

Current Perspectives on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict¹

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on the possible implications in solving the conflict by the European Union, who has played a significant role in the context of the Middle East Peace Process. This paper presents a series of conclusions regarding the chances of being peace between Israeli and Palestinian in a frame of a bi-national state or a single democratic state or two-state solution and to explain if the EU has the necessary and sufficient skills regarding the mediation/resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conclusions of the paper are based on the responses from one survey conducted on 25 respondents, most of them being special training on the Middle East region problems.

Keywords

Israeli-Palestinian conflict; peace;
Middle East; European Union

Introduction¹

In preparing this analysis I used it as study material some received answers to a questionnaire from a number of 25 respondents who come from different socio-geographic areas, who are special training, but different, focused mainly on the Middle East region problems.²

The questionnaire applied to the respondents included the following three questions: 1. Taking as reference the current situation in the Middle East, what you consider that depends on the chance of concluding Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a positive way (for both parties)? a) by the active involvement and coordinated of the major international actors [eg the Quartet for the Middle East (US, EU, Russia and UN)]; b) by cooperation/involvement of third countries interested in peace and stability in the region?; c) by developing a culture of responsibility (accountability) at

1 This article is based on a communication presented at the conference „The Burden of History and Geopolitics: Contemporary Israeli Governance“, 28th – 29th of April 2017, organized by the Center for Israeli Studies, The National University of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, Romania.

2 Ana-Maria Bolborici, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene și criza din Orientul Mijlociu la începutul secolului al XXI-lea* (Iași: Institutul European, Colecția: Studii strategice și de securitate, 2016). For more details see Chapter 6, p. 243.

the regional level involving both the Israelis, the Palestinians and the neighbouring Arab states (as well the Arab League) to pacify the region?; d) by compliance and implementation of the agreements already reached between the two sides?; e) other factors/conditions; 2. Which of the three options you think should be the key to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?; a) a bi-national state?; b) a single democratic state?; c) two-state solution (Israel and Palestine)?; 2. Do you consider that the EU has the necessary and sufficient skills regarding the mediation/resolving the Israeli-Palestinian crisis?

The percentage on how respondents answered to the first question: 15 respondents have chosen variant a), 11 respondents variant b), 15 respondents of variant c), 11 respondents of variant d), 13 respondents variant e); of the total of 25 respondents, 7 were appreciated as valid all five.

Analysing the answers of respondents, in particular, while the variant a) have specified punctually the members of the Quartet for the Middle East, there were respondents who wanted to emphasise that „USA only“ plays an important role in the conflict, others stating that it is important „especially the United States as well others actors“.³

From the same information, it resulted that 15 respondents assessed as particularly important the role of the Quartet in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more than one said that this international body should impose to the parties the solution/the Roadmap as the only chance for peace in region. There have been respondents who contrary, emphasised that no one can impose a solution, more third parties (eg. Egypt, Jordan and Turkey) should have a positive role in supporting Israel and the Arab leaders, including Palestinians to achieve a stable and lasting agreement.

To the second question, respondents answered either punctually or have given a possible answers while providing additional explanations and evidence; thus, for the variant a), was two responses registered as favourable, for the variant b), 3 answers and for the variant, c) 23 responses.

Of all the interviewed persons a number of 13 respondents, besides marking the considered most suitable variant have provided several explanations subsidiary; as follows: somebody proposes the solution of coexistence of the two states (Israel and Palestine); other respondent consider that the variant c), would be appropriate in the future, but for now, it requires an Egyptian control of Gaza and in the West Bank one Jordanian; categorically, another respondent explains that no solution is possible as long as Israel's existence is denied.

The analysis results to the question number 2, shows that 23 respondents gave a favourable response to the proposed solution variant c), two-state solution, respectively the Israeli-Palestinian coexistence, 2 expressing the option for variant a), 3 respondents have chosen variant b).

At the third question respondents answered as follows: 7 respondents appreciated that the EU has the necessary and sufficient skills in mediation / resolving the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, while 9 respondents responded negatively.

Some of the comments of the respondents attached responses to the question 3, stressing that: „the EU has competencies, but does not have the necessary influence“; or, the EU could not be efficient on their own and therefore considers that it should join in a common effort near the USA and other nations, although the leading role in resolving the conflict lies to the Israelis and Palestinians.⁴

³ Bolborici, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene*, 249. Comments have been taken from the answers of the respondents.

⁴ Bolborici, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene*, 255.

Another respondent consider that it is possible that the EU to have those necessary abilities (and if there is, in his opinion these „are hidden“), which can be developed over time, although the reality of last few decades has shown that every European initiative in this area failed; the EU has in question skills but they are limited, has competence, the means and know-how needed, but not holds the tools and the necessary power in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and unlike the United States (who are most influential actors in the conflict); on the other hand, somebody gives a negative response to its arguments emphasising that the EU „is not a real political power“, by missing an efficient common foreign policy, and with regard to the role that it plays in the Middle East, it is limited mainly to trade and humanitarian action and stressing that „EU is unhelpful in the peace process“ from the Middle East; „the EU can be a credible and effective mediator if politically will want to do this. Until now the political initiatives have been modest, even though financial support has been extremely consistent and generous“, the EU could provide support „when it comes to the settlements, refugees, security and financial compensations“.⁵

One of the respondents is convinced that the EU is unable to settle the first stage of the conflict and the EU should become involved in the second phase, to support humanly and financial the new administrative structure, in facilitating the transition towards democracy.

Another respondent underlines that the EU's role is not so important in the region and for this reason, it can not influence the conflict resolution because it does not want to follow the political line drawn by the United States and the EU Member States do not share the same point of unified view regarding the Middle East peace process and concludes that the role of Europeans is currently payer, not player.

In an optimistic note other respondent consider that over the years the EU has proved more expertise in actions of peace-building than in actions of peace-making, but regarding the ability of mediation and foreign policy in general, EU is still emerging but with chances to be developed over time.

Conclusions

Referring to the situation in the Middle East, the chance of concluding Israeli-Palestinian conflict depends largely by understanding the need of promoting and developing a culture of responsibility at regional level which means commitment in joint actions, between all sides: the Israelis, the Palestinians and their Arab neighboring states, that could lead to a regional political balance so needed.⁶

Strengthen of such a culture, which primarily directs both parties of this conflict secular towards more responsibility of the vertically, starting from the elites and finishing with the most deprived social categories, certainly would lead to a increase awareness of the importance of mutual assistance, which in turn, in the medium-term, would foster reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians and thus, in the alternative, between Israelis and the Arab world.

Admitting the assumption that the contemporary world is a structure becoming more obvious pluricultural and given the intercultural and the multi-cultural perspective on society based on the inclusive approach, concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I think in time it would be plausible to assist to a symbolic and also formal recognition of the ethnocultural communities, of the specific

5 Bolborici, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene*, 256.

6 Bolborici, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene*, 265.

rights harmonized which can be translated into a peaceful coexistence and mutually accepted and agreed.

The relaxing of the eastern region have chances to be achieved if are fulfilled a few mandatory conditions, such as: a greater involvement of the Israeli and the Palestinians leadership in direct talks, changing the mentality of the two parties, completing the process of colonization by Israel, the intra-Palestinian reconciliation etc.

Should be noted that a major threat to the unity and cohesion of the Palestinian entity is the latent conflict between Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization, a situation which is reflected by polarizing from territorial point of view of the Palestinians people and politically, which leads us to the inference that actually is a chance that the Palestinian State to be able to obtain independence, but with certain limitations, who might translated into absence of a territorial control and the full judicial review on the Gaza Strip.

Another precondition and also priority, in my view, as well as in the interviewer from the conducted survey, it would have to be respecting and implementation of the all agreements agreed and concluded by now.

Not in the least, is important the cooperation and the involvement of interested third parties which want to establish a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region; the political future of all being particularly important both in terms of the architecture of regional security, but also in terms of impact which they will have on Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Once satisfied all these conditions the ending of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict depends on (almost exclusively) the courage and the political will of the two entities, the compliance commitments by developing existing partnerships and assuming new responsibilities that are important to be imposed in this effervescent region.

Focusing our attention on the variant agreed by respondents regarding the most suitable solution to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is noted that most of them have accepted the two-state solution.

With reference to the third question, from the questionnaire, I appreciate that how respondents felt to answer didn't surprise me, if we consider the manner in which public opinion, media generally has reflected the situation in the region; thus, most of the respondents said that the EU does not have the necessary skills and sufficient mediation/settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and though only one respondent affirm that the EU is seen as a payer, not a player, essentially all each other's respondents comments led the same shade of pessimistic conclusion.

The daily reality, which describes the regional painting of the Middle East, is proving stronger than the speeches, commitment and optimism displayed either by the most important leaders of the international community, either by leaders of the states which are directly involved in this contagious conflict for the whole Oriental region and not only.

The continuation of the terrorist attacks in Gaza followed by the immediate Israeli reactions, the terrorist attacks in the region and throughout the world and so on, are just a few realities of the moment which strengthen our belief that almost nothing has changed in the oriental landscape and perhaps this situation will maintain it on short and medium term.

In conclusion, I consider as being valid the appreciation that beyond the direct involvement and active participation of international actors, the regional support for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the international community's support for the economic development of the future Palestinian state and for creating the institutions a state of law, the sincere desire of the parties to reach an agreement and to negotiate directly is a sine qua non condition.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a long history characterised by violence almost permanently remains in the 21st century a nodal conflict, located at the junction interests of the Western world with the Muslim-Jewish one.

REFERENCES

1. The answers to the applied questionnaire by Delphi method represent the main „bibliography“ which offers me some different points of view in the paper analysis.
2. Ana-Maria Bolborici, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene și criza din Orientul Mijlociu la începutul secolului al XXI-lea* (Iași: Institutul European, Colecția: Studii strategice și de securitate, 2016)