

## **What should the European Union do to save the two-state-solution?**

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**Speech by Nikolaos van Dam\***

The recent Middle East report of the *Advisory Council on International Affairs* concludes that the positions of the majority of EU countries do not really need to be changed. There are more than enough appropriate resolutions already. What matters much more is that the professed principles are not implemented, and therefore do not really contribute to achieving peace. The existing official declarations need to be translated into effective deeds.

Let us not be so naive as to expect Israel to be willing to withdraw from the Arab territories it occupied in 1967, at least not without enormous pressure from the outside. Israel has from the very beginning wanted the *whole* of Palestine, and has, moreover, had the aim of establishing a Jewish state there, preferably with as little Arabs living within its borders as possible. The Palestinian Arabs are perceived in Israel as a problem: Israel "got stuck", as it were, with the Arabs of Palestine, because in an earlier stage Israel did not succeed in ethnically cleansing the whole of Palestine from the Arabs who had been living there for ages.

Israel has hardly ever been seriously put under pressure from abroad, and could therefore continue its policies of occupation, annexing ever more land, building ever more illegal Jewish settlements, and squeezing out the Palestinian population and expelling them from their land wherever possible. The outside world generally expects Israel and the Palestinians to come to a solution by mutual negotiations, but tends to ignore that we deal with two completely unequal parties: the all-powerful Israeli

occupiers who hold more or less all the cards and the occupied Palestinian population which is largely powerless and cannot protect its fundamental rights.

Not even the United States of America, the most powerful nation in the world, has been able so far to force Israel to comply with the demands of its president, Obama, who said in his speech in Cairo in 2009, that Israel should stop building settlements, and that a peace arrangement should be based on the principle of Israeli border lines pre-1967, with the possibility of land swaps. Even though Israel is the biggest foreign receiver of US military and financial aid, it has simply ignored the American request, and keeps doing so.

Actually, the US requirement is not even going that far, because it does not ask that Israel should leave the occupied territories immediately.

Further, it neither says that all or part of the illegal Jewish settlers should leave the occupied territories nor that they should dismantle their settlements. It only requests a *freeze* of the settlement activity, a freeze of the present illegal situation; nothing more. Similar requests have been made by many countries for tens of years, but Israel keeps on building, thereby giving a clear indication of its real intentions. It does not want a two-state-solution.

The saying "don't bite the hand that feeds you" apparently does not apply to Israel. During his visit to the American Senate in May 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu received some thirty standing ovations and much applause, even when he declared that Israel would never return to the pre-1967 boundaries. Netanyahu's statement was completely contrary to what President Obama had called for.

The reason why the president of the United States is not applying effective pressure in this issue is simply because of the strong pro-Israel lobby in his country, that severely restricts his maneuvering space.

A similar phenomenon applies to Israeli internal politics. Israeli politicians, if they were to undertake a serious effort to undo the Jewish settlements, would be attacked and would undermine their political and electoral positions.

These factors of internal politics in both Israel and the United States make it extremely difficult to reach a solution on the Jewish settlements and therefore on any withdrawal from the West Bank, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state there. A powerful segment in Israeli politics, strongly represented in the present government, wants to keep these settlements and the occupied territories. The thing most Israelis do not want, however, is the presence of the Palestinians there. They, however, happen to be the original population and are not willing to leave their country. Here lies the chance for a Palestinian state.

Today we are discussing the possibilities for a two-state-solution and the role of the European Union. I think there is only one possibility of helping achieve a two-state-solution, and that is by putting heavy pressure on Israel. Resolutions and friendly formulated words to convince Israel have clearly turned out to be fruitless.

Those who consider themselves as real friends of Israel should help Israel to save it from itself. Not having a state of Palestine next to that of Israel will only bring further disaster, at the expense of Israel's security.

When we are discussing the two-state-solution we should not ignore the fact that most members of the present Israeli government do not at all want a two-state-solution. They have not even formally discussed it, being aware, of course, that when it comes to the point they are strongly against it. They already very much dislike having an Arab minority within, as they call it, the Jewish state of Israel, let alone having an independent Palestinian Arab state next to it. They prefer not to have peace, rather than having peace if this would mean losing the occupied territories. They don't mind if the Palestinians and the outside world, including us here today, keep discussing the two-state-solution at length, as long as in the end they will have their Jewish state in the whole of Palestine.

A first step to put pressure on Israel is to fully review the EU-Israel Association Agreement in the light of international law and stated EU principles and to restrict Israeli imports to the EU accordingly. I am not only talking about the imports from the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories but just as much about imports from Israel proper. Sanctions should be imposed on those who are responsible for Israel's policies, and that is the Israeli state, not just the Jewish settlers illegally residing on land forcefully expropriated from Palestinians. We should finally put our political positions into practice.

Let me end with, what I think is, a rather sober note:

If you ask me whether I am so naive as to believe that the European Union under present political circumstances can convince Israel of changing its position with respect to the Jewish settlements and the occupied Arab territories, my answer is: *no*. After all, EU foreign policy

to a great extent remains a reflection of domestic political considerations. In that respect we are similar to the United States and Israel. Just pay attention to what our Minister of Foreign Affairs will have to say when he visits Israel these days. With al due respect to Mr Timmermans, and I do indeed highly respect him, his visit will be similar to tens, if not hundreds, of previous Dutch and other European (and even American) ministerial visits to Israel: discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict, but bringing no results whatsoever. It will be more words, without effective deeds.

As long as our politicians are not really willing - or able - to implement the declared principles they are supposed to be committed to, they should at least accept the idea that they are co-responsible for the disaster that has already taken place in Palestine/Israel and is unfolding itself further, day after day.

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