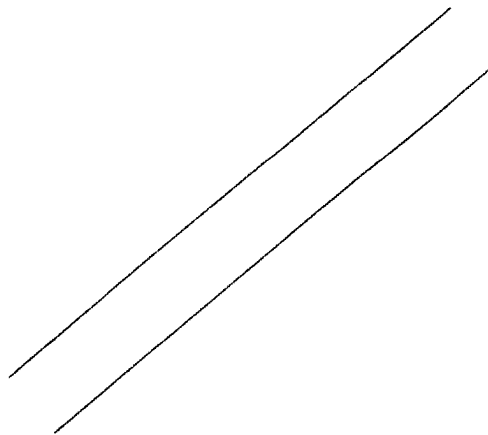


**Franco Frattini**

European Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security

**From the outside, looking in:  
international perspectives on the  
Middle East**



Israel at 60: test of endurance

**Herzliya, 22 January**

I am delighted to be here in Israel, only a few days after the talks on core issues began between Israel and Palestinian negotiators. This gives me the opportunity, being among friends, to speak politically and share my views, shared by many but not all in Europe.

For eight long years, conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has fostered only despair and fuelled extremism. The hopes for peace of the 1990 gave way to scepticism. The window of opportunity opened in Oslo slammed closed on us, suddenly, in the autumn of 2000. Now, it seems, there is a new opportunity. We cannot let it slip away like past ones. But in order to seize the moment and make 2008 the year of Israeli-Palestinian peace, we must not be blind to the lessons of the past.

The years from 2000 to 2008 have been punctuated not only by suffering for Israeli and Palestinian peoples, but also by much incomprehension of the reality of this conflict across the world and across Europe.

We Europeans have always believed that peace in the Middle East is of great importance for us. We are your neighbours; we share a past of great achievements and awful tragedies.

Above all, we have a shared future of renewed understanding and prosperity.

Solving this conflict will make it easier to address other challenges. We have long recognised the national rights of the Palestinian people. We have also repeated our long-standing commitment to the right of the Jewish state of Israel to live in peace and security.

But beyond the frequent reiteration of these beliefs, there has been much misunderstanding between Europe and Israel in recent years.

Israel has been complaining for years about Europe – and, sometimes, not without reason. For too long, European public opinion and some of its leaders put too much of the blame for the failure of the peace process on Israel's shoulders.

For too long, we ignored Israel's fears and legitimate concerns about terror, fanaticism and the refusal of key groups in the Arab camp to come to terms with Israel's existence, let alone its legitimacy.

For too long, Israel's security predicament eluded our understanding and was dismissed as an excuse for diplomatic inaction.

Instead, we should have understood Israel's concerns sooner, for your predicament in the face of terrorism is the same as ours. This does not mean that Israel's record is immaculate. As friends, it was our duty to criticise, politely and respectfully, our friend and ally when we felt that you were in the wrong. But, too often, our criticism fell short of at least acknowledging the dilemmas that Israel faced. We asked our friend to take risks, but did not always offer reassurances that in taking those risks Israel would not be left to stand alone.

For the three years of the second Palestinian intifada, many in Europe were reluctant even to acknowledge that the rising, insidious tide of hatred that Middle East violence has unleashed might be called "anti-Semitism". This European sickness had taken new roots and new forms. But things have changed. Governments have taken note and more action. This prejudice, this stance towards Israel and Jews has no place in today's Europe, must not have place in today's Europe. It does not matter if it is presented as a side-effect of political grievances. It is simply unjustifiable. Full stop.

Anti-Semitism is the ugliest and most hideous form of racial hatred, which results in the abuse of our fellow Jewish citizens. Europeans do not need reminding what it can lead to. When Israel reminds us of anti-Semitism in Europe today, we have to take it seriously because this awful prejudice, if left unchallenged, poses a serious threat to the very fabric of our democratic societies.

Similarly, Europe now appreciates the complexities of the Middle East landscape much better. Europe is better prepared to take real risks itself, to expend political capital and to take on board Israeli concerns and interests in a way that was not on our agenda in the first years of intifada.

Less than two months ago, leaders gathered in Annapolis, Maryland, to restore hope to the Arab-Israeli peace process. Looking at the list of participants, one could not fail to recognise the long way we have come in the last eight years. Many of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of EU Member States were there, alongside the top EU diplomats. Our strong presence at Annapolis is in itself significant because of our previous political absence, like in 2003 in Aqaba.

Annapolis is, of course, a promise of peace – not peace itself. We believe that this conflict is part of a complex web of related problems in the region.

Fortunately or less, the entire process is very strongly influenced by the political regional context, which doesn't make Mr Olmert's and Mr Abbas' position any easier.

Iran is striving for global role and regional hegemony. While the first is a legitimate goal for any democratic country, the position of Iran's President appealing for destruction of Israel and questioning the holocaust is putting those goals in a completely different and highly worrying light. We, the International partners, should impede Iran to equip itself with an atomic bomb. It would hugely destabilize the world and the region. Already now the Arab countries fear Iran. What then if it would have such a deterrent leverage. Iran would be the only OPEC country to have an atomic bomb. You can only imagine the consequences this could have for Israel, for the region, on the petrol prices and on the global security. This is not Israel's problem only, it is our common problem, in Europe and the rest of the world.

I am in favour of the third set of UN sanctions if there is no progress at the end of the four week period Mr Al Baradei just agreed in Iran last week. A diplomatic solution would be the best option if combined and only if combined with severe sanctions. There is also an erroneous assessment on the strength of the democratic forces in Iran. Unfortunately they are not well organised and their numbers are yet very limited. We, as Europe, have to show to them the cost of international isolation and the need to better react.

Syria, it is a long-term partner of Iran, despite their profound differences. One is a theocratic Shiite regime and the other a socialist state with the majority of Sunni population. Yet nobody has really managed to split the two since 1979.

Nothing makes me believe that we will succeed this time. Their alliance is forged on the basis of a common fight against the West.

This is also crucial in relation to Lebanon, where hopes are for the three points plan brokered by the Arab League was not agreed upon.

So far about some of my thoughts on larger geopolitical context. They are strongly influenced by a detailed insight I have into the problem of security and fight against global terrorism – a policy I am responsible for in Europe.

Terrorism is a global threat. The whole world is concerned.

We have high-speed technology, transport and constant media. We are linked at individual level - friends, family or business contacts - at political level – by many international organisations - and, sadly, by sophisticated criminal or terrorist networks. The boundaries between Europe and the Middle East, between outside and inside, are increasingly blurred.

Violent conflict in an unstable country has consequences outside its borders. And a stable country can have criminals or terrorists inside. Afghanistan under the Taliban or the British home grown terrorists show this.

Israel is not only a key partner for Europe, it is also our natural partner. Israel lives and exists according to the same traditions and values as the European citizens. I hope to deepen our cooperation in the near future. This is the second reason I came to Israel to meet my key interlocutors. The first being Herzlyia Conference.

Israel is struggling with the same terrorist threats that Europe but on a much larger scale. We witness home grown terrorist groups. Israel a sharp radicalisation and versatile transformation of violent Islamic groups active on occupied territories or in Lebanon.

First of them, HAMAS - which backs its radicalism and private army – has been provoking Israel's armed response and challenged Palestinian opponents. I am proud that under the Italian Presidency of the EU in 2003, at the time when I was serving as Foreign Minister, HAMAS has been included in the black list of EU-designated terrorists groups. HAMAS has never abandoned its plan of destroying Israel and still rejects the principle of two-state solution. That's why HAMAS cannot be a viable interlocutor, neither for the international community, nor for the poor Palestinian people who should sooner rather than later realise that HAMAS has brought them only disaster.

The terrorist groups increasingly use new technologies and are fast in recreating themselves anywhere they operate in the world. Hence, there is much Europe and Israel can do together.

One of the implications of this principle, and at the same time of modern terrorism, is our need to modify relations between the public and private sectors. The interaction between these two actors can no longer be limited to public procurement and export controls. Public-private interaction in fighting terrorism must become more sophisticated as well.

Since 2005, I have sought to intensify public-private cooperation in order to bridge the gap between these two sectors.

One of the major outcomes is a creation of ESRIF – the European Security Research and Innovation Forum - which brings together public and private sectors in a bid to support research on security. 1.4 billion of Euros (2007-2013) has been devoted to this endeavour and I am proud that Israel is a member of this initiative.

Security is not a gift and I believe that, through an improved interaction between public and private partners, through an improved cooperation between Europe and Israel and other Middle East partners, we could significantly improve our citizens' security, as well as security of our common interests.

I commit myself personally and institutionally to assisting Israel and the Israeli people in the years to come with the view to achieving our common goal of peace and prosperity in the region.