

News Report : 21-04-2004

■ **MEPs discuss Israeli plan for Gaza withdrawal with 'Geneva Initiative' architects**

Brussels, 21 April 2004

MEPs discuss Israeli plan for Gaza withdrawal with 'Geneva Initiative' architects

Yasser Abed RABBO, former Palestinian information minister, and Avraham BURG, former speaker of the Israeli Knesset, presented the "Geneva Initiative" to the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday evening. The Geneva Accord, a non-official plan to settle the Middle East conflict, calls for a two-state solution based on Israel's pre-1967 borders as well as the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Jerusalem would be divided into western and eastern parts, each becoming the capital of Israel and Palestine respectively. On the Palestinian refugee question, each Palestinian would be presented with the following options: they could reside in the new State of Palestine, emigrate to a third country or remain in their current host country. Immigration to the State of Israel proper would be at the sovereign discretion of Israel. In addition, a multinational force would guarantee both parties' security and supervise the implementation of the agreement.

Referring to recent events, notably the killing of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi by the Israel Defence Forces and Prime Minister Sharon's unilateral plan to withdraw troops from the Gaza Strip, Avraham BURG started by addressing an apology to MEPs: *"I apologise to you, because I find no words in which to come, to defend the policies of my government. But at the end of the day, this is the democratically elected government of Israel."* He then referred to the first decade of the 21st century as being characterised by unilateralism. *"Europe is not playing a matching role to balance the US's dominant role in the political arena"*. On the Geneva model accord, he told the Members that *"Geneva is the reintroduction of hope into the equation of despair for world and regional politics"*. Finally, Mr Burg called on Europe to become increasingly involved in the peace process. *"I don't know how you define the notion of 'dialogue' in Europe, but in the Middle East, the definition is: 'two monologues'. Europe must help produce a rational Palestinian 'monologue', which calls for co-operation and not extremism,"* he concluded.

Yasser Abed RABBO stressed the need for *"the European Parliament to support Palestinian elections under international supervision"*. He added that they have not yet been held *"for fear that the Palestinians would vote in favour of the present leadership"*. He then examined the details of Israel's plan to pull out troops and settlements from Gaza Strip. *"This withdrawal would not occur before November 2005. That is the date when President Bush says he wants his 'vision' to be implemented. It will also be the time when Israel's wall would be completed"*, he said. He added that borders between Gaza and Egypt would remain under Israeli control. *"If this is withdrawal, then what is occupation?"* he asked. Mr Rabbo added: *"the current atmosphere is so disastrous that no-one believes that a solution is possible anymore"*. According to him, Israelis who

attack the Geneva Initiative do not specify why they do not support the agreement. *"The Palestinians attack this plan for the refugee question. But this is the best solution that has ever addressed this question"*, he explained.

Members were then invited to express their views and ask questions. According to Emilio MENENDEZ del VALLE (PES, E), *"Prime Minister Sharon does not want peace. How do you organise elections under a military occupation?"* he asked. Cecilia MALMSTRÖM (ELDR, S) asked what the EU's role would be if there were to be a withdrawal from Gaza. *"Would the EU's role be acceptable to Israeli society?"* According to Mr Rabbo, an Israeli pullout could lead to chaos, because the Palestinians lack a stable government and institutions. *"This was not the case when the Israelis left South Lebanon"*, he warned. He believed that the key question would be to understand the intention behind the withdrawal. *"If there is a serious withdrawal, under an international presence, then this could be a step towards a solution, instead of blocking it"*, he added. Avraham Burg underlined the original reasons that led to a plan for unilateral withdrawal. *"The collapse of the Oslo process created a vacuum in the Middle East. Today, both sides believe that there is no partner for peace. Palestinians view all Israelis as 'occupiers', and Israelis view the Palestinians as 'suicide bombers'. We must restore law and order in the Palestinian Territories. If the result of withdrawal is that people like Mr Rabbo take over Gaza, that would lead the path to similar success in the West Bank."*

Charles TANNOCK (EPP-ED, UK) warned against the scenario where the Hamas wing could potentially take control of Gaza. According to Maj Britt THEORIN (PES, S), *"the Geneva Initiative is the only plan that could be envisaged in the future"*. Luisa MORGANTINI (EUL/NGL, I) called for *"Europe to be courageous"* and to *"start working to keep the Geneva Initiative alive"*. Avraham BURG admitted that he did not understand *"Europe's sense of inferiority compared to the United States"*. Indeed, *"the Madrid process, the Oslo process and the Geneva Accords all happened in Europe, and not in Washington"*, he pointed out.

20.04.2004 Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy

In the chair: Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D)

Press enquiries:

Joëlle Fiss - tel. (33-3) 881 73656 (Strasbourg) or (32-2) 28 41075 (Brussels)

e-mail: foreign-press@europarl.eu.int

On line: 21 April 2004

Webmaster © [Disclaimer](#)