

The European Union and the Middle East

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Early 2009 saw the EU's involvement in the efforts of the international community to bring about a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, while the end of the year marked the Treaty of Lisbon's entry into force. The two events are seemingly unconnected, but in practice they are linked. Should the Treaty be implemented as it is formulated, it will allow the EU – or so its proponents hope – to manage foreign relations in general and crises like the Israel-Hamas war in late 2008-early 2009 in particular more efficiently and effectively.¹

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on December 1, 2009, is a milestone in the history of the EU. It was designed to help institutions and decision making processes adapt to the circumstances created by the latest expansion, which saw the EU grow from fifteen to twenty-seven member states. In addition to increasing the efficiency of decision making processes by changing the manner of voting in the Council of Ministers, the Treaty expands the democratization process by increasing the authority of the European Parliament and the national parliaments of EU member states.

Institutionally, it was decided to create two new positions, one, president of the European Council, elected to a 30-month term (to replace the rotating presidents elected to 6-month terms), and two, the high representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The high representative, elected to a 5-year term, serves as the representative of the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and as vice president of

the European Commission. In order to assist the high representative, the Treaty also stipulates the formation of a European External Action Service. In addition to their representative functions, the expectation is that the people filling these posts will work to maximize the resources at the EU's disposal in its foreign affairs and security policy efforts. The appointment of Herman van Rompuy of Belgium as president and Catherine Ashton of Great Britain as high representative – both lacking charisma and media presence – obviously expresses the preference for influential member states in the EU over appointments that would be less convenient.² When the reforms go into effect, including the establishment of the European External Action Service, it will be necessary to wait and see if in fact the structural changes improve the functioning and international status of the EU. In other words, it will be possible to see if the frustrated question posed way back by Henry Kissinger – “If I want to talk to Europe, whom do I call?” – will finally be answered.³ In one of her first public appearances after the appointment, Ashton referred to the importance of the Treaty of Lisbon and called it an opportunity to change the foreign policy of the EU.⁴ On another occasion,⁵ she blamed the difficulty the EU faced in formulating strategies on the lack of sound frameworks for their implementation. Yet aside from general statements about the complex international environment and the regions of crisis in which the EU operates, her address lacked new content.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict – and the Focus on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The positions of High Representative Ashton on the Middle East were voiced during her first visit to the region, on March 15-19, 2010. In a speech given to the institutions of the Arab League, she referred to the Iranian crisis early in her remarks. Ashton expressed her concern resulting from Iran's refusal to enter into serious negotiations on the nuclear issue. She reiterated the EU's support for the “double approach,” i.e., continuing the negotiations alongside willingness to take “additional steps” in the absence of negotiations. The term “sanctions” was not used. Ashton also expressed her concern in light of the possibility that a nuclear Iran would lead to nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.⁶ Most of her remarks,

however, were devoted to a detailed survey of the EU's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷

Other than some updates based on developments on the ground, Ashton reiterated the traditional positions of the EU. She enumerated the obstacles to progress in the political process, most of which were laid at Israel's doorstep; she described the character of a future settlement – two states for two peoples; she referred to the EU's willingness to render active assistance to promote a settlement, a critical European interest; she called for active, concrete involvement of the EU in the political process; and she promised the backing of the Quartet and the Arab League for American mediation in the talks between the sides.

Israel enjoyed EU understanding at the beginning of Operation Cast Lead because of the reasons it had to embark on a military action against Hamas.⁸ However, following the entry of Israeli ground forces in the Gaza Strip and the use – according to the EU – of disproportionate force that caused both death and destruction, criticism mounted and was accompanied by calls for an immediate ceasefire that would allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip. The Europeans' frustration with Israel's refusal to stop the fighting was expressed in public criticism, which led to the call to investigate Israel's action in light of accusations of violations of international and humanitarian law during the fighting.⁹ Some EU leaders were not satisfied with declarations alone, and visited the region in the hope that their presence would affect Israeli policy.¹⁰ “It is up to the EU to decide whether to take any initiative,” said the prime minister of the Czech Republic about the crisis in the Gaza Strip when he assumed the rotating presidency of the EU Council in early 2009.¹¹

His remarks, coming before President Obama was sworn into office at a time when America was not actively involved in halting the fighting, expressed the EU's desire to take advantage of the American transition period – which in effect entails a lame duck administration – to play an active role in the effort to solve the conflict in the Middle East. However, the EU failed yet again to do so, and beyond its wishful thinking, the EU is well aware of its inability to replace the United States in the Middle East, even when the latter's status is suffering as was the case during the presidency of George W. Bush. Ashton's remarks also indicated that the

EU has made peace with America's status as leader. Appearing before the European Parliament upon taking office (December 15, 2009), she called for close coordination of positions and strategies with the United States. President Obama's strategic decision, made immediately upon taking office, to choose the path of engagement even with states that have been a source of friction for the United States, as well as his willingness to push for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, his support for the two-state solution, his position that the Jewish settlements in the territories are illegitimate, the need for a suspension of construction in the settlements, and his Cairo speech – all of these gave EU member states the hope that with united efforts, they would succeed in ending the conflict. Today, more than in the previous eight years, one can point to greater proximity between the positions of the EU and the United States regarding the situation in the Middle East, how to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, and above all, the urgency attributed to its resolution.

As similar as the EU's positions on the Middle East are to those of the American administration,¹² the other members of the Quartet, and the PA, so is the distance Israel experienced from the EU in the past year. This was a year replete with presidential announcements and spokespeople's announcements, most of them critical of Israeli policy.¹³ Criticism focused on continued construction in the settlements (described as an obstacle to peace, undermining the effort towards a two-state solution, and in defiance of international conduct) and Israeli activity in East Jerusalem (including the evacuation of Arab citizens, demolition of houses, and construction for Jewish residents). There were repeated calls for lifting the blockade of the Gaza Strip and opening border crossings to extend humanitarian aid to reconstruct the Strip, and a call to investigate the lack of proportionality in Israel's use of force in Operation Cast Lead.¹⁴

The political platform of the Netanyahu government intensified the suspiciousness and distrust between Israel and the EU. The detailed announcement – or to use the official terminology, the "Conclusions" – published by the EU council of foreign ministers on December 8, 2009, specified their positions on issues connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In effect, this document summarizes the differences of opinion between Israel and the EU.¹⁵ In contrast with the preoccupation with the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, the EU's political attention to Syria and Lebanon is much more restrained. A December 2009 announcement mentions the two states in the context of achieving a comprehensive peace agreement in the Middle East that would include arrangements between them and Israel.¹⁶

The many casualties in the Gaza Strip population and the extensive damage caused by what was viewed as Israel's disproportionate military response during Operation Cast Lead caused the EU to level sharp criticism at Israel. True to form, i.e., punishing Israel for failing to act in accordance with EU policy, it was decided to suspend negotiations between Israel and the EU on upgrading relations, which was stipulated by an agreement achieved in 2008 as part of an action program signed with Israel in conjunction with the European Neighborhood Policy.¹⁷ Thus in 2009 there was no progress in achieving the EU's goals for the European Neighborhood Policy.

The Iranian Issue

In addition to its longstanding investment in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the EU is involved in the international effort to curb the Iranian nuclear program, largely on the assumption that resolving that crisis would help stabilize the Middle East and resolve other crises in the greater region. This issue was the focus of meetings Solana held in January 2009 with the Iranian foreign minister and in October with an Iranian delegation in Geneva.¹⁸ During the Geneva meeting, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) proposed that in exchange for Iran's agreement that a certain amount of uranium be removed from Iranian territory for a period of one year, it would receive uranium for medical purposes and for serving the research reactor in Tehran.

President Obama's April 2009 decision on engagement in negotiations with Iran marked the end of a five-plus year period, starting in late 2003, when the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Great Britain resolved to launch a diplomatic maneuver to suspend Iran's uranium enrichment project in return for incentives that would compensate Iran for this demand. The ongoing efforts of the three countries, joined by Solana as the EU representative and the UN Security Council emissary, to find a formula

that would satisfy Iran on the one hand and the demands of the EU and the international community on the other did not bear fruit. Nonetheless, in light of the passivity that characterized the Bush administration's conduct during its first term and the first half of its second term in office, the initiative of the three should be viewed in a positive light.¹⁹ At the same time, the decision by the Obama administration to adopt the engagement approach vis-à-vis Iran and enter into direct negotiations with it, while retaining the sanctions option as leverage should Iran reject the invitation to negotiate, made it easier for EU member states to reach a consensus on the question of a nuclear Iran.²⁰ Although the Europeans support sanctions against Iran and even making them harsher if necessary, several EU member states, concerned that sanctions more sweeping than those imposed to date would harm their economic interests, contend that sanctions are not the tool that will ultimately bring Iran to the negotiations table.²¹

The results of the Iranian elections and the response of the authorities to demonstrations against the regime were the background to disagreements between the EU and the American administration.²² Unlike the EU, which did not hesitate to express criticism of the Iranian regime's civil rights violations, the Obama administration claimed that it was up to the Iranian people to decide on further developments (Obama subsequently changed his position). EU states, which were reluctant to level sanctions, did not hesitate to criticize the Iranian regime for acting against principles they hold dear, civil liberties in particular. The United States, which had adopted stricter policies with regard to Iran, even if it was willing to enter into negotiations, hesitated and refrained from criticizing the regime, out of concern that such criticism would lessen the possibility – slight to begin with – of conducting talks with Iran on the nuclear issue.

Iraq

EU activity in general and that of some member states in particular are part of the current international effort, spearheaded by the United States, to create an institutional infrastructure for local leadership in Iraq. Since 2003, the EU has contributed more than €1 billion to the cause, especially in the field of civilian services, including the health care system and the reconstruction of water systems, proper administration both at the national

and the local levels, rehabilitation for refugees, and law and public order. Another issue whose importance for EU member states is likely to grow in coming years is that of energy. As part of the efforts of the EU to lessen its dependence on Russian gas supplies, Iraq could fill a prominent role by integrating into the Nabucco gas pipeline project, designed to bypass Russia and stream gas from Central Asia and the Caucasus (Azerbaijan) to Europe, thereby significantly contributing to decreased dependence on Russia. In the absence of sufficient gas to stream through the pipeline, Iraq could fill the missing piece.²³

The Positions of the Big Three: Germany, France, and Great Britain

Alongside their contribution to the formulation and implementation of EU Middle East policy, the big three are also working to further their own national interests in foreign relations and security policy.

Unlike France and Great Britain, whose colonial past in the Middle East still exerts great influence on the nature and scope of their political ties with states in the region, Germany operates primarily in the economic sphere. Chancellor Merkel refrains from active involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and makes few remarks on the topic. When she is called on to address it, she clearly expresses Germany's commitment to Israel's security and right to exist, in a way that sometimes generates internal German and European criticism for what is seen as her one-sidedness. If she has criticism of Israel, she expresses it in measured tones.²⁴ After the Second Lebanon War, the longstanding taboo regarding involvement was broken, and the chancellor responded to the prime minister's request to send a naval force as part of the UNIFIL forces implementing Security Council Resolution 1701. The Liberal Party (then in the opposition) opposed the decision, couching its reasons in terms of the memory of the Holocaust. In other words, Germany was reluctant to send military forces that might somehow find themselves in a military action with IDF soldiers. When the party joined Merkel's coalition in November 2008, it asked that Germany stop its participation in the force, and the fundamental position was accepted. Thus, one may expect that German involvement in this context will gradually lessen.

In contrast to her relative reticence on issues relating to the conflict, the chancellor gives unequivocal expression to the Iranian nuclear issue. The damage to Israel's security and existence liable to grow out of Iran's drive for nuclear weapons lies at the heart of this resolute policy. In an attempt to close the gap between rhetoric and reality, the chancellor made an effort this past year (though without a great deal of media exposure) to persuade the German financial and economic circles to decrease the scope of trade with and investments in Iran. Her efforts, together with American pressure in the same direction, did not result in a significant drop in the scope of trade. By contrast, there was a dramatic reduction in the scope of investments and guarantees given by the government.²⁵ Nonetheless, despite Chancellor Merkel's own firm position in favor of sanctions against Iran, she does not share the position of Israel and the United States whereby all options to curb the Iranian nuclear program must remain on the table. Although it was Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer who was the primary force behind the October 2003 EU decision to engage Iran in a diplomatic move, the position represented by the German bureaucracy with regard to anti-Iranian activity is not as unequivocal as those of France and Great Britain.

France's Middle East policy in the past year was no different from the policy it pursued in the past. President Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Kouchner continued to demonstrate involvement that went beyond EU policy, both at the declarative and the diplomatic levels. This involvement was seen in the Persian Gulf, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Levant, and the Mediterranean arena.

Operation Cast Lead provided Sarkozy with the opportunity for personal involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and accelerated his efforts to formulate a resolution to the conflict. A French proposal to convene an international conference was not implemented, nor was it removed entirely from the agenda. In an attempt to eliminate obstacles to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, France tried to settle the inter-Palestinian dispute. Meetings between French representatives and Hamas members – violating the official position of the EU regarding conditions for negotiating with the organization – did not bear any fruit. French frustration with the ongoing foot dragging in the efforts to renew Israeli-Palestinian negotiations toward

a two-state solution was heard in the call by the French and Spanish foreign ministers (February 2010) to establish a Palestinian state within one year.

As the leader of the Mediterranean EU member states and the patron of the Maghreb states, Sarkozy enabled the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean in July 2008.²⁶ This organization replaced the framework established by the Barcelona Process in November 1995 as a tool for the EU to generate a series of reforms in Mediterranean states, with emphasis on the Maghreb. It was meant to be a professional organization, without a political agenda. Among the objectives presented was the 2010 establishment of a free trade zone. Yet as was the case with the Barcelona Process, which since its inception had failed to realize its goals, it seems that the new organization has also become a victim of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of the byproducts of Operation Cast Lead was the suspension of meetings at the ministerial level, which were to have taken place during 2009. This development underscores yet once more the priorities of the Arab states that are members of forums where Israel is also a participant. Instead of focusing on the implementation of reforms that could conceivably lead to enhanced welfare for the region in general and the member states in particular, they relate to the setting as an arena for attacking Israel and thereby paralyze all activity.²⁷

Israel's criticism of French policy on the negative role played by Syria – the continued arms smuggling and other assistance extended to Hizbollah and Hamas – fell on deaf ears. France attributes much importance to its relationship with Syria because of Syria's status and influence in Lebanon, as well as its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Syria's willingness to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon and maintain an embassy in Beirut helped improve relations between France and the Asad regime. Regarding the Iranian crisis, Sarkozy and other French officials demonstrated a rather assertive approach, evidenced by emphatic declarations in favor of imposing harsh sanctions on Iran through the Security Council and perhaps, if necessary, even independently of the UN.

The focus of Great Britain's involvement in recent years in the Middle East has been Iraq. The war and the ongoing international involvement there have demanded attention and significant resources (troops and reconstruction assistance). The British presence in the Gulf region has both

economic and political dimensions, complementing the American policy in the region.

Unlike his predecessor, Tony Blair, who like Sarkozy took an avid interest in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the involvement of Prime Minister Gordon Brown in this context was limited. By contrast, Foreign Minister David Miliband filled an instrumental role in formulating the Security Council resolution that called for a ceasefire during the war in Gaza. Because of Israel's military campaign, Miliband's approach to Israel grew more critical than it had been in the past.²⁸

Together with France, Great Britain leads a rigid, uncompromising line on the Iranian nuclear issue. As a member of the Security Council, Great Britain was a partner to four sanctions resolutions. In public statements, British leaders leave no doubt that should Iran fail to fulfill these resolutions, it will be necessary to take even harsher steps against it. Nevertheless, Great Britain has avoided adopting the American position, namely, that should Iran not change its position all options are on the table.

Public Opinion

Operation Cast Lead, particularly reports in the electronic media on casualties in the civilian population and extensive damage due to disproportionate Israeli military action, joined the criticism leveled by the political echelon at Israel's unwillingness to stop the attack on Hamas. This was followed by the publication of the Goldstone report accusing Israel of war crimes. These factors and the continued blockade of the Gaza Strip have worsened the trend of recent years: ongoing erosion in public opinion with regard to Israel. There is also steady criticism by the political echelons in many European countries of Israel's policies in the territories and what is seen as its positioning of further obstacles to the realization of the two-state vision. In general, in the European mind Israel is increasingly assigned responsibility for the deadlock on the political front.

These trends serve anti-Israel elements as a background for questioning the legitimacy of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Even if at this stage the discussion is confined to academic ivory towers and some of the media, it is enough to arouse concern given the long term ramifications of Israel's status in both the European public and internationally. Moreover, the

criticism coming from the civil society is liable to affect the policymakers attempting to formulate their position regarding Israel.

Conclusion

The proximity of the Middle East to Europe, Europe's colonial past, economic interests, Europe's energy needs, and the basic assumption that Europe's stability depends on stability in the Middle East are the constant factors underlying the EU's involvement in the Middle East.

The view of the Arab-Israeli conflict in general and the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation in particular as a destabilization threat par excellence, with ramifications going well beyond the conflict arena, is the thrust of most of the attention from individual EU member states and the EU as a collective. In the absence of superpower features, such as possessed by the United States, the EU demonstrates its positions through declarations. This fact was in abundant evidence in 2009 as well, and lacking other means, this megaphone diplomacy will presumably continue into the foreseeable future.

The December 2009 EU declaration clarified the areas of disagreement between the EU and Israel concerning the Israeli-Palestinian political process. Moreover, the language of the announcement placed greater onus on Israel than it did on the Palestinians and the Arab states for the lack of progress in resolving the conflict. The ongoing deadlock and the postponement of discussions of the core issues, in tandem with Israel's continuing policy on the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, will likely lead to multiple EU condemnations of Israel. The EU's support for the PA program announced in August 2009 by Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad for establishing a Palestinian state, alongside the conviction – evidenced in the position of the Quartet that it is possible to reach an Israeli-Palestinian settlement within 24 months – may also increase friction with the Israeli government, which does not deem that schedule realistic. EU frustration and displeasure with Israel's moves have found another outlet, i.e., in the EU decision to suspend talks about upgrading Israel's status vis-à-vis the EU. The pattern of providing compensation when Israeli policy aligns itself with EU policies and ambitions on the one hand, and punishing Israel when it maintains policies not consistent with

the EU's on the other, will presumably continue to characterize relations in the foreseeable future.

Beyond the traditional means designed to enhance EU influence over the Middle East (such as the Association Agreements and working plans as part of the European Neighborhood Policy), Sarkozy's Union for the Mediterranean initiative is yet another attempt to forge closer ties between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbors. This setting, like the Barcelona Process before it, will likely fall victim to the Arab-Israeli conflict, disappointing those Mediterranean nations that are not members of this initiative and who harbor expectations that the EU would be hard pressed to realize.

If it indeed strives to affect processes in the Middle East, the EU, in recognition of its limitations, must recognize the centrality of the United States and its leading role in the region. The end of President Bush's term in office and President Obama's entering the White House created an opportunity for closer political coordination across the Atlantic, with regard both to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the Iranian issue, despite the criticism from some in the EU of Obama's hesitancy, particularly regarding Iran. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iranian nuclear issue, in addition to the crisis in Afghanistan, will continue to command attention in 2010. When she assumed responsibility for EU's foreign policy, Catherine Ashton blamed the EU's difficulty in strategic conduct on the lack of appropriate frameworks and methods for implementation; the Treaty of Lisbon is supposed to fill this gap. Yet it is doubtful if indeed the implementation of the Treaty alone will change the fundamental causes keeping the EU from playing in the superpower league.

Notes

- 1 This essay focuses on the position of the EU rather than the positions of the individual member states, though it also surveys the positions of the "big three" – France, Germany, and Great Britain. Foreign affairs and security policy continue to be the prerogative of member states, even if their national positions are not necessarily in line with official EU positions. Nevertheless, from an historical perspective, the issue of the Middle East is one area in which there is close coordination between member states.

- 2 In an early stage of the campaign for the position of high representative, former prime minister Tony Blair's name was raised. His chances to win the position were slim, in part because of his support for President Bush's decision to go to war against Saddam Hussein, which was anathema to some of the member states. There was also some concern that his status, media recognition, and desire to lead would damage the status of the EU's leading members.
- 3 The doubt felt in many quarters was expressed by Henning Riecke, a scholar of Europe in the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). In his assessment, the EU is not yet a global player, and many of the EU member states are in fact not interested in this status. Moreover, even if the EU does strive for the status of a global power, it is doubtful if it can compete with the United States and China.
- 4 See Ashton's appearance at the Munich Security Conference (February 6, 2010), Europa Press Releases.
- 5 Ashton's appearance before the European Parliament (March 10, 2010), European Union Press.
- 6 The beginning of the trend discussed by Ashton is evident in that Jordan, Egypt, and Abu Dhabi have expressed the intention and/or decision to pursue the construction of nuclear power stations. These decisions are ostensibly a response to the states' energy needs. However, as in the Iranian case (e.g., the nuclear energy station in Bushehr), the construction of civilian nuclear infrastructures allows states to acquire knowledge and technology that helps them become familiar with the fuel cycle. This activity is a prerequisite if at any point a state decides to jump from the civilian nuclear track to the military capabilities track. It is possible to shorten the process by acquiring a turnkey bomb. Saudi Arabia, worried about a nuclear Iran, is liable to attempt to buy nuclear bombs from Pakistan, the state the Saudis helped financially when it was building its nuclear capabilities.
- 7 The main points of her address: Resolving the conflict is a European interest and is central to resolving other regional problems; the solution can be advanced through cooperation to achieve comprehensive peace on the basis of international law, involvement of Syria and Lebanon, and the Arab peace initiative; commitment to the security of the State of Israel; and commitment to the two-state solution. The current objective is to establish a viable Palestinian state (in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) on the basis of the 1967 borders; finding a just solution to the refugee problem; proximity talks (announced by the American administration in March 2010) that can form the beginning of a new opportunity to find a solution; the need for demonstrating a real commitment rather than reiterating old positions; the Israeli decision to build in East Jerusalem is dangerous and damages the possibility of launching proximity talks; Israeli settlements in the territories are illegal, are an obstacle

to peace, and endanger the possibility of realizing a two-state solution; putting cultural and religious sites in the territories on the list of Israeli Heritage Sites is not helpful; the siege of the Gaza Strip is unacceptable: it creates human suffering and damages the political process; the Palestinians, too, bear responsibility: PA president Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian prime minister Salaam Fayyad, in tandem with constructing institutions of statehood, must also enforce order at home. The ongoing struggle within the Palestinian camp, as well as the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, does not serve the Palestinian cause; the Arab world is also responsible for aiding the effort to find a resolution; the EU is willing to assume responsibility and increase its involvement. Further, Ashton pointed to a number of areas in which the EU can advance the political process: extending an aid package (the commitment is not open-ended but rather dependent on rapid progress towards the establishment of a Palestinian state); willingness to consider granting political, economic, and security guarantees to the sides; interest in joint development with key players such as the United States and the Quartet. In addition to these points, Ashton emphasized the need for setting goals and assessing progress on the basis of the Roadmap as well as the need for active mediation. She also said that the efforts by the United States to promote the political process would earn the backing of the Quartet and the Arab League. The policy presented by Ashton corresponded to the thrust of the EU's position as was spelled out in the December 2009 announcement of the Council of the European Union.

- 8 The spokesperson for the rotating president from the Czech Republic (*The Independent*, January 5, 2009) described the action as "defensive, not offensive." As the result of criticism from some member states, Czech sources claimed the president had been misunderstood.
- 9 The growing criticism of Israel was also expressed in demonstrations throughout Europe. Demonstrators compared Israeli actions to those of the Nazis. Indeed, in recent years accusing Israel of genocide has become fairly common in Europe.
- 10 In early January, a delegation sponsored by the EU was dispatched to visit Israel, the PA, and Jordan. While the delegation was in the region and without prior coordination, President Nicolas Sarkozy also arrived in the area. He visited Israel, the PA, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. This was evidence that European states operate without regard for the collective interest on issues understood by EU member states as being important to the national interest. Another delegation, which included the French president, German chancellor Angela Merkel, and heads of state from Israel, Spain, Great Britain, and the Czech Republic, visited Israel and Egypt. This delegation, which did not comment on disproportionality in Israel's military action, issued a call to allow humanitarian aid to enter the

Gaza Strip along with a call to end the arms smuggling into the Strip. Other than demonstrating solidarity with the residents of Gaza, the visit lacked political significance.

- 11 *BBC Monitor*, January 1, 2009.
- 12 On the question of how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is much in common between the two sides of the Atlantic. However, concerning several other issues on the international agenda, the United States and the EU do not see eye to eye. One such issue is the fighting in Afghanistan. An expression of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the European NATO members could be heard from Secretary of Defense Gates (*AFP*, February 23, 2010), such that European states currently abhor any type of military force and as a result are not investing in weapon systems. He added that while the demilitarization of Europe in the twentieth century was a blessing, in this century an anti-military mindset is an obstacle to attaining lasting peace and security. President Obama's decision to cancel his participation in the EU-United States summit that was to have taken place in April 2009, with the excuse that he could not leave Washington because of urgent domestic matters (the health care bill), was viewed by the EU as a lack of interest in the EU as an organization. There are those who claim, with a great deal of justification, that the president understands that on the important issues, the leaders of the big three are to be addressed rather than the institutions of the EU.
- 13 In recent months, a total of thirty-eight states in various stages of acceptance to the EU (Turkey, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Azerbaijan) have been mentioned in the EU presidential announcements.
- 14 Reaction to the Goldstone report was twofold. On March 10, 2009, the European parliament discussed the report's conclusions and accepted a resolution calling on Israel and the Palestinians to undertake an internal investigation within five months. Similarly, the representative on foreign relations and the member states were charged with following up on the implementation of the report's conclusions. When attempting to formulate the EU's position before the voting in UN institutions, the council of foreign ministers discovered internal differences of opinion that made it impossible to reach a consensus. The result was a split in the voting of EU member nations in the Human Rights Council and in the UN General Assembly. Thus, even after the Treaty of Lisbon went into effect, national considerations continued to tip the scales over unity in the thinking of member states.
- 15 In July 2009, even before the formulation of the foreign ministers' announcement, Javier Solana, then in charge of EU foreign relations, called on the UN to set a

target date for the establishment of a Palestinian state and to recognize it even if Israel and the Palestinians had not yet reached a settlement. A draft of the December 2009 announcement, formulated by the Swedish foreign minister, included a call to recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state.

- 16 The resolution did not include any reference to Hizbollah's arms smuggling, in violation of a UN resolution, or to the internal situation in Lebanon. President Obama's decision to renew the dialogue with President Asad as part of his inclusive engagement approach is in line with the position of most EU states that were, during Bush's term in office, forced to shun Syria because of its involvement in terrorism. This approach and the dialogue between France and President Asad have turned Syria into a legitimate partner for dialogue. Although Asad has not changed his policies on key questions, he is no longer considered a political pariah.
- 17 In April 2008, Israel submitted a request to reevaluate its relations with the EU. A favorable response to the Israeli request, which proceeded with the implementation of the working program that had been agreed on, was granted by the EU at the Association Council conference that took place in June 2008. The decision was accompanied by a string of critical declarations, stressing the link between progress in the political process and the revaluation/upgrading of relations. For example, the foreign minister of Luxembourg (*Irish Times*, March 28, 2009) declared that upgrading relations should always be viewed in the context of the political process. The head of the Commission's delegation to Israel noted that the decision on when to renew the talks would depend on the way Israel concluded the conflict in the Gaza Strip (*FT*, January 15, 2009).
- 18 Solana concluded his term in office when the Treaty of Lisbon went into force. Solana served in the position for ten years and visited the Middle East many times in this period. In an interview with *Haaretz* (October 23, 2009) on the eve of his retirement from the post, he noted that the goal of the EU was the establishment of a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders as soon as possible; that without third party mediation the sides would be unable to reach a settlement; and that Israel would do well to place some of its eggs in the European basket rather than leave all of them in the American one. Solana added that Europe would respond favorably to a request by the parties to station forces in areas to be evacuated by Israel. He also said that the United States is the best mediator for the region.
- 19 Contrary to the position of the United States and Israel, whereby all options are on the table, most EU member states, with the possible exception of France, disagree. Most of the member states, if not all, would prefer to live with a nuclear Iran rather than assist or participate in a military move.

- 20 President Obama's willingness to enter into negotiations before Iran suspended its uranium enrichment process is something of a violation of Security Council resolutions demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment before the start of negotiations. Neither the EU nor the Security Council protested the president's decision. For his part, the president made it clear that the United States has not changed its fundamental position on the need for Iran to ultimately suspend its enrichment activities.
- 21 The gap between rhetoric and reality regarding sanctions is evident in the data about the scope of trade between EU member states and Iran. In 2008, trade between four states (Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and France) as well as Switzerland amounted to \$15.4 billion (*BBC Monitor*, April 26, 2009).
- 22 *Financial Times*, June 20, 2009.
- 23 On November 18, 2009, the EU and Iraq signed a memorandum entitled "Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy." The memorandum is supposed to serve as a political framework to tighten the energy relationship between the EU and Iraq.
- 24 Merkel broke with her standard posture and leveled public criticism of the Netanyahu government's decision to grant building permits in Ramat Shlomo in East Jerusalem.
- 25 *TAZ*, June 28, 2009.
- 26 Sarkozy's proposal generated criticism on the part of the EU, particularly Germany. As the result of pressure from Chancellor Merkel, Sarkozy was forced to compromise and bring the organization under the aegis of the EU's Council on Foreign Relations as the successor to the Barcelona Process.
- 27 Since the beginning of activity of the Mediterranean Union no decisions have been made with regard to a long line of fundamental issues concerning ongoing activity, including the composition and mandate of the General Commission that would manage the agreed-upon programs and funding.
- 28 It is also possible to detect a change in Britain's stance since the retirement of Tony Blair, who saw himself as the mediating factor between the EU and the United States. Even in the setting of the EU, since Operation Cast Lead Great Britain has departed from its positive approach towards Israel.