

Amsterdam Conference March 2004

The European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Perceptions and Future Possibilities

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**Organized by
dialogue lab,
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– Documentation –



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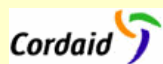
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The European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:
Perceptions and Future Possibilities

Dear Reader,

At the beginning of March 2004, 14 European, and 16 Israeli and Palestinian socially committed students and young leaders from diverse backgrounds and political beliefs met in Amsterdam to discuss the core issues of the conflict and by this, learn about the perceptions of the 'other'. Discussions took place in plenary session and in the following four workshops: Security and Fear, Refugees and Settlements, Mass Media and Education, and Jerusalem.

The Amsterdam Conference is the fourth of a series of exchanges among European, Israeli, and Palestinian students entitled "The European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". By providing a neutral forum for Israeli and Palestinian students, these conferences aim at establishing a network of strongly committed young people who can play an active role in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When we as young people start to listen to each other, give 'the other' a human face and express our own needs, try to have empathy with the 'other' and share fears and hopes, the foundation of mutual understanding is laid. That may enable us to work together and make a change.

We hope you enjoy reading our documentation,

Stephanie Müssig
&
Aline Rieder

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Table of contents:

Personal views by participants of the workshop topics – 4
Process of the Conference – 10
General Framework of the Conference – 19
Articles about the conference by participants – 22
Information about the cooperating organisations and contact information – 26

Personal views by participants of the workshop topics

-The articles were written as part of the application procedure.-

Engines of the Conflict:

Security and Fear

by Anna Buhbe

Since the Israeli Palestinian conflict turned violent again in 2000 it hasn't ceased to escalate. Short periods of de-escalation are followed by new rounds of intensified conflict. When we hear about Israel in the news these days, we rarely get to hear anything but a new round of suicide bombers or the Zahal shooting and killing of Palestinians or ordering the closure of the occupied territories.

Fear is one of the main factors, that drives the conflict onward. As both sides live in fear of each other, each desires that its security is guaranteed. But how can this happen, if security for one side means disadvantage for the other, as is the case at the moment? One major problem thus is clearly that each side only acts according to its own view and doesn't consider the possible consequences for the other side adequately. To really feel secure, each side needs a minimum of basic rights. Since both sides need those rights, they should mutually take care not to restrict the others' rights while trying to set up safety. The best way to achieve security for both sides is for each side to guarantee more security,

step by step, to the *other* side, instead of one side trying to gain security without considering the other in its actions.

How can Europe successfully intervene in the conflict and help set up security? The European Union first of all serves as a model to be achieved. Europe's history has seen long periods of mutual insecurity concerning neighbour states. Minorities within the states and across the borders have been both an object of suppression and a source of fear that they may topple the rule of the respective majority.

The family of European states has by now learned that the vicious circle of oppression and fear can be broken by giving up some national rights in favour of European integration. The security of neighbour states and of minorities living in these states can be jointly increased by delegating some sovereignty to the European level. The area of peace is thereby expanded to the expanding borders of the European Union. Being a model in this way, Europe could play the role of a neutral mediator in the conflict and help both sides understand each other better.

The fear caused during the conflict clearly isn't dealt with in the right way at the moment. Israel's

policy of controlling more Palestinian territory or even building a large fence to keep potential terrorists out of Israel humiliates the Palestinian population and causes them to fear for their rights. This again gives rise to radical ideas and drives many more into the arms of terrorism. Clearly terrorist acts have to be prevented, but not in this way. A desirable solution is to send soldiers from a neutral country to Israel to monitor the situation as long as necessary. The Palestinian government should cooperate with these soldiers in stopping terrorism while the Israeli army should retreat from Palestinian territory, so as not to provoke more aggressive acts. In addition, both sides should realize that there is a common enemy they should be fighting together: extremists on both sides, who cannot accept the basic rights of others.

To promote an understanding for this, the dialogue between both sides needs to be maintained. Ceasing communication between two parties of a conflict fosters its escalation, since it causes each side to know less about the others' fears and hopes, leading to less understanding and growing distrust. To maintain a constructive dialogue, measures should be taken against those politicians of confrontation

who want to cut off communication between both sides. It should be made clear, that negotiation is the only way for both sides to gain a peaceful solution in the long run. Furthermore, populist sentiments in the mass media that create a hostile, war-like atmosphere have to be discouraged.

* * *

Refugees and Settlements by Catherine Palpent

Under UNRWA's operational definition, Palestine refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. It also covers the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948. The number of registered Palestinian refugees has subsequently grown from 914 000 in 1950 to more than 4 million in 2002, and continues to rise due to natural population growth.

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has led to a serious humanitarian crisis. Movement restrictions, border closures and curfews have had a devastating impact on the Palestinian economy, which has halved in size while the population has grown by nine percent. Moreover, unemployment and poverty are rising: more than half of the active population is

unemployed and nearly two million people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are now living below the recognised "poverty line". As a result, dependence on humanitarian assistance is increasing.

The European Union feels very much concerned about the refugees and settlements issues in the Middle East. Whereas it recognises Israel's irrevocable right to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders, it recognises at the same time the need for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders, with the possibility of minor adjustments through land swaps and an acceptable solution to the refugee issue. The EU continues to call on Israel to lift the closures and all restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people, and to freeze settlement activities.

The European Commission fully supports the EU's position in the Middle East Peace Process in various ways. It is also responsible for the preparation and implementation of assistance programmes to the region. It manages for instance the budget support for UNRWA for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. Moreover, the European Union tries as well to implement project through NGOs such as Medical Aid for Palestine, Movimiento por la Paz or Première Urgence.

What are those projects? The European Commission has recently approved a €10 million humanitarian aid package to support victims of the crisis in the Palestinian Territories and Palestinian refugees. Palestinian refugees, more than half of whom live in overcrowded and unhygienic camps and settlements, rely on continued assistance from the international community. Excluded from state support and banned from working in more than 70 professions, they face a multitude of socio-economic and health problems. Therefore, the EU funding decisions respond to humanitarian needs through operations aimed at boosting job opportunities, household income and self-reliance; improving health conditions and access to water and sanitation.

European, Israeli and Palestinian students have, from my point of view, a great role to play to help in dealing with this problem. They can develop dialogue among civil society on both sides, through activity within local NGOs. This dialogue is completely necessary for the implementation of the above-mentioned projects, and cannot be built by UNRWA or the EU or big national or international institutions by themselves. Students, with their enthusiasm and their open-mindedness are the right persons to build this dialogue.

Media and Education**by Riham Jafari**

The new Palestinian textbooks teach and educate Palestinian pupils for peace and coexistence with Israel and all neighbouring countries even though they are still under occupation. Peace as a theme and as a process is highly focused upon. Also, texts warn pupils about the dangers and wars, encourage them to resort to peaceful means and ways of conflict resolution through peaceful negotiation, civil obedience and dialogue.

Palestinian education has been widely attacked in the U.S.A and in Israel. But we must recognize here the political situation we live in. The Palestinian Israeli conflict has not been fully resolved, although both sides have recognized each other's existence and entity. The Oslo agreement does not address the most serious issues in this conflict namely: water, borders, Jerusalem, settlements and Palestinian refugees' issues. The idea here which must be recognized is that how can a Palestinian write in a textbook that Israelis should be loved while one is experiencing death, land appropriation, demolition of homes and daily degradation? Give us the chance to teach loving.

One of the most common problems that are really

misunderstood is de-legitimising Israel. Palestinian state that according to the UN resolution of 1948 and the International legitimacy Palestinians have the rights to practice their national rights and political independence. The 1948 UN resolution includes the establishment of an Israeli state and an Arab state in Palestine. Thus describing the Palestinian resistance in the textbooks against the Jewish groups as a kind of Palestinian struggle the texts mention the destruction of the Palestinian villages and the expulsion of Palestinians from their land by Israel. These are examples of the Palestinian problems and suffering up to these days and cannot be considered as cases of de-legitimation of Israel. "Palestine" is used with different meanings. It refers to the PNA territories as well as the history and the geography before the establishment of the state of Israel. The historical term refers to the historical geography of Palestine, the climate and the water sources.

As for Jews, they are presented in a positive way in the Palestinian textbooks. They are mentioned in the stories of prophet Mohammad and the Jews, which reflect the tolerance of the other, and especially the story of Jews in al Medina where their human rights under the Islamic state were recognized. This promotes the

possibility of two states beside each other.

Jerusalem is mentioned in the textbooks and they refer to it as "al Qudis asharif" which refers to East Jerusalem that was occupied by Israel in the 1967 War. But all texts stress that Jerusalem is 'holy for all the three religions'.

Peace and tolerance and humanity as teaching aims are the main contents of Palestinian education. Palestinian education is created in the culture of peace where the greeting word in the culture is "salam" which means peace. Jihad is a holy war but not an aggressive one. In fact, it is a defensive war in which Muslims are ordered to take the following conditions and stipulations if they are attacked or their homelands are taken or stripped from them. Muslims are requested to fight to get rid of their oppression and injustice on earth.

The Media play a great role in monitoring the wars. Media is still a big problem because it is controlled by different sides whose interest is to escalate the situation. The media game is to get more money and to compete to convey the news without regarding feelings of the others. The problem in media is that the finance of media affects its attitudes and we can rarely find objective media in our situation. Thus, media's work is a kind of

marketing news to get more of the world's support.

Finally signing a peace agreement is not enough to change the attitudes and values between two foes; it is only the first step. Peace building needs grassroots support and time for people to heal and mourn and space to meet. Therefore, I fully agree with John Kennedy's famous statement "peace does not lie in the charts and conventions alone, it lies in the hearts and minds of people". And I should add to this statement that for peace to grow in the minds and hearts of people they need first to feel and live their humanity as free human beings. Being able to discover themselves, to restore their shattered identity and to regain their self respect. In order to grow, love needs fertile land that has compassion and mercy and people who care.

* * *

Mass media and education by Daphna Liel

Europe could have a more meaningful role in enhancing the idea of a peaceful resolution of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, and in resuming and restructuring the mutual confidence between the two rival sides.

The Israeli public is tending to support nowadays a policy of one-sided measures to separate the

Israeli and Palestinian populations. This suggested policy is based on the assumption that "there is no partner on the Palestinian side". This position is enjoying wide support in the Israeli public, as well as in the centre of Israel's political map.

On the Palestinian side there is still widespread popular support for the continuation of terror activities, at least against Israeli soldiers and settlers. This position is understood in Israel as ongoing support for the kind of brutal terrorism Israel has suffered from over the last three years in which 941 Israelis lost their lives.

This feeling of the Israeli public is the main source of frustration, disappointment and despair leading to the abandonment of the idea of a peaceful solution. The popular Israeli notion is that Arafat himself is orchestrating terror and this is the reason he is not being accepted as a partner.

As to the Palestinians, their despair, and support of terror as a result, is stemming from the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and especially as a result of ongoing settlement activities on Palestinian territories.

I think that Europe has to direct its media and education efforts at the centre of the Israeli and Palestinian political maps in order to revive the hopes in these two camps for an agreed peaceful

solution to the conflict. The difficulty in doing so lies deeply in the Israeli and in Palestinian despair as a result of the continued terror and settlement activity in the Palestinian territories.

Europe could plan a media-education campaign de-legitimizing Palestinian terrorism and Israeli settlement activities, in a way that will gradually revive the mutual trust and confidence between the sides. Only after a clear majority of Palestinians will denounce terrorism, and a clear majority of Israelis will understand that settlement activities are harming the interests of the state of Israel, mutual confidence might be revived.

The media and education European campaign should stress the international and European consensus according to which nothing less than a peace agreement culminating in a Palestinian State is acceptable to the world. However, the peace process can not tolerate continued terrorism and continued illegal settling activities which are both having a devastating effect on the ability of both sides to move forward.

The campaign should also educate the Israeli and Palestinian public opinion about conflict resolution success stories as in Europe and outside. Bloody ongoing conflicts all over the world were ended in lasting agreements,

and the Israelis and Palestinians should know that they are an exception to the existing trends toward peace and reconciliation all over the world.

* * *

The European role in solving the Jerusalem problem

by Dror Kraus

The era of bilateral peace negotiations in the Middle East both began and ended in Oslo more than a decade ago. Ever since, all major advances in the peace process were reached with the aid of the international community, mainly the USA. There are several reasons why, in my opinion, Europe should play a major role in the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and in the final agreement in Jerusalem in particular:

a. A peace agreement in the Middle East will have to cover not only political and military issues, but also major religious, financial and humanitarian ones. It is my belief that Europe, with its heritage of overcoming international conflicts throughout modern history, as well as its leading role in the field of human rights (reflected very impressively in the European convention of human rights), has a lot to contribute to peace negotiations anywhere in the world, especially when humanitarian and religious issues are present.

Further, one must not underestimate the financial power of the EU as a catalyzing factor in both reaching and maintaining any future peace contract.

b. The USA, the leading supporting force of the peace process so far, has lost much of its legitimacy as a fair mediator in recent years. The Bush administration has failed to maintain its neutrality, possibly because of the deep identification of the American people with Israeli suffering from Palestinian terror attacks, in particular following the events of 11.09.2001. Regardless of the validity of their criticism towards the PA, the American policy has caused the Palestinian side to lose faith in American neutrality. My critique of the Americans might be summarized in the sentence "sometimes it's not enough to be right – one has to be smart also."

c. The solution in Jerusalem is in my opinion the most complicated topic on the Israeli-Palestinian agenda. The Iraq-war underlined the common belief in the Muslim world that the USA has decided to embark on a crusade against Islam in general. It is of cardinal importance to hold negotiations on the Jerusalem subject without turning it into an inter-religious struggle. The religious liberality of the EU states, combined with the increasing percentage of Muslims in

Europe and the future plans to include Turkey in the EU, makes them a perfect mediator on this subject.

d. Furthermore, leading European regimes (mainly England, Germany and to a lesser extent France) are already actively involved and enjoy high appreciation from both sides. Europe is beginning to regain its prestige as a leading international and political force.

To conclude, after "pure" bilateral talks between Israelis and Palestinians proved virtually impossible, further advancement of the peace process depends on external mediators. Europe and the USA are undoubtedly the two "natural candidates" because of their liberal and moral heritage, as well as their financial power. Recent events have severely damaged the American ability to be acceptable mediators. It is Europe's turn to take the "pole position" as mediators in the peace process in the Middle East.

* * *

The significance of Jerusalem by Niveen Naiem A. Nijmeh

Jerusalem is a unique phenomenon in the history of cities. Indeed, its spiritual status, its rich historical heritage and geographic characteristics make it one of the oldest and holiest cities in the world.

Jerusalem, maybe the key to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In addition to its religious, cultural and historic importance, Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian people, their most important economic centre, the headquarters of their civil institutions, and the centre of their social, health, and education services.

More than 22000 Palestinians dwelled in the western sector of Jerusalem, which was occupied by Israel in 1948. They no longer reside there. Then, the eastern sector of the city was occupied in 1967 and Israel made a second attempt to limit and contain the Palestinian presence. Israeli law was imposed on East Jerusalem, and the policy of Israel has been to reduce the concentration of Palestine build-up areas and to utilize the largest possible area of empty land for the establishment of Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem.

The Israeli policy also aimed at creating a new demographic status quo in which the number of Palestinians in east Jerusalem does not exceed 27% of the total population of the city, while at the same time increasing the number of Jewish residents. In 1993, Israeli authorities announced that the number of Jews in east Jerusalem had exceeded that of Palestinians.

These small points – and many more – indicate how important Jerusalem to the Palestinian, in which, along with discrimination, the means of pressure from the Israeli side and the ongoing conflict in a daily basis...etc. people still stick to it and can't surrender. Jerusalem is considered the symbol not only to the Palestinians but to the Arabs in general and the Muslims in specific due to the existence of Al-Aqsa mosque in its centre. Whatever pressure Israel may impose over the Palestinians through the rules and the regulations in its laws, Jerusalem will always be the main concern whenever occupation is mentioned. Occupation is concentrating in its all means to lead a voluntary transfer from the Palestinians side to let the Jews expand more and improve their existence on the land. Everything Israel is doing prove that their main concern is to prevail Jerusalem as a place for the Jewish people, ignoring the original inhabitants, their needs, and their existence. In which, more conflict, and less understanding and a peaceful environment may exist.

Whatever solution/barrier Israel take into its consideration blew things to be substandard regarding Jerusalem. For example, building the wall – which is against international law & human rights - reflect an apartheid policy against the Palestinians. Israel chose the

wall as a means of security to the Israelis, neglecting the side effect of it on the Palestinians as a whole whether inside Jerusalem or outside in the West Bank in which people face collective punishment all along.

Jerusalem will always be a tough issue to be discussed with both sides. A core struggle between Israelis and Palestinians is over land ownership in Jerusalem and its surrounding district. Israel has adopted several strategies to prove its ownership of the land and to prohibit the expansion of the Palestinian population and of housing for Palestinians. Reaching a peaceful environment may be guaranteed step by step if discriminated methods discontinued in one hand, and if understanding and trust achieved in the other hand. The Palestinians have the main right to live freely in their country with no occupation at the end. They can live as neighbours next to the Israelis if they no longer face discrimination and other means of pressure and stress.

One reasonable question always passes my mind: "the Jewish people, after their long crisis and obstacles in Europe and elsewhere, found a place to live in and built a community, after all, they got what they wanted, how come they still control and keep occupying other's lands and makes them suffer all the time???"

The Process of the Conference

Similar to former conferences the working method of the conference was built on four stages: *vision – contradictions – strategic directions – implementation*. Within each stage, the Consensus Workshop Method from the Institute of Cultural Affairs was applied.

In the first step, all participants elaborated a common *vision* for a certain date in the near future, the year 2009. Based on this vision, a shared understanding of the *obstacles* preventing both societies from achieving this vision was reached within each workshop. In the third step, each workshop elaborated various *strategic directions* to overcome the identified obstacles. During the last part – *implementation* phase – the participants eventually discussed how we as young people from the Middle East and Europe can play an active part in our societies.

In each of the four steps participants first brainstormed ideas individually, then in small groups. In the following, these ideas were shared by the whole group and clustered together in columns. As they did this, the principle was kept that they did not need to agree with all ideas, rather to understand them. Having clustered the ideas together, participants then reached consensus on a name for that cluster.

Although the method has been proved to be adequate for such conferences, both the participants and facilitators realized that in some situations the method exceeded its limits. Reaching consensus on the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among both conflict parties and Europeans within the restriction of time sometimes seemed impossible. In the Jerusalem workshop, for example, the participants could not agree on strategic directions but had to find a common basis first by defining red lines from the Israeli and Palestinian sides.

Despite or better because of the hard and painful discussions in the workshops the aim of the conference has been reached. The participants learned about each others' fears and doubts, but also about their hopes and dreams. There is one objective all participants shared: the willingness to work for a peaceful society in the Middle East.

At the beginning of the conference during the plenary meeting of all participants, a common vision was articulated.

PRACTICAL VISION

What do we want to see in place in our communities and in the region in 2009?

The top line is the consensus of the whole group, items beneath are brainstorm items

Security	Equality and Human Rights	Solution for the Jerusalem problem	Two Sovereign States with Clear Borders	EU-ME Co-operation	Functioning Civil Society through Education	Ability to live a 'normal' life	Economic Development	Understanding and Respect	Symbols of peaceful co-existence	Freedom of movement
Both of us can live in security	Equal rights for both sides	Jerusalem as a shared capital	Two states with open borders	Regional co-operation in global problems: environment, water, security	Have educational co-operation	Stability: having the ability to plan personal future	Economic co-operation	Accepting diversity and the "other"	Palestinian UN troops working in other regions	Open borders and the right for free movement regardless of nationality
Sense of safety and security	Equality and justice: equal opportunities	Jerusalem is the capital of two states	Palestine is a state next to Israel	Unanimous EU foreign policy towards the Middle East	Spend money on social issues but not military	Reading/hearing "boring" news	Socio-economic relations as a role model	Have a united peaceful world	Symbolic buildings: Friendship Bridge	Freedom of movement/travel for all
An absence of fear		A united Jerusalem	Two state solution with friendly relations	Create a bridge between the EU and the ME	In-dependent and good education for all		Joint tourist and Infrastructure projects	Kingdom of freedom (HR, movement, religion)	Football world championship hosted by both countries	To move freely everywhere in Palestine
			Two states with clear borders	Successful EU attempt to push both parties towards peace	Strengthened economic, education and health for everyone		Joint work for development projects	Culture and religion: mutual respect		
			Israel-Palestine suit on territories in ICJ		Common education for mutual understanding		Economic perspectives and trade development			
			No more settlements		Change in the way of thinking		Israel an active part of ME. EU as model for ME			
					School trips to the neighbouring countries					
					Enlightenment, No narrative of hate					
					Build strong civil society on both sides					
					Israel-Palestine civil societies co-operation and interaction					

In the next step the participants continued their discussions in the four workshops. In small groups of eight people contradictions and strategic directions were dealt with.

1. Workshop: “Engines of the Conflict: Security and Fear”

The workshop dealt with the existential fear that both parties in the conflict are experiencing and with their continuing desire to achieve a feeling of security. Both feelings seem to play a very dominant role in the behaviour of Israelis as well as Palestinians and therefore have a lot of influence on their actions. The role of these feelings in the national narratives of both sides was discussed by the participants. The discussions also dealt with the security measures that both sides use, their legitimacy and their consequences on the conflict. Europe's understanding of these settings was examined thoroughly, as well as its possible contribution to alleviating them.

OBSTACLES

What is blocking us from reaching our vision?

Existential fear	Lack of communication	Distrust and mis-perception	Radicals/lack of political control	Violence and terror on both sides	Israeli control of Palestinian life	External factors
Fear of not being allowed to exist on both sides	Language barrier / Lack of communication	Israelis and Palestinians do not trust each other mutual Mistrust	Power of radicals on both sides	Using violence to achieve political goals	Continued presence of Israeli military in everyday Palestinian life	External influences
Emotions and feelings of victimisation		Misperception of the “other”	Lack of taking political responsibility	Having to deal with terror in daily lives	Most of the settlements	Passivity of the international community
			Lack of effective control of radical groups on Palestinian side	Bombing attacks	The route of the wall	
				Assassinations		

What can be done in order to overcome the obstacles and reach our vision?

- A joint European and US effort to negotiate between the sides
- Assembling an international police force in the territories
- Stronger international political and economic enforcement
- Democratic election, respect and deal with the elected leader
- Co-operation between the two authorities must take part (must exist in high office)
- Preventing terror attacks, arresting terror activists
- Israeli responsibility for illegal settlers
- Stop incitement to violence
- Getting to know the other's culture and religion
- Studying the other's language
- Educational changes/programmes that address victimisation, violence, misunderstanding, etc.
- Teach non-violence, empowerment, communication
- Organise/support large scale Israeli Palestinian civil society campaign against war, conflict, violence to foster understanding and respect
- Media coverage in mass media by journalists of the other side

- Strengthen the civil society through education and mass media
- Start with the “man in the mirror” (not blaming the other, not excusing, no reasoning)
- Put yourself in the other’s shoes
- Empathy: both sides are victims
- Establish trust/show the good will to trust

2. Workshop: “Refugees & Settlements”

Participants examined past European attempts to solve the refugee problem and the question of the settlements. Under the umbrella of these two topics, participants discussed the many connected historical, political, economic and social elements that perpetuate the conflict. The workshop focused on participants' knowledge, perceptions and experiences with "refugees" and "settlements," as well as different approaches to realizing the repatriation of Palestinian refugees and the resettlement of the settlers. Participants emphasized the need for a comprehensive solution for both issues, and broad-based public support to ensure their implementation.

OBSTACLES

In what ways are refugees and settlements blocking us from reaching our vision?

Economics	Presence of most settlements within future Palestinian state	Defining “refugees” and their histories	Process of evacuating settlements	Conditions of Implementation of Right of Return	Internal Israeli and Palestinian divisions	External political interests, power imbalances and varying interpretations
Volatile existing economic situations	Location of most settlements prevents the contiguity of a future Palestinian state	Number of Palestinian refugees (generations)	Refusal from settlers to evacuate	Personal Hardships for Refugees (who can't return)	Absence of mutual trust	Varied interpretations of UN resolutions 242 & 194
Money spent on settlements – takes away from social issues	Settlements disrupt movement of Palestinian population	Defining refugee	Personal Hardships for Settlers	Question of Return (where? how many? how?)	Governments are afraid to take steps on both sides	Political interests impair implementation of international resolutions
Question of what institutions and individuals will support reintegrating returning refugees		Disputes over what to call Jews who left Arab countries between 1948-1967 and possible compensation	Source of compensation for settlers	Issue of Israeli demographics	Influence of radical groups	International 3 rd country interests
		Israel's non-recognition of right of return for refugees		Source of compensation for Palestinian refugees	Unequal enforcement of the law in Palestinian areas under Israeli control	Extremist groups
				Israel's non-recognition of right of return for refugees		

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**How do WE (Europeans, Israelis, Palestinians) deal with the obstacles of refugees and settlements to achieve our vision?****Consensus strategic actions:**

- Comprehensive, united, clear EU foreign policy towards Middle East
- Establishment of an international monitoring commission for the implementation of a comprehensive, just Israeli-Palestinian agreement for end of conflict and claims
- Create an atmosphere for public acceptance of the peace process through a mass-media campaign (target all conflict groups, especially settlers to be evacuated and refugees to have a compromise on return)
- Land swaps for the 1967-line settlements
- Develop financial incentives to encourage settlers to leave

Strategic actions with items in brackets still being discussed:

- Comprehensive, just Israeli-Palestinian agreement for end of conflict and claims, based on UN resolutions {242, 194, 338, 1397}
- International commission to address all issues of refugee settlement, including compensation, {with Israel to decide final number of refugees to return to Israel}

3. Workshop: “Mass Media and Education”

Mass Media and Education form the perceptions of both sides. As such, the workshop examined the media and education's roles in the conflict – both as an obstacle and as a resource. Participants discussed the effects of both forums on national narratives. Coverage of the conflict in the European media and European education regarding the conflict received special attention during the discussions.

OBSTACLES

How are issues of media and education blocking us from achieving our vision?

Ulterior Motives in Media	Marketing idea for one's profit to justify actions	Bias / uniformity of media	European perception and position of the conflict	Superficiality and sensationalism	National ego-centrism
The interest in selling headlines	Israeli media creates a panic discourse	No self criticism in Palestinian media	European tolerance to suicide bombers in media	People's disinterest in headline's	Disconnection of other people's experiences
Economic profit for media	Arafat's use of the media	No tolerance in Palestinian media towards different political opinions	European media presents PA as corrupt	Writing what people want to hear, which leads to self-fulfilling prophecy	Individual background influence attitudes
The media is owned and run by people who are not neutral	Distorting the truth to get international sympathy and support	The bias of American media for interest of Israel			Israeli condescension and disrespect towards its Arab neighbours
	Political and economic interest of world power government	Palestinian tolerance to suicide bombers in media			Israelis speak Hebrew, Palestinians speak Arabic
	Israeli media creates a panic discourse				Palestinian educational system fosters hate towards Jews and Israelis
					The need for identifying a Palestinian identity
					Israeli education presents a partial picture of the Palestinian history
					Both sides feel like victims of history

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

How do we deal with the contradictions & move towards our vision?

(Note: The workshop did not reach consensus on the strategic directions)

- Creating international internet forum with moderation
- Encourage “objective” NGO involvement
- Education against hate and for non-violence
- Israeli education will acknowledge the legitimacy of the state of Palestine
- Palestinian education will acknowledge the legitimacy of the state of Israel

- Continue conferences like ours (now)
- EU conditions for aid to Palestinian education
- PA and Israel to open its curriculum and editorial system to monitoring by UNESCO
- Project of mutual critical analysis of school books

- Create a common scientific commission for history book writing
- Promotion of the other language (supported by EU, UNESCO, etc.)
- Incorporate strategies that have worked in other conflicts
- Increase citizen initiatives or projects about everybody issues (environment, education of non-violence, etc.)
- Install a media publishing Israeli and Palestinian articles
- Human rights and other organisations to watch media in both Israeli and Palestinian areas
- Increase Palestinian international educational exchange programmes

- Compulsory Hebrew in Palestinian schools from 1st level
- Compulsory Arabic in Israeli schools from 1st level
- To watch and identify the objective media
- Install communication about shared aspects of culture (food, music, language)

- Joint extra-curricula activities, sports turnaround theatre groups
- Establish trilateral summer universities (practical social projects)
- Start a common film project (and other cultural joint ventures)

- Joint educational program that presents the “others” narrative as a critique of our own
- To create a bi-cultural edition/media (like ARTE)
- Learning from the experiences (in workshops) of European countries in conflict resolution (ex. French-German model)
- Human rights and other international organisations to publish objective reports based on accurate findings
- Exchange programmes between Israeli / Palestinian and European teacher and schools (in a “neutral” country in Europe or Turkey, etc.)

4. Jerusalem

The workshop addressed one of the most sensitive issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was attempted to reach a resolution regarding the future status of Jerusalem. The participants discussed the importance of the city for both Israelis and Palestinians -Jews, Muslims, and Christians- and then tried to resolve the various political, religious, and international issues related to the city's future status.

OBSTACLES

What is blocking us from reaching our vision?

Defining the final solution for Jerusalem	Mutual existential fear	Injustice and inequality	How to share Jerusalem	The holy places	The economic impact
The Wall	Fear and mistrust	The legal position of East Jerusalem Palestinian residents	Compromising about the division of land	Geographic proximity of nationalities defining symbols	Consequence on tourism
Settlements	Identity / Fear	The right of movement	Concerns about demographic evolution	Sovereignty over holy places	
Occupation	Losing faith in a peaceful agreement	People in Jerusalem are treated as second class citizens	The reach of sovereignty	External religious interests	
	Lack of recognition of other side's suffering		The question of borders	Different interpretation of the history	
	Israeli and Palestinian public opinion				

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

- The Wall: obstacle or solution?
- Settlements and the issue of compensation: Israeli settlements in Palestine in the future
- Focus on Jerusalem
- 1948 refugees who left houses in West Jerusalem
- Wall/Fence/Barrier?

First Step: the discussion of basic values

1. Red lines from Israel
 - a. Accepting and condemning the Holocaust, and not to compare it.
 - b. Deliberate killing of civilians is unacceptable
2. Red lines from Palestinians
 - a. Israel has the main responsibility for the tragedy since 1948 of the Palestinian nation
 - b. Deliberate killing of civilians... (the session stopped at this stage and consensus on all of the above could not be achieved)

Final Plenary Brainstorm on Implementation

After the deep discussions of contradictions and strategic directions a bridge to the more practical part of the conference was built by the participants' reflections on possibilities to implement the ideas elaborated in the workshops.

What can we do?

Brainstorm of possible ways in which we can individually use our leverage to make a difference in the Israel/Palestine region

Ideas linked to individual communication

- Give lectures on our experience of the conference
- Talking to friends and families (sending friends to next conference)
- Talk with people about importance of peace and security sought by others
- Share experience in local schools and community organisations

Follow up with this participant group

- A follow up meeting with this group of participants to see impact or change & deepen friendships, building on what has been built
- Establish an email list of all participants
- Session on implementing knowledge
- Participants write articles on experience for conference documentation

Ideas Linked to Future conferences

- Facilitate & support future conferences
- Work with YIFC, Palestinian Vision, dialogue lab
- Conference on "red lines", connected with holocaust, understanding where red lines come from
- Organise training workshops on communication, accepting others, when to be emotional and when to be rational

Ideas Linked to education

- Student magazine report
- Conference for school teachers from Israel and Palestine & beyond
- European, Israeli and Palestinian student exchange
- Bring Europeans to Israel and Palestine, create exchange projects (dialogue lab, YIFC, PV)

Ideas Related to IDF checkpoints

- Israeli participants to raise awareness about problems with Ethiopian and Druze soldiers
- Monitor checkpoints (organisations and individuals)
- Talk with officers regarding check points

Miscellaneous Ideas

- Concrete projects
- Breaking Barriers meetings
- Bring Israelis and Palestinians to meet with ambassadors and embassy staff
- Joint research projects and conferences plus ambassador lectures
- Create joint journals on conflict for personal opinions and experiences (dialogue lab)
- Ishmael and Isaac programme
- Find out about funding through EU Euro-med programme

General Framework of the Conference

The Conference was imbedded in a framework of different lectures and activities starting with an introduction of the organisers and words of welcome by **Prof. Mr. P.F. van der Heijden**, Rector of the University of Amsterdam. In his speech he emphasised the importance of debate as an instrument of democracy and asked the participants not to shy away from confrontational discussions. He challenged all of the participants to question the existing worldviews and dogmas and to look towards new horizons.

Yuseef el-Habbab, general representative of the Palestinian National Authority to the Netherlands and **Eldad Hayet**, counsellor of press and public affairs, embassy of Israel, addressed their welcoming words to the participants.

Mr. Ernst van Eeghen, as an honorary guest, gave a short speech to the assembly.

On Wednesday evening the group dealt with international negotiation processes as a tool in conflict resolution and mutual cooperation. **Paul Meerts** (deputy director) and **Rob Aspeslagh** (former staff-member) of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' guided the participants through the options and pitfalls of negotiation. Paul Meerts delivered a one-hour interactive lecture on the questions of processes, parties, positions, power and perceptions in negotiation. He noted that not only interests are an important factor, but emotions count as well and can sometimes dominate over material needs. In the second hour the group practiced a prisoner's dilemma (a role play of international negotiations) . Notwithstanding problems over mutual trust, most negotiation groups managed to overcome the suspicions and took the risk of striking a profitable deal. This showed the flexibility and wise insights of the groups who overcame the cleavages and concluded the game in a forward-looking win-win mode.

Another aspect of the programme of the conference was a lecture on "The European Roots in the Middle East" given by **Prof. Ludo Abicht** from the University of Antwerp, Belgium. According to Mr. Abicht there are at least three good reasons why European citizens and their governments should be involved in the present Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

First, Jewish Culture and the state of Israel can in many ways be looked at as the spiritual ancestors of Europe and thus the Europeans. *Second*, the Middle Eastern Conflict is to a certain degree the result of the lack of tolerance on the part of the Christian majority toward the Jewish minorities. *Third*, the European Community is or at least could be in the unique position of playing a significant role as intermediary between both camps.

The lecture of which a summary is given here deals with these points in greater depth.

"Between the second and the end of the eighteenth century, the Jewish minorities were discriminated against or persecuted by the non-Jewish European rulers and ordinary citizens. They were deported from Palestine by the Romans as prisoners of war, they were accused by the Christian theologians as responsible of the murder of Christ and they were subjected to heavy taxation and were often the victims of spontaneous or organized mob actions.

In Muslim countries such as medieval Spain, they were treated with respect, but not as social equals to the Muslims, with the exception of a number of scholars, doctors and philosophers.

This is important in light of the present-day animosity between Jews and Arabs.

With the advent of the Enlightenment in Western Europe, Jews were gradually emancipated and granted equal status as citizens, even though many orthodox Jews feared that this acceptance and integration would lead to complete assimilation and disappearance of the Jewish culture.

As a result, a large number of talented Jews contributed significantly to the development of modern European culture which is simply not conceivable without their presence. For many non-Jews as well, "Judaism" became synonymous with universalism and humanism.

In the nineteenth century medieval anti-Judaism was replaced by modern anti-Semitism, based upon racial distinctions and the envy toward successfully emancipated Jews who were not accepted as full members of the ethnic national community.

This anti-Semitism was met with either further assimilation (even the changing of names, intermarriage etc.) or Zionism, the secular political and cultural movement for an independent and autonomous Jewish nation state.

Whereas Zionism succeeded in establishing an independent "state of the Jews", rightwing extremism, fascism and national-socialism in Europe eventually led to the systematic, "industrial" murder of millions of European Jews. In the Soviet Union, most Jews were assimilated into the new socialist society or, if they persisted, discriminated against as enemies of the state. After the Six Days War, the European attitude changed from guilt and compassion toward the Jewish victims to an evermore critical attitude toward the policies of the state of Israel, which is now perceived by a majority as a threat to world peace. This change of attitude is partly a result of the recent mass immigration of people from Arab and Muslim countries.

Paradoxically, the success of the Zionist enterprise to establish a safe haven for the Jews of the entire world has, once again, heightened the tensions between Jews and non-Jews, even though the correct assessment should rather be: between Zionists and critics of the Israeli politics.

In a democratic society, the question is not, whether citizens have the right to support or to criticize Israel or any other government, but whether both sides agree, that all forms of racism against Jews, Arab immigrants or Palestinians have to be opposed with equal vigor. To be an open-minded humanist or not to be, that is the real question."

The **Public Panel Discussion** taking place towards the end of the week reflected the process of the conference and outcomes and gave room to a general discussion of the Middle Eastern Conflict.

In this event the participants were given the possibility to present some personal impressions of the process the group had gone through during the week.

Furthermore, **Mr. Andreas Radtke**, personal and press advisor to the EU special representative to the Middle East peace process and **Mr. Mouin Rabbani**, senior analyst of the International Crisis Group (ICG) held short lectures. Abstracts of their talks follow.

Mouin Rabbani:

"An assessment of the role of Europe with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be made on the basis of a number of factors:

1. Does Europe have a responsibility towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
2. Does Europe have the capacity to play a role?

3. Does Europe have the opportunity to play a role?

4. And does Europe have an interest in the resolution of the conflict? To rational individuals this requires no further discussion.

The response to each of these questions is clearly affirmative. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not start on account of decisions taken in North America or the realities of the Middle East. Rather, it was created by the combination of European anti-Semitism and European colonialism. Clearly, those who bear historical responsibility for both the holocaust and the nakba bear at least some obligation to contributing to a just resolution of the present conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

Secondly, the European Union is today both Israel's premier trading partner and the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority. In political terms, this provides substantial leverage, meaning the capacity to exercise it is primarily a question of political will.

And with regard to the third question, the EU has fairly clear ideas on how this conflict should be resolved. The contours of a permanent settlement are no mystery to European politicians, who have collectively developed their ideas over the course of the past several decades. With the roadmap terminally lapsed, and the United States immobilised by its election cycle, 2004 presents a unique opportunity for the EU to step into the resulting vacuum, and to actively pursue its vision of a permanent political settlement, reflecting as it does the regional and international consensus on this issue.”

Andreas Radtke:

“According to Javier Solana's *European Security Strategy*, that was adopted by the European Council last December, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a strategic priority for Europe. This assessment is based on obvious political necessities rather than on free strategic choice: The Middle East and the Mediterranean region are Europe's immediate neighbourhood, coming even closer with the Union's enlargement to the East and South. For Europe to realize the tremendous opportunities offered by this process of “growing together”, it needs to work towards creating conditions for sustained development in the countries concerned. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict chronically destabilizes the region and its continuation is perceived as one of the reasons that hamper such a development. Furthermore, the tensions created by the conflict are immediately tangible in Europe itself.

Add to this the moral obligations vis-à-vis Israel and the Arab world arising from the historical burden of the Holocaust and the colonial heritage, it is not surprising that the EU is playing an active role in the Middle East Peace Process as member of the Quartet (EU, US, UN and Russia) and co-sponsor of the Roadmap peace plan. Despite setbacks in the implementation of this plan the EU remains committed to it as the only way to get out of the current impasse. For any initiative to be successful in building trust and reducing tension, it is vital that it be carried out in the framework of the Roadmap. The EU and its member states will therefore continue to use their influence with both sides to push for more vigorous efforts to fulfil their respective obligations.”

Subsequently, a discussion among audience, participants and the mentioned speakers evolved.

Articles about the conference by participants

Pieterneel, Utrecht

I'm sitting in my new room in Switzerland, where I arrived yesterday, looking through the window at vineyards, mountains and beautiful cottages, trying to find the right words to describe my experiences during the conference week. I think about the people I met there and all that happened every day, but I find it harder than expected to put it in words. The week was so much all at once. My objectives for coming to Amsterdam were to learn more about the conflict so as to not feel so inadequate in discussions and to meet Palestinian and Israeli students of my age and learn more about their daily lives. Though I feel I have met both objectives, I've learned so much more as well; and still feel ignorant.

Being a European student was not easy and I struggled to determine my role in the conference as a whole and the workshops in particular throughout the week. Although I did not necessarily want to be a mediator, I found myself mediating more than once and felt utterly inexperienced. I was more used to discuss, argue and voice my opinion, but learned that that was not always appropriate or appreciated. Israeli and Palestinian students told me they valued the contribution of the Europeans at the conference, but at times I was also told 'you don't know because you don't live it.' And we really don't. This paradox of wanting to participate and contribute, but being an outsider at the same time made it difficult for me to find my way. Talking to people outside of the official program and having a laugh together at night largely made up for this, but what I learned most from the conference was how important it is to really listen. Listen and hear what the other is trying to make you understand.

Though it was challenging for me personally to sometimes just listen to people and be more in the background, it was also frustrating to notice that often the Palestinian and Israeli students were not really listening to each other. It seemed extremely hard for both to sometimes just admit to something, agree or give a little; perhaps because in acknowledging the other's pain they feel it undermines their own suffering? I could understand this, but at times it was nevertheless exceptionally difficult to deal with. Running into my own inability to sufficiently deal with all this tension in the room during the workshop was tough and especially on Thursday I was very frustrated and distressed. I'd also never expected that 'simple' cultural differences or linguistic barriers could complicate communication so much. Being labeled as pro-

Palestinian or -Israeli seemed to always lurk around the corner and I found myself choosing my words more carefully as the week passed by.

Although I wonder whether this has limited me, I am convinced my personal contact with many people, Israelis, Palestinians and Europeans, was sincere and intense. Outside of the workshops I had many interesting and heated discussions. Nevertheless, it was mostly during the workshops that the real differences, the complexity of the conflict, and my personal failings became most clear to me. And this is good. It shows how it is truly about the process and not about the outcome; besides, it would not have been such a valuable experience if it had been all fun and games. I feel the week was a success and I can only hope that now that the Palestinian and Israeli students are back in a life so incomparable to mine, they too will feel some pride in what we have done together and find some hope in having experienced such a powerful week with each other. If only they realize there really is someone to talk to on the 'other side.' I know that I did not go home being the same person I was before I met all of them and I want to thank both organizers and participants for that! I am looking forward to seeing everyone in the (near) future. Take care.

'You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one' - John Lennon

* * *

Abraham, Haifa

One of the vivid memories I have of the conference was that of the pillar we had in the middle of our general assembly room at the University of Amsterdam. It blocked one's view of the room and only allowed partial contact with the other participants at any given time. Speakers were constantly trying to walk around the obstacle and get a full view of their interlocutors. For me that image embodied the very reason we all chose to attend this conference, for the possibility of overcoming the blind spots existing in our positions on the conflict. Both the Middle Eastern parties carried heavy baggage of misconstrued representations of each other, a load that was partially alleviated by the end of the conference, leaving room for meaningful dialogue and a certain amount of optimism.

I came to the Amsterdam conference with the fundamental assumption that we, Israelis, Palestinians and Europeans were all there to discuss the core issues of the conflict and create alternatives to the mutual animosities that have underlied its course in the past years. At first I was gravely disappointed to discover that this expectation was not going to be fulfilled, but over the course of the conference I came to understand how pretentious this idea was and started reformulating my expectations of what I hoped we could achieve.

The workshops, all dealing with the most pressing issues of the conflict, such as Jerusalem and the refugee problem, could not achieve any significant progress for the simple reason that no common language existed between the parties. I feel the workshops were nothing more than a setting meant to allow the real drama, that of the establishment of dialogue, to take place.

The frustration shared by the participants at the deadlocks reached during the workshops and throughout the conference may have been emotionally strenuous and a cause for aggravation, nevertheless, I believe they were a stage necessary for the constructing a channel of mutual communication. This channel could only be reached by facing the cultural and perceptual gaps that exist between us. The conference helped me realize how difficult it is to negotiate at the same table with so many asymmetries at the starting point. The Israeli and Palestinian collective identities retain varying degrees of diversity and plurality due to the very different challenges faced in their national struggles, making them incompatible. The power imbalance between the two sides, was replicated at the conference by the discrepancy in the 2 sides' linguistic skills which allowed the Israelis a certain advantage over their Palestinian colleagues. Acknowledging these problems and keeping them in mind was crucial in establishing any mutual understanding.

These ten days of sincere and sometimes even painful dialogue have helped expose some of the ambiguities, reservations and fears we all carry with us regarding the conflict. This understanding left us at a point where dialogue is possible; my only hope is that we all realize our personal responsibility in maintaining it as it is our only alternative to the current cycle of violence and bloodshed.

* * *

Niveen, East-Jerusalem

It was an immense experience that every young determined girl would like to have in her own life. Living under occupation is not an easy life, from the Palestinians side; it's devastating, frustrating, very difficult and complicated. For girls, it's even harder because of the insecurity and despair in the area. But these things didn't keep me from being ambitious and living my dream as a Palestinian girl who seeks peace and a decent life. Every obstacle I faced in my way was like a step for progress in my eyes, each time I start to feel desperate like there is no hope I consider it as a remedy for power that will provide me with more strength to face a cruel world of injustice. My source of comfort was the words: "**don't give up & don't lose hope!**"

I have had many activities in this regard, I learned a lot and gained lots of precious experiences, but this conference was the best! It was the opportunity that I was waiting for. It reflects the reality that I was always

dreaming about. Finally, I had a chance to talk face to face with whom I used to call: "my enemy"! What a great opportunity to say everything that is inside of me, to those people who took my lands and transferred my heaven to hell! What a great opportunity to show the facts which were hidden behind the scenes! I always wanted to have this chance to talk to an Israeli and ask him/her, why? And what is the end of all this? This conference made my dream come true! There were things I expected and others I didn't. I expected we'd fight for who is right and wrong, and who the faults belong to. But I didn't expect that after all I would talk personally to anyone of the Israeli group!

It was beyond my expectations that I will reach this point of erasing the barrier between us which in my eyes was made of hard metal like iron! I didn't realize that it can melt away if we give it a chance and exchange views. What a great experience I shared with the whole group of Israelis and Europeans who were all incredible! I found out that at the end we are **human beings** - regardless of nationalities and religions- and there is no difference between us; as if I didn't know this before! I had a block on my eyes and my heart, from the daily pressure of the occupation like checkpoints and closures. This block was increasing everyday. But, in these 10 days of the conference, this block was decreasing one day after another, after every discussion or interaction with both Europeans and Israelis.

This is enough proof that the conference changed a lot of my views! Through this experience, I got a chance to build a very important step in my life, which is the importance of the word "Trust". All the participants fought to make this step, besides the disagreement and the conflict.

The outcome of this experience is trying to build trust and understanding which was extremely difficult but was successful and we managed to overcome this major step...!

* * *

Hanna, Odessa

Where do we go?

The six days of the conference had passed, the 7 days after conference has passed but still there is a feeling of total mess in the mind. It's always difficult to be in the middle, between counterparts in a dispute or war. Even more difficult to mediate a conflict, which has a long history. When we read academic books we always think that we know the very solution, but when we appear "on the ground", you realize that it's not good or bad parties, wrong and right positions – every people has its own "right".

In conflict management and resolution I am an academician, that's why participating in the International conference "The European role in

Israel-Palestinian conflict" was so important for me, as I wanted to listen to both parties – Palestinians and Israelis – what do they feel and how do they see the light at the end of the tunnel, as well as what role do they want the European Union to play in settlement and peace-building process.

My main experience in the conference was realizing that both parties have their "truth" and their "mistakes", their "misperceptions" and their "rights". Hearing every day the phrase "the European Union should improve its role in the Middle East peace process" I couldn't receive an answer which role do both parties prefer for the EU? Mediator? Arbitrator? Financial supporter? Just a friend to whom is possible to complain? It is a pity but I haven't received the answer. Probably it is because the EU can't settle the conflict by its authority, but the strong wish of both parties is necessary. In all theories of conflict studies the mediator can step into conflict and be successful in its settlement only if both sides realize that they really want to solve the problem, that they lose more than they can gain by peace, and that they are ready to sit and negotiate.

I learnt again that the Israel-Palestine conflict can be solved only when both parties will be ready not only to make statements, but also to look for compromises. I always thought that statements are the prerogative of states and politicians. But at the conference I saw how difficult it is to be a representative of

your state. On one hand people who came really wanted peace and to find a solution. On the other hand they are stuck to the statements, and sometimes can't abstract themselves from the official positions. In some measure it can be also applied to the Europeans – as we still don't know where our place is in the conflict-management process – and hiding behind the statements of “just peace”, “two states”, solving of refugees problem” etc.

So at the end of the conference I had a question in my mind – Where do we go? Toward just peace? But every nation sees it in its own way. Where does EU go? Toward neutrality, toward interfering into conflict settlement or towards competition with the USA? So the main experience is – Every step we do ahead raises many new questions and we shouldn't be afraid to face them and to dream, as even the craziest dreams of settlement one day can come true.

* * *

Michal, Beer Sheva

Fascinating.

Throughout the entire ten days of the conference I found myself fascinated. And I still am. I think I mainly began to grasp things that I may have known before, but never really understood. I feel as though I have been given the kind of understanding about issues in this conflict that many people around me will never have the chance to experience, and I am very grateful for that. There were moments when I realized, in the deepest sense of the word, that these are our lives and that is why we must find a way to communicate.

It is amazing to analyze the way in which we communicated during the ten days, on both the formal and informal levels - I am so happy that we accomplished all that we did although I won't deny that there were times when it was hard. Like Abraham, I feel that on the one hand, the workshops did compel us to talk about the more sensitive issues, ones that may have been a lot harder for us to get into had we merely been speaking on a personal level. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the real process taking place was more about us intensively speaking with each other, confronting all that was being said (whether we liked it or not), and trying to understand why it was said, than it was about finding the solution for Jerusalem or the solution for better education

I really enjoyed the fact that most of the time I felt that I could say what I thought and I was curious to listen, with no matter to whether it was happening on the formal level or on the colourful sofas in the hostel.

Nevertheless, I do think that there were times when the different expectations that every side had of the other made things difficult when it came to holding a real dialogue. I know that we learned a lot from that,

that we have been exposed to the different points of view, but there is still so much that we must work on, internalise, and accept. It is especially important that we remember the real reason we all came to the conference and keep that in mind throughout the conference.

The Europeans contributed a lot to the discussion - there were times that they brought a very rational point of view amidst all the heated emotions, and times that the "third side's" remarks were needed. Nevertheless, it was very important that on the days of the "post event", when there was no one to "escape" to, we were forced to stand in front of each other in a different manner.

On a more personal level - I felt like I was testing my national identity by seeing it as it is reflected in the eyes of the others - the Palestinians and the Europeans, and the different way in which I was seeing it in this special situation (It is not as easy as it sounds!).

I get the feeling that despite of all the difficulties, we formed the beginnings of a real dialogue. Now that we have overcome a few obstacles together and realized what is possible, we must continue what we have begun. We still have much to discuss, and it important that we do continue to have discussions consistently and constantly because things look different as time passes. I think we have the commitment to at least try to change what we can change - not everything, just everything that we can.

Information about the cooperating organisations and contact information

dialogue lab

www.dialogue-lab.org

info@dialogue-lab.org



dialogue lab is a European organisation by and for young people that want to contribute constructively to the advancement of a just and peaceful society. *dialogue lab* is a non-governmental, politically independent and non-profit organisation.

Our Vision: We are convinced that conflicts and grievances can be overcome if each of us is willing to establish dialogue between people, creating awareness, empathy, mutual understanding and trust.

We believe that there is beyond borders – physical ones as well as borders like nationality and religion – a strong bond between people all over the world based on human dignity. This common ground has to be strengthened by means of open and true dialogue, especially among young people as leaders of tomorrow.

Palestinian Vision

www.palestinianvision.org

Pal_vision@hotmail.com



Mission:

Palestinian Vision aims to promote an active leadership role for youth within their community and provide them the opportunity to develop extracurricular skills so as to fill their time with constructive and meaningful activities.

Palestinian Vision objectives:

To develop and strengthen competencies of youth (skills, knowledge, practices and attitudes).

To promote volunteer work, community service and environmental awareness.

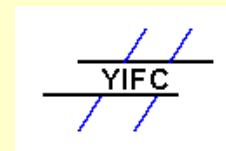
To encourage youth activities at local and national levels.

The Young Israeli Forum for Cooperation promotes Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and understanding, and fosters Israeli-European relations. The YIFC is one of the leading Israeli organizations that acts at the young leadership level (up to 35 years of age), and includes activists from diverse social backgrounds and political beliefs. It aims at influencing the Israeli political, social, and professional spheres, and is highly linked to prominent Israeli, European and American policy makers, scholars and NGOs.

Young Israeli Forum for Cooperation (YIFC)

www.yifc.org

contact@yifc.org



AEGEE (Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe) has the aim to promote the European idea amongst students. AEGEE is a secular, non-profit association and not linked to any political party. With over 17,000 student members in 261 towns of Europe, we are the biggest interdisciplinary European student association. For more information about AEGEE please visit www.aegee.org.

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