

Hasselt, 21st October 2013

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

A few weeks ago you received an invitation from *Soemoed Flanders* for a conversation about our petition for peace in Israel and Palestine. Two delegates of Combatants for Peace were also present in Belgium on that day, the 27th September 2013.

That meeting could unfortunately not take place because hardly anybody registered. We obviously regret this as a meeting with Asaf Yacobovitz and Nour Shehadah offers the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the Israeli and Palestinian issue. Moreover it provides a beautiful, personal example of the way people in that area look for solutions.

A number of parliamentarians asked to be excused. We want to thank everybody who showed any interest at all in this activity.

On that day there was a meeting at the cabinet of Herman Van Rompuy, chairman of the European Council. We were received by Mrs. Franziska Hagedorn. Soemoed elucidated and handed over the petition they launched a few months ago. The two delegates of Combatants for Peace were able to tell their story. A report on the event can be found at:

<http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/artikels/2013/10/04/naar-een-rechtvaardige-vrede-in-israel-palestina-eist-petitie-soemoed-vlaanderen>

We continue of course to critically follow the situation on the spot; we shall obviously plan other actions or give support to existing ones. In that context we are working hard to prevent the European Union from giving in to Israeli pressure to reverse the measures taken in connection with the labelling of Israeli products originating from the settlements as well as the decision to stop any financial aid to Israeli institutions in the occupied Palestinian territories. The European Union should instead exert more pressure on Israel to stop the settlement policy and the blockade of Gaza, in order to end the occupation and to start a true peace process.

We shall also continue to provide information to associations and groups.

We are hoping that you will use your commitment as a politician to end the occupation of Palestine and the deprivation of the Palestinians' fundamental rights by Israel. Respecting humanitarian and international justice is a prerequisite for a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

Yours faithfully

Soemoed Vlaanderen:

Ella Bormans, Frans Swartelé, Marcel De Prins, Leni Creuwels

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Soemoed-Flanders
Towards a just peace in Israel and Palestine
No peace without international pressure
Petition to Van Rompuy and Reynders.
Political memorandum: Political reactions and evaluation

Summary

Marcel De Prins 12 09 201

From travel experience to political action

In December 2012 the Kinderrechtenhuis Alken, Amnesty International Hasselt, Broederlijk Delen, Hannah Herent, Jeugd en Vrede and Pax Christi Flanders drew up a petition demanding Herman Van Rompuy as chairman of the Council of Europe and the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Didier Reynders, to help restart the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

At the beginning of March 2013 the group adopted the name 'Soemoed Flanders' because they were inspired by the book written by Toine van Teffelen and Victoria Biggs: *Soemoed. The soul of the Palestinian people. Fortitude and resilience of non-violent resistance.*

The group have written to the Belgian members of the European Parliament and to all members of the contact commission Palestine-Israel. A hearing with the Belgian members of Parliament was attempted. There were contacts with minister Joëlle Milquet following the visit of Ismael Khateeb in Limburg from 10 to 18 December 2012.

A socio-cultural training programme was made available to schools, institutions, groups that wanted to organize a peace campaign or a consciousness-raising evening. Quite a number of discussion evenings have been organized in Flanders.

Political demands

We call on the European Union to commit more strongly to a durable and just peace.

The basic causes of the conflict and the occupation of the Palestinian territories have to be terminated. International humanitarian rights and human rights must be defended in word and deed.

The European Union received the Nobel Peace Prize 2012 and rightfully so. But this entails obligations. The lack of peace in Israel and Palestine constitutes one of the largest threats to peace in the world and a peaceful relationship between the West and the Arab world. As a result, it takes absolute priority in international politics.

We insist very strongly that the EU plays a more active part in the recently restarted peace negotiations.

What do we propose? What are our specific demands?

The EU and its member states have to take the following steps:

- Exert pressure on Israel to lift the blockade on the Gaza strip in order to facilitate the export and import of raw materials and finished products and to normalize the traffic between the Gaza strip and the West Bank.
- Demand suspension of the recently announced construction of new houses in Israeli settlements on the West Bank and in East-Jerusalem.
- Stop all direct and indirect support of illegal Israeli settlements and take specific measures for this purpose such as demanding the correct labelling of products from the Israeli settlements, excluding the settlements from bilateral agreements and pressure on financial institutions in Europe not to finance illegal activities.
- Increase the support of the Israeli and Palestinian peace-oriented civil society through financial and logistic support of activities with special attention to peace education.

Reactions of politicians

Only three members of the European Parliament on the contact commissions with Israel and Palestine responded to our letters and mails. Two signed the petition. Two Belgian members of the European Parliament agreed to an interview: Mark Demesmaeker (N-VA/EVA) and Bart Staes (Groen). Said El Khadraoui (Spa-S&D) and Ivo Belet (CD&V-EVV) responded extensively by mail.

We have compiled all these answers in an extensive memorandum. Here is a summary of this document.

Summary

All our contacts and reactions show that the European politicians take a unanimous stand on the baleful influence of the Israeli settlement policy on the peace process as an obstacle and a threat to the two-state solution. A new political initiative is needed. The role the EU plays is actually not very important compared to the role of the US. The different parties think that the role of the EU should be strengthened. Europe can and should carry more weight. The political deadlock has to be overcome. How?

There is no unanimity within the EU on how to exert their possible influence as the largest trading partner of Israel.

Spa-S&D and N-VA want to use the association agreement to put a stop to the growth of the Israeli settlements while the CD&V e.g. does not see the point of the suspension of the association agreement between the EU and Israel, does not deem the upgrade advisable for the time being but at the same time finds it necessary for the association agreement and the so-called association council at ministerial level to remain intact. According to Bart Staes (Groen) a debate on a worldwide economic boycott or of economic sanctions with regard to Israel is necessary until a stop is put to the daily violations of the human rights of Palestinian citizens.

NV-A and Groen support the demand for concrete guidelines on the correct labelling of products from Israel and the Israeli settlements in Palestine. There is no support from CD&V according to Ivo Belet. Said El Khadraoui does not answer that question. Within the Belgian government (with CD&V and Spa) something is being done about the implementation of the European (consumer) legislation and the decisions taken.

Groen lends support to the proposition of lifting the Gaza blockade and also Spa judges it positively referring to a resolution of the EP on November 12th 2012. CD&V and NV-A draw attention to the negative role of Hamas and their refusal to recognize the state of Israel within safe borders. CD&V calls on Israel not to block the emergency aid and the humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population in the Gaza strip.

On the support of the peace-oriented civil society, both in Israel and in Palestine, and the importance of peace education, the only positive reply we got came from Groen.

Political evaluation and realization

We notice a growing awakening, not only among politicians but also in public opinion at grass roots. There is increasing sympathy for the Palestinian cause. The permanent occupation of Palestine by Israel and the denial of the human rights of the Palestinians arouses more and more resistance.

Our fundamental demand that the EU should take the initiative to advance peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine remains very relevant, also after the elections in Israel of January 2013.

The new Israeli government carries on with the settlement policies and the peace process does not seem to be a priority. The West Bank is being divided in two and a two-state solution is becoming unfeasible because of the systematic further encircling of Jerusalem with illegal settlements.

The EU has adopted a guideline which states that in future agreements between Israel and the EU from 2014 onwards grants, gifts and other forms of financial help cannot be allocated to Israeli institutions (companies, universities, projects) in the occupied Palestinian territories. The EU suited the action to the words for the very first time. We applaud these measures.

In the meantime the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine were restarted at the end of July. John Kerry, the US Minister of Foreign Affairs, has managed to bring the parties back together. We are glad about this new start and hope that, despite the considerable differences and threatening storm clouds, these consultations will mean concrete steps on the difficult road to just and durable peace. Here is an opportunity for Europe to take up a more effectual and consistent position. Peace is impossible without international pressure. European politicians should realize that ever larger sections of the European population, belonging to all different ideologies, humanists as well as Christians, Islamites and nonbelievers, expect and desire this.

This political process has to be given strong support through further consciousness-raising in all sections of society.

Where to find the petition and the background information

The online version of the petition (link to sign the petition)

Dutch	http://bit.ly/petitie2012
French	http://bit.ly/petition2012_fr
English	http://bit.ly/petition2012_en

The pdf version of the petition

Dutch / also signatures form	http://www.hannah.be/petitie.pdf
French	http://www.hannah.be/petitie_fr.pdf
English	http://www.hannah.be/petitie_en.pdf

The pdf version of the background information

Dutch	http://www.hannah.be/petitie2012.pdf
Frans	http://www.hannah.be/petitie2012_fr.pdf
Engels	http://www.hannah.be/petitie2012_en.pdf

Number of signatures on 11 September 2013

Written petition: 1189

Dutch website: 787

French website: 24

English website: 4

Total: 2004

Members of the group

Frans Swartelé and temporarily Libert Verjans, for vzw Kinderrechtenhuis Alken;
Ella Bormans, for Amnesty International Hasselt;
Leni Creuwels and Jan Engelen, for vzw Hannah Harent;
Marcel De Prins, for working party Israel-Palestine Broederlijk Delen and Pax Christi Flanders.

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