestinian police in helping authorities to

reforming the security sector and justice as well as with other issues.

The European Union has developed political and economic relations with partners in the region, including Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan and "Association Agreements" and "Action Plans" were concluded by the European Neighborhood Policy (currently, the EU considers if it will conclude a similar agreement with Syria).

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership ("Union for the Mediterranean") is a forum for regional dialogue and remains the only multilateral context (outside the United Nations) in which all conflicting parties have the opportunity to meet and work together for solving the interest problems under the auspices of the European Union.

Starting with the summit of Saint Malo (from December 1998), the EU expressed its readiness to conduct autonomous crisis management missions. In July 1999, at Cologne, the European Council decided that "the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, supported by credible military forces, by decision-making mechanisms for their use and preparation to respond adequately to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO"; this capability has been implemented since 2003, when the EU launched four missions of the "Petersberg" type under the auspices of ESDP (three in Europe and one in Africa).

Since 2003, the official position of the EU has been the support of the staged implementation of the Road Map, working within the Quartet (UN, US, Russia and EU), on the possibilities for a political settlement and as a major founder, mounting assistance and state-building operations in the Palestinian territories.

Therefore, in this context EU Border Assistance Mission Rafah was launched on November 30th, 2005 (for a period of one year) at the Rafah border crossing; this was

a mission monitoring the border between Gaza and Egypt; in May 2009, the EU Council confirmed the EU's readiness to engage again at the Rafah crossing point, stressing that, since the closure of the Rafah crossing point, the mission kept the operational capacity; on April 26, 2010, the European Council reaffirmed the political importance of EUBAM Rafah mission and maintaining its support in the occupied territories. [1]

EUPOL COPPS (EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories) is a police mission undertaken in the Palestinian Territories (launched on January 1st, 2006, for an initial period of three years) aiming at helping the Palestinian Civil Police and authorities in the security and justice reform sector, in May 2009, the EU Council approved the continuation of the approach to future action with regard to the wider rule of law in the Palestinian territories; on April 26th, 2010, the European Council has stressed that the EUPOL COPPS activities should be positive, encouraging its involvement at strategic and operational level in further close cooperation with the Palestinians. [8]

All these tasks demonstrate the contribution of the European Union, in particular, to the crisis management of the Middle East (but also in other international crises) by various means of coordination (civilian and military) but also to the eradication of major threats such as: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction terrorism and organized crime, cyber security, energy security, regional conflicts, states who are in a process of involution. [9]

The EU has extensive political involvement in the central Israel/Palestine dispute as a member of the Quartet. Moreover, the EU provides financial assistance to both the Palestinian Authority and directly to the Palestinian people, with the aim of sustaining the existing

institutions and building capacity for the future Palestinian state under the plans for a two state solution.

Though the US has led the politics concerning the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), the EU has made a significant policy contribution, not least by taking a lead in producing imaginative ideas, including the two-state solution, which were subsequently adopted by the Quartet and the Arab League.

We believe the EU has an important role in the policy sphere which should be maintained. At the same time, the EU and the Member States individually should act more closely in concert on both political and economical aspects; and the EU should press on the US the importance to the region of sustained US engagement in the MEPP.

We believe that the EU should be prepared to strengthen its relationship with Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the context of progress in the peace process.

The European Union needs to increase and sustain its efforts to working more closely with all the main players towards an inclusive peace process and settlement and also should use all the instruments at its disposal, including the European Neighborhood Policy.

The EU and the international community need to decide whether, if a single Palestinian entity is restored, to return to the bilateral negotiations based Road Map with its incremental path, which has so far failed to produce results or whether, in addition, to start work on the final status issues, a path which has become known as the “political horizon” (a formulation used by Dr Condoleezza Rice). In an atmosphere in which countries in the region have increased their active interest in the conflict, can a wider regional settlement be achieved through the kind of formula represented by the Arab Peace Initiative? Should the EU support a process

between Israel/Palestine which does not also address issues such as Syria and the Golan Heights and Lebanon or should it continue to pursue a comprehensive approach for a peace settlement? How can progress be made in the EU’s relations with the Palestinian Authority government?

All these interrogations are waiting to provide relevant answers and a clear solution regarding the situation in the Middle East. The credibility of the Middle East Peace Process needs to be restored by a renewed, concerted and sustained effort by the whole international community. We believe therefore that the EU, which has many interests at stake in this region, should participate actively and forcefully in such an effort.

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