

ADDRESS TO THE KNESSET ON THE INAUGURAL EVENT OF THE *EUROPEAN FORUM OF THE KNESSET*

Mr. President of the Knesset, Mr. Ministers of the Israeli Government and Parliament members, honorable Yohanan Plesner, and European Friends of Israel that worked hard for this event, SHALOM and Zaohoraim tovim. Ani Moda ve mitrageshet. It is for me an honor and a great emotion to be hosted by *Knesset Israel* on this important occasion. I know and I love this place from my activity as a journalist and a writer. I love its walls, its square Greek shapes and ambitions, the faces of Ben Gurion, Golda, Moshe Dayan and Yigal Alon on the green walls in the entrance, and the white shirts without tie that you could always meet in this institution. I love its history at peace and at war. It's for me and for all the world a valorous outstanding symbol of enduring democracy in the middle of the most overwhelming difficulties.

I would like to thank MK Yohanan Plesner for inviting me, and with him all the very efficient staff of the new born European Forum of the Knesset (EFK), in particular Meital Goor and Michel Gourary of the European Friends of Israel.

I would like to thank President Rubi Rivlin for welcoming us, all the Ambassadors in particular Mr. Davide La Cecilia from the Italian Embassy. I bring the regards of the President of my Parliament Mr. Gianfranco Fini to Mr. Rivlin personally and to you all.

It is extremely important that the Knesset has instituted a group aimed at strengthening the relations with European Parliaments. In my activity as Member of the Italian Parliament, I really felt the need of somebody to relate to, an ear that would listen to the request of materials, willing interlocutors, non casual relationship and continuous relationship in every European Parliament. Everywhere, as the one thousand parliament members of the European Friends of Israel show, there is one, two, some parliament members that want to produce knowledge and sympathy in a situation where Israel is often badly mistreated and misunderstood, and I can tell you that much can be done if Israel is there to give us a hand. We need to be able to invite speakers, to affirm, to explain, to enhance the relations between experts, in a word to enjoy the support of the Israeli Parliament.

Europe is today damned by an incredible increase of Anti-Semitism episodes, only in England the Community Security Trust, that provides security for the Jewish community have recorded 609 anti Semitic crimes from January to June, while last years in the same period they were 276. The worst happened during the operation Cast Lead; the bias on Israel, I don't have to tell you this, are the basic reasons of the growth either of anti-Semitism and political parallel positions against Israel in Europe. Nathan Sharansky has written about the double standards that show the anti-Semitism inside antisraelianism. Seems to me that the Israeli Parliament has all the interest in helping to answer to this very serious problem ensuring just what this new *shdula* wants: presence, assistance, interlocution.

I see a huge potential in the cooperation between the Knesset members and the parliamentarians of the various legislative assemblies of Europe, since we, as parliamentarians, can have a great influence in the decision making process. Therefore, it is right and important for you to invest in the cooperation at the parliamentary level and in supporting the single parliamentarians that are trying to make their voice be heard in Europe.

In my fresh experience as a member of the Italian parliament and as a deputy president of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I found myself delegated as a member of Strasbourg's Council of Europe, precisely at the Political Committee and its derivate, the Middle East Committee.

The first plenary discussion about the Middle East that I have attended was for me a real shock. It was held at the end of January about Operation Cast Lead. I expected a generic sense of pain toward the civil population involved in the war, accompanied by the understanding of the unbearable situation of the people bombed by Hamas from Gaza; and therefore I imagined that there would have been a thoughtful, problematic discussion about the question of asymmetric war, an army fighting against the terrorist Hamas' decision of aiming at civilians hiding beyond civilians. Nothing of this kind.

I heard a long string of speeches, from the Swedish to the Spanish, from the British to the Russian representatives, who chose to focus not on the clash in itself, but rather on the supposed Israeli war crimes, the Palestinian suffering, and the occupation - as if Gaza were still occupied. I think that only the Canadian observer and myself voiced a different opinion. The rest expressed a deep antipathy toward the Jewish State, even beyond the expected. The representatives of almost all the European countries were actually mirroring the image of what was happening in the European squares, where marches took place, sometimes so incredibly aggressive to choose as slogan "Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas", as it has happened in the Netherlands.

In Italy, I will say it with pride, the Italy-Israel parliamentary friendship association, that counts a membership of more the 200 MPs, has been able on the contrary to organize a spectacular, courageous exit toward the square to support the Israeli right to self-defense; thousands of citizens were waiting for us in the square with Israeli flags, and the President of the Parliament, Gianfranco Fini, came out to greet us.

The same attitude Italy has had about the Durban 2 conference in Geneva: our Parliament has been the first to vote unanimously for deserting the Conference, and our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, has guided the little group of European countries (Germany, Holland and Poland) that declared the impossibility of joining the so called antiracism conference. But we cannot ignore that while standing and making a nice exit from the hall where Ahmadinejad was again calling for the extermination of the Jews, the European nations, except the Czech Republic, came back quickly into the Geneva assembly after he finished his speech.

The estrangement of Israel from Western Europe in my view is one of the most outstanding moral and diplomatic markers of our era. On the disintegration of any moral sympathy toward Israel, you can read the disintegration of Europe. The relations between Europe and Israel, do not only constitute a geostrategic axis that is aiming at the survival of a plurimillenary construction of democracy, and also at the physical survival of our civilization. It's also the indicator, with other markers like low birthrate, aging population, fear and surrender in front of imported values that dismantle the conquers connected to the status of women and of sexual and cultural minorities, of the profound lassitude, the end of civilization weariness that holds in its grip the EU nations. It is also, as Ambassador John Bolton has written, the desire of being liberated forever from conflicts, war, from any problem that will recall the disgust and horror for itself that Europe felt after the Second World War. Since that time onward, Europe considers like a mistake anything connected to its own culture, to its own most intimate structure, its economic, familiar, national, juridical structure, its own civilization. Israel, felt as Europe rib, is a refused member of the family.

Moreover, the fact that religion has become a questionable, sometimes even laughable motivation, makes the State of the Jews become only an annoying incident. The Old Continent has a fantasy of having moved beyond history, and nowadays this attitude is enhanced by the USA new attitude.

Sweden, which took over EU presidency on July the first, has been financing, according to “NGO-Monitor”, a precious watchdog organization of NGO activities, a radical NGO in the guise of human rights and humanitarian aids. Its activity is very relevant: *Diakonia*, Sweden’s largest humanitarian NGO, receives 9,3 million Euros and it distributes this money to some of the most radical centers, like the *Alternative Information Center* (“working with Peres Center for peace is morally disgusting”) and *Sabeel* (“Israel places Jesus on the cross again, with thousands of crucified Palestinians everyday”).

In general, through the Barcelona Process, Europe fuels the conflict funding all the organization that call Israel a regime of apartheid and accuse it of war crimes. The Palestinians Center for Human Rights receives funds not only from the European Commission, but also from single countries like Norway, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland. This and a lot of other foundation program their appearances in public with booklets and researches so to feed in coordinated times, always through funds that should encourage a peace culture, the culture of hate and war. I see this problem as a field of hard work for parliaments: discuss here where the citizens’ money go.

The greatest confusion reigns in allocations of European programs, the names and possible conflicts of interest are hidden, the European Union deleted data in giving information to NGO monitor. Lately a protest of the Israeli Ambassador to the Netherlands has brought the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to claim they will stop funding the organization “Breaking the silence”, that we know is financed also by England and Spain: just one of the many organization of opposition on the Israeli soil financed by European nations. Here I cannot but underline, with respect with every opinion, how much whenever any intellectual, NGO, famous writer speak against the morality of Israel this become an enormously amplified argument, widely used for extreme and damaging statements all over the net, the media, the political spectrum of power and public opinion: sometimes you really have the impression that no sense of responsibility seems to be taken in consideration in front of the need of expressing one’s opinions and sometimes even simple impressions.

This attitude is perfectly consonant with a sort of categorical European imperative to help the Palestinians, however and whatever: in spite of the international boycott called on when Hamas won the elections, aid to Palestinians grew from about 1 billion in 2005 to more than 1.2 billion in 2006, and billions of dollars are arriving now, after three billion dollars have been raised at the conference of Sharm el Sheik following the war of Gaza. Arab country promised 1.65 billion dollars, the US 900 millions, the EU 436 millions. Now, after a conference on the 12th of July, held between the UNDP, the UN Agency that supervises the distribution, and the UNRWA, it came clearly out that several mechanism permit the funds to arrive in the hands of Hamas itself.

Actually, I don’t think that all this generates more than a formal eyebrows rise.

Europe was stopped by watering down the Quartet’s three condition for dealing with Hamas and making the dialogue possible, only by the speech of Netanyahu at Bar-Ilan on June 14th. The same happened with a Belgian proposal that was about to introduce a EU clause in its resolutions saying that East Jerusalem should be the capital of a future Palestinian state. Nowadays, Europe is fascinated by the “settlement complete freezing” way chosen by Obama and feel encouraged on its traditional way, again expressed by Javier Solana last surprising speech that saw in the Israeli “occupation” the source of almost all the troubles of war, much more than Iran and Afghanistan.

Also, even if we assisted at the strange phenomena that Europe was the main objective of the Mullah’s accusations of conspiracy and violation of sovereignty during the latest harsh repression of the protest after the elections, still it’s clear that Europe feels reassured by the politics of

dialogue of Obama toward Iran. The recent revolution has raised among Europeans a wave of surprise and indignation about human rights violation, but I would say that basically, as you can read for instance in the stenographic text of the plenary of the Council of Europe that on June 25th has dealt with the Iranian situation, the analysis never touches the basic aspects of the Iranian danger, always arrives somehow to a “dialogue” choice. The trade and therefore the sanctions aspects are ignored, serious boycott is left for the future, the men of the regime are out of discussion. The rapporteur answered to my request of delegitimizing the regime as an interlocutor, just denying this possibility. There is much work to do about Iran and the danger that Europe itself faces in front of an atomic Iran.

My government has behaved with sense of responsibility when it refused to receive Ahmadinejad at the FAO meeting held in Italy on June 2008, and also now, according political asylum to 70 Iranian students that during the riots found shelter in the Italian Embassy at Teheran, and announcing that in September, at the G8 meeting during the next UN General Assembly opening session, will take further decisions if Iran doesn't give signs of complying with the renounce to atomic energy. September is near, and also Clinton gives signals that she realizes that. In the meanwhile, plenty of forces work to signal that it's possible to coexist with an Iranian bomb.

What can Israel do with the European institutions and public opinion to help? First of all, the Parliaments must use the very many opportunities that this main form of popular sovereignty gives to different opinions. If you will work thoroughly with the Parliaments and institutions of the European Union, with the Council of Europe, with OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), with NATO, you will always find somebody ready to listen and to express a different point of view. Maybe it's not much, but it's something. You should help the parliament members with ideas, proposals, bringing them to Israel. It would be also very useful if the European Forum of the Knesset will discuss within itself and with the European institutions the old proposal, that comes from several parts, of the admission of Israel in the European Union.

Second point: Israel must speak up his mind in a more aggressive, so to say, and explicit way. You never praise enough the courage and sense of collectivity of your own society. Make the European understand what sacrifice the youngsters of Israel, boys and girls, make for the sake of freedom, don't try to hide the war, it's impossible, just put more energy in explaining it.

Palestinisation of public opinion is something very damaging for all the European tradition, a false idea of human rights that is transforming Europe in what somebody has called *Eurabia*. It's a delicate subject, but incitement and hate against the Jews are turning again Europe in a wild territory and this goes together with Islamic courts in England, polygamy in Germany and France, genital mutilation in Italy. Anti Semitism has been in the other century the destruction of Europe. Nevertheless it's there again. That's why we will be holding very soon in Rome the meeting of the Steering Committee of the ICCA, the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism, which gathers more than 40 Parliaments throughout the world, and we are now going to institute a section of it in the Italian parliament: it's not to defend only the Jews, it's to defend ourselves as Italians. I also brought with me, given to me by President Fini, the protocol that, if the Knesset will accept, will found the institutional cooperation between our two Parliaments, signed in a close future by the two Speakers of the Parliaments and formed by two special delegations. It's in this perspective of common work that I foresee the spirit of the initiative that you valorously started today. My compliment and my best wishes on behalf of the EFI and of the Italian Parliament.

The dramatic diffusion of hate against Israel is directly connected with the loss of the most important principles of freedom, a Judeo-Christian conquer. You cannot forget it while working with Europe.

Fiamma Nirenstein

Vice President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Italian Chamber of Deputies

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