

The European Union's Policy Towards the Islamic Resistance Movement " Hamas "

Avrupa Birliği'nin İslami Direniş Hareketi " Hamas " Politikası

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ABSTRACT This academically oriented and analytical study is a historical description of the European Union's stance vis-à-vis Hamas, especially after the latter's victory in the Palestinian election in January 2006. After providing a simple introduction that briefly covers the Post-Oslo events happening in 1993, the study analyze the logic of putting the military wing of Hamas (Ezzidin al- Qassam Brigades) on the terrorist list, and the opposition of some major European countries to such step, since it might lead to further radicalization of the moderate elements within Hamas. Although the EU member states were obliged to boycott the Hamas government and its officials because of the movement's failure to renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist, the voices that were growing in different European countries raised concerns over the complete boycott of Hamas' political leadership after its stunning victory in the 2006 Palestinian election and the wide spread of corruption charges during Fatah's rule. Hamas' obvious moderation was remarkably hope-inspiring, especially after the signing of the National Reconciliation Agreement, the Cairo Agreement and the Mecca Agreement. Still, the EU was not able to make any breakthroughs in their stance towards Hamas because of the latter's insistence not to recognize Israel's right to exist in peace and because of the EU's political initiative to leave that role to the US while at the same time concentrate more on supporting the Palestinians economically and at humanitarian level as well.

Keywords: Islamic history; Islamic studies; Hamas, political violence, Fatah faction, democratic election, peace process, political role and economic aids

ÖZ Akademik ve analitik bakış açısıyla yapılan bu çalışma, Avrupa Birliği'nin Hamas karşısında, özellikle de onun Ocak 2006'daki Filistin seçimlerinde elde ettiği zaferin ardından sergilediği duruşun tarihsel bir tasviridir. Bu çalışma 1993'te Hamas'ın askeri kanadını (İzzeddin el-Kassam Tugayları) terörist listesine koymanın mantığını ve bazı büyük Avrupa ülkelerinin, Hamas içerisindeki ılımlı unsurların daha da radikalleşmesine yol açabileceği gerekçesiyle böyle bir adıma muhalefet etmesini incelemektedir. AB üye devletleri, hareketin şiddetten vazgeçmemesi ve İsrail'in var olma hakkını tanımaması nedeniyle Hamas hükümetini ve yetkililerini boykot etmek zorunda kalsa da, 2006 Filistin seçimlerindeki çarpıcı zaferinden ve El Fetih döneminde yolsuzluk suçlamalarının yaygınlaşmasından sonra farklı Avrupa ülkelerinde büyüyen sesler Hamas'ın siyasi liderliğinin tamamen boykot edilmesi konusunda endişelere yol açtı. Hamas'ın bilhassa Ulusal Uzlaşma Anlaşması, Kahire Anlaşması ve Mekke Anlaşması'nın imzalanmasından sonra sergilediği bariz ılımlılık dikkate değer ölçüde umut vericiydi. Buna rağmen AB, Hamas'ın İsrail'in barış içinde yaşama hakkını tanımama konusundaki ısrarı ve kendisinin bu rolü ABD'ye bırakma yönündeki siyasi girişimi sebebiyle Filistinlileri ekonomik ve ilaveten insani düzeyde destekleme konusunda Hamas'a karşı duruşunda herhangi bir ilerleme kaydedemedi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam tarihi; İslam araştırmaları; Hamas, siyasi şiddet, el-Fetih grubu, demokratik seçim, barış süreci, siyasi rol ve ekonomik yardımlar

To start with, achieving a comprehensive lasting peace in the region of the Middle East is the most crucially important element for Europe. The Middle East itself is a region with which Europe has had long-standing political, historical, cultural and commercial ties. As a result, the region's stability and security are essential to maintain those of Europe. This is why the EU and its member states are strongly involved in the affairs of the Middle East and are fully committed to the peace process for different political reasons and strategic considerations. The EU contributes to all of the aspects related to the implementation of the Road Map initiative as articulated by Bush administration in the year 2002 which calls for a two-state solution that might lead to a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EU's principal stance stresses that Israel should live in peace within the internationally-recognized borders, accepted by all its neighbors and free from all kinds of threats to its security.

In a like manner, the European Union holds a view that this can only be achieved by creating a free viable sovereign and democratic secular Palestinian state that is capable of providing security to its inhabitants while peacefully living side by side with Israel. The EU is strongly active despite its participation in the Quartet's (E.U, U.S, U.N and Russian Federations) meetings and regular proceedings. Furthermore, the European Union actively promotes economic, social and political reforms of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to make it much stronger at the institutional level. The EU member states are also active in promoting good and transparent governance by adopting the following steps: pursuing judicial and security sector reforms, undertaking confidence-building measures that cover the monitoring of the proper implementation of the Israeli/ Palestinian agreement on the operation of the Rafah Border Crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, and providing capacity-building assistance to the Palestinian cadres working at the crossing check points. The European Commission has also organized and directed trilateral policy dialogues (Commission/Israel/PA) on issues transport, energy and trade to promote and strengthen non- political contacts.

Hamas has traditionally suggested that peace must be achieved through a long-term truce (hudna) between Israel and the future Palestinian state. Although Hamas does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel, it has suggested that it could accept the reality of Israel as a practical matter and live peacefully by its side as long as it withdraws from the 1967 borders. The most generous presentation of this proposal suggested that the truce could last for a considerable period, leaving it to future generations to work out an alternative option. After the 2006 election, Hamas passed the negotiations with Israel to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). However, they began to float the idea that even though they would no longer negotiate with Israel, they would participate in the PLO bodies that would carry on such negotiations.

After the signing of Oslo Agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel in 1993, Hamas relied on a dual strategy. The first part of the said strategy was the stiff opposition of Oslo Agreement because it was signed at a time when the global and regional balance of powers was tilting in favor of Israel. The second part focused on deepening the idea of Islamization of the Palestinian society by widening the scope of the legal and religious doctrines prevailing across all classes, including the intelligentsia, the middle class and the lower class. In 1988, Hamas issued its general convent which contained statements and phrases that indicate Hamas' willingness to establish a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. There were also other statements and paragraphs that implicitly defended the idea of a democratic Palestinian state whose constitutions must combine the Islamic Shura and the western notion of basic liberties and political pluralism in more harmonious way.

Hamas renewed its role in the Palestinian politics upon the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit held in Washington D.C between Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehod Barak under the auspices of President Clinton. This coincided with the eruption of the Second Intifada which in turn changed the overall Palestinian-Israeli equation and relationship. In the middle of this bloody and hot-burning atmosphere, Hamas actively participated in the daily and routine activities of the Uprising. Hamas executed hundreds of military operations against the Israeli army and the settlers, including suicide bombings in the heart of Israeli cities. Despite Hamas' ability to strike against the Israelis in various sites and locations, Israel succeeded at the end of this fierce fight in assassinating a couple of prominent Palestinian figures and leaders, including Yasser Arafat (Fatah), Sheikh Ahmad Yasin (Hamas) and Abu Ali Mustafa (Popular Front), which created a huge gap in the Palestinian political life with wide implications for the political system in general.

Hamas' pragmatic thoughts were crystallized on real ground by their move to be a part of the Palestinian political system. In fact, they took the first step to activate their participation in the Palestinian domestic scenario and power game. After five years of military confrontation with the Israelis, Hamas finally realized that it had sacrificed hundreds of its activists. They also realized that military conducts are enough to liberate the land and achieve the desired political goals. Consequently, Hamas began to balance military works against political moves to eventually reap some fruitful results. The new orientation in Hamas' mentality was finally noticed through their approval to cast and compete for the local municipal election and at a later stage their participation in the legislative council election in January 2006, which brought Hamas to the Palestinian Legislative Council after winning the overwhelming majority.

Writing about this topic is crucially significant at this juncture for the following reasons:

1- To see how much a political Islamic movement such as Hamas could be politically and ideologically changed if it becomes a part of the Palestinian political system.

2- To review the role of the external factors in increasing the space of moderation or radicalization of Hamas as an Islamic movement.

3- To spot various statements issued by EU officials and politicians and the justifications behind such statements; and to see how much change actually exists in the EU positions towards Hamas and the future horizons for such positions.

4- To analyze Hamas' reaction towards the EU moves as well as other external stands and positions adopted to isolate it and to see the impact of these moves on the relations amongst radicals and moderates inside Hamas itself.

■ EU, HAMAS AND TERRORISM

The EU blacklisted Hamas' military wing, the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades in 2002. However, some EU member states notably France and Germany opposed that step, urging that it could be counterproductive to the Middle East peace process with regard strategic and political terms. In September 2003, the EU put the political wing on its list of terrorist organizations after Hamas' success in carrying out many military operations in Israel, including civilian targets. This meant that Hamas was named as a completely terrorist organization due to its Islamic ideology and the American and Israeli pressures on

the EU member states. This came after Hamas had claimed responsibility for two suicide attacks in Israel in the second half of August. Those attacks led to the killing of fifteen people in order to avenge the attempted Israeli assassination of a senior Hamas leader. The Spokesperson for EU Foreign Policy Cristina Gallach said, "This is an unequivocal message from the EU that terrorism will achieve nothing in the Middle East... what has happened since August, when Hamas broke seven weeks of ceasefire, was absolutely unacceptable, ... Hamas leaders know if they reverse their position, renounce violence and enter the political system and political game, they can come off the list."¹

The EU could not see Hamas as part of the Palestinian national movement that resisting long colonial occupation over the earth. It is a matter of putting more pressures on Hamas leadership to concede to the blackmails and surrender their declared political objectives and political program. Having two hands, one in the military conduct and the other in diplomatic and political sphere puts Hamas under the pressure of give and take strategy. The EU officials and strategists consider this is as good opportunity to tame Hamas leadership and contain their political aspirations and political goals by offering them a sort of bargaining between renouncing violence on one hand and recognizing the movement by the EU on the other hand.

The official stance of the EU towards Hamas held that no political dialogue will be carried out with Hamas as long as their leaders and activists do not denounce all acts of violence and explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist in peace and security.

Such statements by senior politicians in E.U. member states have accompanied widespread lobbying by former E.U. officials to engage Hamas. Alistair Crooke, an ex-MI6 officer who acted as the E.U.'s liaison with Islamist groups in the West Bank and Gaza from 1997 through 2003, has publicly called for discussions with Hamas.²

HAMAS' EXPERIENCE IN THE ELECTION

After Hamas won electoral control over many towns in Gaza and the West Bank in the local municipal and village election in 2005, three senior Hamas members said that their group had been talking to the EU diplomats regularly. The EU officials denied that contact in return, but acknowledged that meetings with Hamas may be inevitable now after its distinguished victory in the local election. Both the U.S and the EU labeled Hamas as a terrorist group. However, winning the local election had pushed the EU to figure out a way on how to handle and manage the current aid projects in the towns and villages run by the Hamas-backed mayors. The EU faced a new situation in the occupied territories, and they had to decide what to do about their connections with the Hamas-backed mayors in towns where Europe had current aid projects, especially humanitarian funds dedicated for food and employment. Some diplomats in the EU argued that talking to Hamas moderate leaders could help curb their extremist tendencies and could help contain the radical fundamentalist movements and groups that had spread over the Middle East; others said that these ties will only prop up violent hard-liners by conveying wrong messages and signals.

Pragmatism is defined, within the context of this research, as the systematic and realistic political paradigm that creates a balanced relationship between capabilities and objectives. Given the scope and

¹ http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/hi/worlds/middle_east/3100518.stm

² <https://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/2007/08/31/why-the-european-union-finally-sidelined-hamas>

nature of these objectives, it is logical they must not jump over the actual capabilities that the other political player possesses. When it comes to Hamas' way of playing the game of politics, the movement itself has finally realized that taking part in the political bargaining is unavoidable due to the overall conditions of the Palestinian people and the limited options available before the Palestinian decision-makers in the view of the global and regional distribution of powers and due to political realities on the ground.

Hamas cleverly utilized a group of factors and reasons in its electoral battle fought in January 2005. The Movement benefited from its wide scale charity and voluntary works and activities run by its members and activists. Hamas's success in the local and municipal election that took place in 2004-2005 acted as an impetus and incentive for the movement to fight in the legislative election in 2006. This reason behind this was that such success had clearly reflected Hamas's solid grassroots support. From the very first day of their massive success in the election, Hamas invited other political forces, including the arch-rival Fatah to form a coalition government. This was a main indicator and criterion of their political realism and pragmatic model of thoughts. This invitation was open for all political forces, including the leftists, the socialists and the independents. This coalition (National Unity Government), which was led by Hamas, came at the expense of the movement's ideological and religious slogans that had long been propagated to serve the national interests of all Palestinians. In Hamas' perception, the nationalists and leftists could act as common platforms and bridges that can be used to enter the international politics, especially those of the western countries that have some reservations about the entry of political Islam in the power game practiced in the Arab and Islamic countries. There is huge debate about this tricky issues.

In their meetings with Hamas mayors, EU diplomats discussed both municipal and other wider political issues, including the issue of cease-fire with Israel which was in effect at that time. Mushir Al-Masri said, "The EU officials and statesmen spoke frankly of the need for Hamas to disarm and renounce violence, but we responded by saying that the Israeli occupation would have to end first. In every meeting, we affirmed that ending the role of Hamas' armed wing is linked to the end of the Zionist occupation of the Palestinian lands, and we will affirm this stand in all future meetings."

Senior Hamas representative in the West Bank Mohammad Ghazal said that Hamas was on contact with the EU diplomats, and that the meetings grew into being more frequent following Hamas' stunning victory in the three rounds of the municipal election in more than a third of the 120 towns in December 2004. "Every ten to fourteen days, we have at least one meeting with a European diplomat." He also said, "Most of the contacts in the West Bank and Gaza were with the lower level EU diplomats. However, higher level contacts between the EU and Hamas were taking place abroad." Mousa Abu Marzouk, Syrian-based Hamas leader and member of its Political Office, said to a Hamas website that members of his group had met with British ex-security officials and other European officials. This is clear quest and new strategy from Hamas leaders to open a channel of communication with the EU officials to gain more international support and legitimacy.

On the other hand, Israel loudly protested the EU's contacts with Hamas. Israel Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mark Regev said "We believe that the Europeans should be strengthening moderate Palestinians, not appeasing the extremists. Anything that demonstrates acceptance of Hamas as a legitimate player is a problem. Hamas is a murderous terrorist movement that has been responsible for

countless acts of suicide attacks against innocent civilians throughout Israel." Israel accused Hamas of standing behind many acts that killed hundreds of Israelis in the hearts of Israeli towns and cities."³ This is a matter of political bargaining and political pressures to end any possibility of military confrontation.

In Brussels, EU official Elena Peresso, said, "The EU was not aware of any contacts and has reached no collective decision on whether to change its policy towards Hamas which was still on the terrorist list." And there is no direct or immediate intention to delist Hamas from terrorism pool.

It must be noted that the European Union is the biggest provider of aid to the Palestinian Authority with donations amounting to 500 million euros in 2005 (\$614.9 million). 280 million of that amount came from the common EU direct budget while the rest came from the member states.⁴

The European Commission is the EU's executive arm that is partially charged with political and security policies. In addition, it administers the union's external assistance programs but has limited influence on the goals and decisions of the EU foreign policy. The Palestinian Delegate-General to the EU Leila Shahid, told Belgian radio on January 26th, 2006 that the EU should apply the same conditionality in its relations with the Palestinian Authority as it has done to other Mediterranean partners, and it should hold Israel to account by the same standards, indicating the harmfulness of adopting double standards in dealing with the two conflicting parties.⁵ This is clear and visible indication that the Palestinian officials wish to see more active political role in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The EU could balance the US alignment with and bias to Israel and its unquestioned support to the Israeli occupation.

It is important to mention that that the Palestinian economy and standards of living depend heavily on extensive international assistance programs and humanitarian aids rendered by the donors, particularly American and the European ones. This assistance comes in three forms: direct budgetary support for the Palestinian Authority, extensive development programs in different areas, ranging from water to legal education and judiciary, and humanitarian assistance (much channeled through the United Nations Relief and Working Agency). The first form was put under a major threat because of Hamas' victory. Hamas started searching for other foreign contributors, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, Iran and even Russia to compensate for any cutoff of the western donor funds. However, Hamas could not rely on these funds and even came across some obstacles in the process due to the constraints imposed by the western banks and financial institutions on channeling money to the Hamas-led PA.

JAN 2006: NEW ERA IN THE PALESTINIAN POLITICS

Hamas drastically changed some of its religious, ideological and political justifications on the basis upon which it rejected the participation in the 1996 election. During Al-Aqsa uprising, Hamas leaders began to realize that the military wing of the movement (Ezzidin Al-Qassam Brigade) had scarified dozens of their supporters and activists in their battle against the Israelis and that military endeavors should be paralleled with active political means. Hamas clearly had the ability to create a vision through which it

³ www.usatoday.com/news/world/2005-06-16-mideast_x.htm

⁴ <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/aspx/print.htm>

⁵ www.ejpress.org/article/org

can balance between military resistance and political means in such a fashion that would guarantee the continuity of dialogue with masses in two languages: the language of resistance and the language of ballot boxes. Notably, both of them need a large-scale mass support.

The forces of political Islam characterized by moderation and flexibility in their broader slogans, including Hamas, began to read the global and regional political maps more or less rationally that they transformed their socio-economic charities and voluntary works into a real political investment. Notably, Hamas' participation in the 2006 election was a wise step towards the democratizing of the political system and the institutionalizing of the politico-administrative apparatus. In order to succeed, Hamas was required to maintain a balance between two dimensions: the ideological/ religious and the political/ pragmatic in order to stay within the boundaries of the political game.

With regard to Fatah, main political force that dominated the political scene in the Palestinian territories since 1965, it tried to manage the crisis with the Israelis as an occupying power by inventing some political strategies and military tactics. However, it seems that Fatah tremendously lost after the death of its founder Yasser Arafat whose pragmatic and charismatic personality played a role in keeping Fatah together and in overcoming the conflict between the old-fashioned leaders and the new generation within Fatah.

Prior to the elections, precisely in December 2005, EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Office Javier Solana, threatened to freeze the European aid sent to the Palestinians. On Jan 26, 2006, Solana welcomed the fact that "the Palestinian people have voted democratically and peacefully" and noted that the European Union "has supported the smooth running of the election." The view of this European official is justified according to the European public opinion which is vigilantly watching the stands and policies adopted by the EU in supporting the democratic elections in Palestine and other parts of the world. Sometimes we feel contradictory positions adopted by the EU officials on one hand by supporting democratic election in Palestine and the same time asking Hamas to relinquish its current posture of confronting Israel.

The (EU) was particularly shocked by the January victory of Hamas in the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Middle East peace process has been a key part of the EU's collective foreign policy strategy, putting the EU on an equal footing with the United States in the so-called Quartet, along with the United Nations and Russia. The key to this policy was a two-state solution. Hamas's rejection of that vision, repeated after the results were announced, jeopardizes years of careful and persistent diplomacy. The EU realizes, however, that having Hamas in power is different from having Hamas with a significant but minority representation in government. The overall initial effect of the Hamas victory, viewed from Europe, is that it represents a significant development with potentially huge and largely unpredictable consequences. Such challenges are difficult for the EU to deal with as an institution.⁶

On Jan 26, 2006, (first day following the election) the European External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner declared that the European Commission "would work with any elected government that used peaceful means."⁷

⁶ Simon Henderson, "European Policy Options toward a Hamas-Led Palestinian Authority", *Hamas Triumphant*, (ed. Robert Satloff), The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Press, Washington 2006, pp. 52-55.

⁷ Ibid.

Javier Solana expressed his opinions and views during an interview with a French journalist. "It is obviously unacceptable to legitimize a terrorist organization only because it has won the election." The press-secretary of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "Our ally is not Hamas, but is President Mahmoud Abbas." It seems that the EU apparently has contradictory stand on balancing Fatah against Hamas when it comes to the notion of peace and reconciliation with Israel.

On Jan 31, 2006, the Russian President Vladimir Putin commented on Hamas' success in the election, "It is a harsh, strong blow to the American efforts in the Middle East." He added, "Our stance towards Hamas differs from the American or West-European ones."⁸ He criticized the western policy towards the Palestinian people and said, "The refusal to assist the Palestinian people, in any case, is erroneous because the west is supposed to respect the free will of people all over the world."⁹

On Jan 27, 2006, EU Ambassador in Israel Ramiro Cibrian Uzal said, "The EU would continue to cooperate with any PA government committed to solving the conflict through peaceful means with a respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of laws as laid out in the two agreements that the PA had already signed with the EU: the Association Agreement and the Action Plan, indicating that the EU would not tolerate any act of terrorism or violence, for such acts would be politically counterproductive."¹⁰ This is an implicit move to decide exactly the track not only at political settlement level but also the ways and the means of resistance and confrontation.

On the other hand, Hamas said that it will not formally recognize Israel on both political and religious grounds. Instead, Hamas leaders offered a long-term truce with Israel in return for a viable Palestinian state in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital after allowing the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. It must be noted that Hamas is a movement that prides itself for its principles and is unlikely to abandon them easily, particularly the ideological components of its convent. As a result, any change in the movement's position is more likely to be slow and gradual. Such change would require a substantial amount of time before it could be sensed due to political, ideological and religious hindrances that govern Hamas. Nathan Brown wrote, "The United States and Europe's demand of Hamas' recognition of Israel can be converted into several different workable formulas some of which Hamas leaders had hinted -admittedly yet vaguely- at their potential acceptance. For instance, Hamas might allow President Mahmoud Abbas to negotiate as he pleases whenever he wants as long as any resulting agreements or treaties with the Israeli side are subject to a referendum submitted by the Palestinians. Even more, it might allow the PLO to bargain with Israel on the condition that any final agreements must be approved by the body that oversees the PLO - the Palestinian National Council which is considered as the legislative wing. Hamas might also be pressured to recognize the Arab League declarations which clearly endorse a two-state solution. Such formulas would allow Hamas to hold on to its position while still bowing to political realities and conflicting parameters."¹¹

The notion of a truce is an old one, perhaps as old as the Hamas movement itself. However, it has recently become a practical case study in literature, documents and statements adopted by Hamas. This notion has become high on Hamas' agenda since a very long time in the hope of managing and

⁸ <http://www.axisglobe.com/article.asp?article=636>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tovah Lazaroff, "Hamas must recognize Israel", *Jerusalem Post*, 27/1/2007.

¹¹ Nathan J. Brown, "Aftermath of the Hamas Tsunami", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2006, p.8.

regulating their relations with Israel as an occupying power. The awaited true can bring Hamas a period of peace to relieve the tired Palestinians from the continuous clashes with the Israeli army and Jewish settlers and to get rid of the domestic violence that had swept the Palestinian life away. The truce could also enhance the status of the Palestinian issue at the regional and global levels. Furthermore, it represents a new bargaining chip in the hands of the Palestinian decision-makers and negotiators for maneuvering the Israeli side.

The concept of truce in a theoretical and hypothetical sense was raised and defended by the Hamas movement fifteen years ago.¹² As a practical study, however, it was established in 2003. The thing that helped and encouraged Hamas to adopt the idea of a truce was the pressure exerted by the Palestinian public opinion that was thirsty for security, peace and safety after three years of bloody clashes with the Israelis. In a survey for public opinion conducted by the General Information Agency on Jul 3-6, 2003, the results showed that 68.8% of the selected sample were satisfied with the decision calling for a truce if adopted by all Palestinian parties and factions. 56.8% of the participants answered positively with the belief that a truce would serve the public national interest and 67.8% believed that the Palestinians need this truce at least for the time being.

Hamas leaders and activists made some remarks and statements regarding the truce in a few occasions here and there, but this conceptual new scheme gained momentum shortly after Hamas' victory in the 2006 election. Being a political enterprise, this truce was attributed to Ismael Haneyeh's political counselor Ahmad Yousef who formulated the final draft with the Europeans. Despite his denial of such news and his unwillingness to frankly comment on the issue, Ahmad Yousef did not deny that the truce would really fit Hamas' perspective in managing their relations with Israel and would give rise to creating new horizons in Hamas's relations with other international powers and forces. This proposed political tool along with the support of previous agreements starting from the Cairo Agreement and the National Reconciliation including also the Mecca Agreement would consolidate Hamas's policies and perspectives with some aid from national consensus as well. In that way, a truce is not only a new linguistic formulation for the relationship with Israel, but also a way to expand the ceiling of the Palestinian objectives which temporarily became Hamas' too as well.

Hamas's point of view regarding the truce was based on the notion of solving the Palestinian question in two stages: the first involves taking primarily urgent and quick steps by Israel to withdraw from the 1967 occupied territories. During this stage, Hamas would make efforts to normalize the relations with Israel after admitting its moral and ethical responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and showing an actual intention to withdraw from East Jerusalem. The second stage is all about Hamas' stands towards the full liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea with the help of the Arab and Islamic endeavors and capacities. someone consider this as a kind of realistic opportunistic politics supported by pragmatism and ideology at the same time.

In a statement, Solana announced that the EU Council of Foreign Ministers, a forum in which the EU 25 member states set the goals and formulations of the foreign policy, would analyze the result of the election in a meeting in Brussels on Jan 30, 2006. On Jan 26, 2006, he added, "The EU will express its views and prospects for cooperation with the future Palestinian government in the light of that

¹² Khaled Safi, "The Position of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin Towards Truce with the Zionist Entity", *The Imam Ahmad Yassin Conference*, The Islamic University, Gaza, 21-23 March, 2005, pp. 1177-1214.

discussion and developments on the ground". He also announced that the so-called "Quartet" (United States, Russia, European Union and United Nations) would discuss the new situation created on the ground after the Palestinian election during its meeting in London at a later date¹³. New strategic thinking was emerging on the part of the European officials to deal with the outcomes of the Palestinian election through the mechanisms of containing Hamas ambitious political program.

On Jan 27, the Quartet's mediators for peace in the Middle East, following a conference attended by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, U.S. Secretary of the State Condoleezza Rice, Russian Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavarov and EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana, issued a statement demanding Hamas – winner of the Palestinian legislative poll - to renounce violence and terror, accept Israel's right to exist and disarm the military wing. It added that the Quartet had expressed its belief that while lending Hamas a stunning election victory, the Palestinians remain committed to recognizing Israel's statehood and living peacefully by its side." The Quartet hailed the Palestinian Legislative Council election as "free, fair and secure". It required all the parties to "respect the result of the election and the outcome of the Palestinian constitutional process so that it could unfold in an atmosphere of calmness and security characterized by clear implications for the peace process."¹⁴ The United States and Israel used this international platform (Quartet) to lay pressures on Hamas to accept Israel's right to exist in peace and security and at the same time lowering the ceiling of its political demands and political tactics.

The Quartet's Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East envisioned a two-state solution, namely an independent and sovereign Palestinian state living side by side with the secure Israel. In addition, the Quartet demanded Hamas to eschew the use of violence as a means of settling the conflict, to recognize the state of Israel and to respect the agreements signed between Palestine and Israel. On Feb 15, Solana said that Hamas must meet three criteria in order to be an eligible negotiation partner with the EU: "peace, acceptance of the two-state solution, and recognition of Israel."¹⁵

Russian President Vladimir Putin invited Hamas to negotiations in Moscow. Putin told the Kremlin news conference on Jan 31, 2006 that "Russia's stance towards the Middle East differs from that of Europe or America. Russia has never declared Hamas a terrorist organization, but that does not mean that we support and accept everything Hamas has done and all the statements it has made." He described Hamas's victory in the election as "a strong blow" to the American diplomacy in the Middle East. He said that "he believed it is possible that the Hamas leadership can change their attitude after taking control, and the whole world must give them a chance to do that."¹⁶ Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavarov outlined the Russian viewpoint that "Russia does not eliminate contacts with Hamas." Meanwhile, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that Russia had not decided yet whether it would continue to supply the Palestinians with military equipment if Hamas did not give up to international pressures. He also added that Russia was going to evaluate all of the available options and assess different policy goals and objectives.¹⁷ This is more of realistic posture by the Russians not only to expand their role in the Middle East peace process but also to utilize any chance or any event or action to weaken American influence in the broader Middle East.

¹³ Yossi Lempkowicz, "Hamas Victory: EU discuss 'new situation'", www.ejpress.org/article5441

¹⁴ http://english.people.com.cn/200601/27/print20060127_238893.htm

¹⁵ <http://ejpress.org/printversion.aspx?id=5863>

¹⁶ <http://ejpress.org/printversion.aspx?id=5578>

¹⁷ Ibid.

On Feb 15, he said that he had no problem with Russia's decisions to invite Hamas to Moscow for talks and views-exchange. Although many international leaders condemned Putin's actions and suspected his moves and intentions. French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin stressed his support for the initiative. He said, "During the meeting, I hope that Hamas will be capable of calibrating its responsibility and understanding the chance to advance along the road of recognizing the UN's resolution on the coexistence of the Israeli and Palestinian states. I believe that the international community should take into account the democratic option taken by the Palestinian people and try as soon as possible to accept the logic of a peaceful dialogue with Hamas because this might contribute to making it more moderate."¹⁸ French model here gives lessons to others by providing space to Hamas and bring it into game to strengthen the moderate leaders in the face of the hardliners and the military leaders in the movement.

On Feb 27, 2006, European External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner declared that the EU had announced a very substantial package of assistance to meet the basic needs of the ordinary Palestinians. The aid packages would amount to 120 million Euros, including 40 million Euros dedicated directly to electricity bills in the utilities concerned. Another 64 million Euros would be dedicated to health and education. They would also provide money in order to pay the Palestinian government salaries which would be channeled through the United Nations Relief and Working Agency for the Palestinian refugees (UNWRA). This aid would be released prior to the formation of the new Hamas-led Palestinian government. As a matter of fact, France had always refused the idea of a complete isolation of the Hamas government since it is a Palestinian choice eventually. It would be very strange and illogical on the part of the French government to isolate an elected government while including democratization as a major objective in its foreign policy formulations and policy orientations.

The EU's aim from this package as Ferrero-Waldner put it was to support the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his attempts to convince Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel and to support the moderate elements within Hamas.¹⁹ On the other hand, Mousa Abu-Marzouk, Syrian-based Hamas leader, welcomed the European Union's decision and described it as a "good step in the right direction." In addition, he called Europe to deal with the Palestinian people in a civilized democratic way and to respect the outcome of the last Palestinian election.²⁰

It must be mentioned that Israel had withheld the monthly tax revenues from the Palestinians whom it collects on behalf of. These revenues amount to 60 million dollars per month. Even more, the US had officially cut off funding from the Palestinian Authority and began financing the organizations of the Palestinian civil society instead.

THE POSITION OF THE CABINET OF HAMAS

As of April 2006, the cabinet of Hamas took up its duties and began functioning as a government of the Palestinian Authority. On Apr 5, Hamas government held a meeting in Ramallah and in Gaza city. Using a videoconferencing call, fourteen cabinet ministers from Ramallah were able to communicate with another twelve cabinet ministers from Gaza. Javier Solana said that "he was disappointed with the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

platform presented by the new Palestinian government, but that it might still be changed over time. At that point, the EU still had not considered the government as a viable and reliable partner that could spread peace in the region. We cannot do that until Hamas' views and positions change... everybody must be given a chance to change. We have to give Hamas this opportunity, but we have to be very tough until the minute they change. We have to create the proper conditions." He added that he had not yet received any indications that the PA Prime Minister Ismail Haneyeh had begun carrying out these requirements, but the Union neither does nor should want the Hamas government to fail."²¹ This is the attitude of balancing the acceptance of democratically elected government and supporting peace making and peace building efforts by both the Israelis and the Palestinians at much broader level.

At the same time, Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmoud al-Zahhar sent a conciliatory letter to the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as part of the efforts made to lend a more moderate tone to the new government and to lessen the international opposition to Hamas and the pressures laid on them.²² The EU acted as a watchdog on the Hamas government and its officials to reshape their mentality into accepting Israel's right to exist. By laying these pressures, the EU was trying to teach Hamas a lesson on how to exchange interests within international politics and to prove to the leaders of Hamas that they cannot enjoy good relationships with the EU and the outside world without giving something in return. It gives and take strategy in other word and in other context.

In April 2006, two Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council were invited to attend the meeting of the sub-committee on the Middle East at the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. One of the invited members was the Palestinian Legislative Council Secretary General Mahmoud al-Ramahi who was denied entry to Belgian territory last month while he was on his way to attend the plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. The Euro-Med partnership is part of the European Union, but it is not affiliated to the Council of Europe.²³

At the same time, the European Union joined the United States and other major donors and cut off all aids directed to the Palestinian Authority in an attempt to force Hamas to become "more moderate". This meant that it had to recognize Israel and renounce terrorism. Hamas criticized the EU's cut of funding, saying that they are being punished for "practicing their democratic choice." The Palestinian chairman Mahmoud Abbas said that the Palestinian Authority is being virtually bankrupt, and Hamas is beginning to wake up to the reality of what it means to be politically and economically isolated. The Western donors were hopeful that Hamas would become more moderate. It was pretty obvious that after Hamas' rise to power, their military wing kept a low profile.²⁴ Despite that Javier Solana demanded Israel on Apr 6, 2006 to transfer custom taxes collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, the taxes have been withheld since the Palestine election as some sort of punishment to the Hamas government.

It must be noted that the negotiations stopped in 2000 following the eruption of al-Aqsa Intifada and the later Israeli incursion of the Palestinian towns and cities. In April 2006, Jacques Chirac recognized that the west must find alternative means to support the Palestinian Authority and pay the

²¹ http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/print.php?id_article=434

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/print.php?id_article=434

salaries of the Palestinian public servants because the stagnant Palestinian economy is being badly reflected upon the Palestinian life. After his meeting with the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Paris near the end of April 2006, French President Jacques Chirac said, "The World Bank should set up a fund mechanism to pay the salaries of the Palestinian officials."²⁵ Additionally, the World Bank memo was leaked to the press at the beginning of May right before the Quartet's meeting which pointed that the Palestinian Authority "could soon become bankrupt and ungovernable because of the severe financial crisis." These statements indicate that the West in general and the EU in particular cannot wait until the collapse of the PA since it has become an important part and actor in the Middle East's emerging political regional order.

In New York, the Quartet agreed on a plan on May 9, 2006 to deliver aid to the Palestinian Authority, following European and French requests that emergency aid be granted. In its statements, the Quartet decided that a "temporary international mechanism" could be created to provide aid, on the condition "that is limited in scope and duration, operates with full transparency and accountability, and ensures direct delivery of assistance to the Palestinian People." The goal of this new mechanism was to "distribute aid to the Palestinian people without having to go through the Palestinian government" said Benita Ferrero-Waldner, External Relations Commissioner of the European Union.²⁶ Such assistance would achieve two goals: help the ordinary poor Palestinians so that they do not seek help from the "terrorist groups", and isolate Hamas officials from any financial and monetary help that they can gain.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's appointment as Middle East envoy to the International Quartet (made up of the U.S., E.U., Russia, and the U.N.) will likely to be another short-term policy against European engagement with Hamas. When Blair was British prime minister, his government took the lead inside the E.U., demanding a crackdown on Hamas in 2003 and 2004 on the grounds that it was "literally trying to blow [up] this peace process." On his first visit to the region as envoy in late July, he refused to meet with Hamas officials. Thus, Blair is unlikely to cave in to pressure at home or inside the E.U. on this issue, especially if he feels that it will further erode U.S.-E.U. ties or alienate pro-Western Arab regimes. Not surprisingly, Hamas officials have been quick to deride Blair's "credibility as a mediator."²⁷

The European Union funded a partial payment of salaries to the public servants working at the educational and health sectors through the World Bank because of their vital role for the ordinary Palestinians. Every employee in these two ministries obtained around 1500 Shekels monthly. On May 15, 2006, two representatives of the Hamas party were received at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Norway (UD) by representatives of the Department to explore the horizons of the political settlement in the Middle East and the future of Hamas in politics after winning the legislative council election. The two were invited to Norway by the Palestinian Committee that closely follows up the affairs of the Palestinian refugees all over Europe. The US asked Norway to drop the visit to the UD, even though it was held at a senior official level. The Norwegian Foreign Minister refused the American pressure. He said that it was unwise not to maintain contacts with one side of the conflict even if it was Hamas because in the end, this political Islamic movement is part of the Palestinian political system and

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ <http://www.norwaypost.no/cgi-bin/norwaypost/imaker?id=23728>

politics. It gives us the opportunity to directly convey other views to Hamas and see the views of their leaders on various topics. It is a long tradition in Norway and in the Department of Foreign Affairs to maintain an open-door policy and broad contacts, and to communicate with various organizations and movements. This is a practice that we will continue."²⁸ It must be mentioned that Norway follows the UN which does not list Hamas as a terrorist organization and keeps the door open for any future negotiations.²⁹

In the middle of November 2006, EU ministers discussed a five-point plan first put forward by Spain, France and Italy. The plan had five components: an immediate cease-fire, formation of a Palestinian Unity Government accepted by the international community, an exchange of prisoners including the Israeli soldiers whose kidnapping sparked a 34-day war between Israel and the militant group Hezbollah, talks between Israel's Prime Minister, the Palestinian President and the International Mission in Gaza to monitor the cease-fire. Eventually, the 25 foreign ministers reaffirmed the initiative.³⁰ Norway, being a peace-loving nation, attempted to balance the tough EU's stance towards Hamas. It took the political initiative to meet Hamas leaders with the intention of maintaining regular contacts with them because that would qualify Norway to play a role in the peace process in the Middle East.

POST-MECCA AGREEMENT

Although the European Union welcomed the Palestinian agreement signed between Hamas and Fatah in Mecca on Feb 8, 2007 to establish a National Unity Government, it did not resume the direct aid to the Palestinian Authority. It is important to mention that the two parties in principle agreed to honor the international laws and agreements that the PLO had signed with Israel. After their meeting in Brussels on February 13, 2007, European Foreign Ministers announced that "the EU was ready to work with a legitimate Palestinian government that adopts the platform reflecting the Quartet" including the recognition of Israel and the renounce of all kinds of violence³¹. This is a move to continue the EU financial support to the Palestinians while at the same time putting pressures on Hamas to recognize Israel right to exist.

The EU and the U.S. withheld recognition but left the door open for further ties to see the political program of the government on the ground. Both said that "they would judge the government based on its action and maintain contacts with ministers who are not members of Hamas". The Palestinian Unity Government formed in March 2007 included the secular Fatah movement, representatives from the Islamic Hamas, some other small movements, and independent politicians. It declared its program which contained the acceptance of a two-state solution without clear recognition of Israel and without clearly forcing the previous agreements signed with Israel. Moreover, it included the government's consent to adopt other forms of resistance like public activities. (For further details see the government program).

Norway was the first and only western country that recognized the National Unity Government and resumed both political and economic contact with it. Although Norway is not an EU member state, it has played a major role in the previous Middle East attempts for making peace, especially in the Oslo

²⁸ <https://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/2007/08/31/why-the-european-union-finally-sidelined-hamas>

²⁹ <http://www.norwaypost.no/cgi-bin/norwaypost/imaker?id=23728>

³⁰ <http://www.souria.com/ar/em/hl/article.asp?at=7489>

³¹ http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/print.php?id_article=722

accords in 1993. Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg confirmed that Norway welcomes the formation of the new government. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store said, "The Norwegians also expect the Palestinian government to respect the international norms that apply to the diplomatic agreements, and that the Palestinians must accept Israel's right to exist." Store wanted the new Palestinian government to be given a chance and asked Israel to meet it in a constructive and positive manner. Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johansen met Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haneyeh and other government officials in Gaza on Mar 19, 2007 making Johansen the first high-ranking western official to visit Gaza to meet leaders of Hamas. It is worthy of note that Israel cancelled a meeting with the Norwegian Minister after he had held talks with Haneyeh.³² Norway is being distinguished by drawing new discourse on the Middle East peace process and the relations with Hamas.

Palestinian ministers from the Unity Government, except Hamas ministers, were welcomed in Europe and the USA, especially the Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayyad, Foreign Minister Ziyad Abu Amro and Information Minister Mustafa Barghouti. Both France and Belgium established ties with the new government, and Sweden sent its diplomats to meet with the government officials. On Mar 20, Marc Otte, EU's Representative to the Middle East, met with the Palestinian Foreign Minister Ziyad Abu Amr who is an independent member of the cabinet. At the same time, France, Austria and Belgium announced that they too would only meet the non-Hamas governmental officials.³³ This is partially intended to create a sort of fracture between Hamas and non-Hamas ministers with the aim of blackmailing Hamas to surrender part of its hardline agenda.

AFTER THE HAMAS COUP IN GAZA

In the period from 10-14th June 2007, Hamas was able to seize complete control of the Gaza Strip after defeating Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Security forces -his Fatah Political group. In the middle of this chaotic struggle over control, the German EU Presidency condemned in the strongest possible terms in a statement issued on Jun 15 "the violent seizure of power" by the Hamas militia in the Gaza Strip. On June 14, European Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Louis Michel called for a humanitarian truce in Gaza to allow injured people out and basic assistance like food and medicines in. Ferrero-Waldner stressed that the EU "will not let the Palestinian down in these critical conditions. She said, "The Union would continue supplying and providing humanitarian assistance through the temporary mechanism it had set up to funnel funds in while sidestepping Hamas or through the direct delivery of food, water and medicine to both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."³⁴ EU officials considered that a wide-scale siege on the common Palestinians might ignite mass demonstrations on the part of the Europeans.

On Jun 15, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared a state of emergency in Gaza. Abbas said that Hamas should give up control of the Gaza Strip and take responsibility for its actions before any move towards reconciliation. The situation must go back to what it was ahead of the coup before there can be any chance of normalization of contacts. Moreover, Hamas must recognize its guilt and apologize for its crimes."³⁵

³² http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/2/hi/middle_east/6470669

³³ http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/print.php?id_article=771

³⁴ http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/print.php?id_article=771

³⁵ www.generic/news24v2_print_PopUp_Article/0,8838,2-10-1462_215668,00.html

The United State, along with some European countries considered support for President Abbas in Gaza and in the West Bank where his Fatah-led government remained in control. In the western eyes, Abbas was seen as a moderate responsible leader who can make peace with the Israelis. As of Jun 16, the Palestinians had practically had two effective governments: the Hamas government headed by deposed Prime Minister Ismail Haneyeh in the Gaza Strip and the new cabinet led by Salam Fayyad and PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. In a statement released on June 15, the EU German Presidency issued its "complete support for Abbas, noting that he is regarded as a partner for the Israeli government." It also condemned what it described as a "violent overthrow" in Gaza by the Hamas militias and guerilla fighters.

In their meeting in Luxembourg for the European Council on External Relations on Jun 18, Foreign Ministers announced that the EU would be developing conditions to provide urgent practical and financial assistance including, direct financial support to the government and to the Palestinian civilian police through the resumption of the EUPOLCOPPS, resume of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Rafah, make intensive efforts to build the institutions of the future Palestinian State and continue the reformation process of all civil and security institutions. From that moment, Gaza's main crossings in the north and south have been closed to everything except for humanitarian supplies.³⁶ Continuation of the European financial and political support is crucial to keep the Palestinian authority on its feet through genuine process of democratization and institutionalization in the future Palestinian political system.

After a meeting held between Putin and Abbas on Jul 31, 2007 in Moscow, the Russian President confirmed Moscow's support for the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas by saying, "I want to assure you that we will support you as the lawful leader of the Palestinian people." Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov said after the meeting that "Moscow had recently downgraded its contacts with Hamas, but would keep ties to foster the Palestinian dialogue... there were no meetings planned between Hamas representatives and the Russian government, and that Moscow was speaking with the Hamas leadership in Syria, not in the Gaza Strip."³⁷

On Aug 1, 2007, Norway suddenly informed Israel that it had visibly cut its contacts with Hamas due to American, Israeli and probably European pressures. In 2006, Minister of the Refugee Affairs in the Hamas government Atif Odwan was allowed entry to Norway where he held meetings with the Palestinian and Arab associations.

On Aug 10, 2007, Roy Dikinston Chief of the Operation Department in the European Commission, visited the Palestinian Authority Territories and confirmed the EU's obligations to support the new Palestinian government in Ramallah. He also made a visit to Hebron to check up on the three projects funded by the European Union.³⁸

Crooke is now joined by Lord Christopher Patten, former E.U. Commissioner for External Relations, who, in March 2007, criticized Europe's policy of boycotting the Hamas government. Patten's view is endorsed by much of the European media, in the E.U. parliament, and in Westminster, where 39 British members of parliament signed a motion calling for engagement with Hamas early this summer.

³⁶ http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/print.php?id_article=865

³⁷ www.generic/news24v2_print_PopUp_Article/0,8838,2-10-1462_215668,00.htm

³⁸ Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, No. 4239, 11/8/2007, p.3

Their demand gained support after Hamas claimed credit for the July release of BBC Gaza correspondent Alan Johnston, who was kidnapped and held by Gaza's Daghmush clan for more than three months.³⁹

On Aug 15, 2007, the EU stopped paying for the daily fuel shipments transported to Gaza from a private Israeli company (Dor Alon Energy), causing widespread blackouts and a miserable humanitarian chaos in the Gaza Strip. The EU cut off the aid funding upon suspicions that the Hamas leaders and official ruling in the Gaza Strip were pocketing electricity revenues to fund their government's agenda and programs in Gaza. It must be noted that the EU Executive pays for 25-30% of the overall electricity supply to the Gaza Strip (\$ 8.75 million per month). EU Spokesperson Antonia Mochan said, " We have received information that Hamas is planning to introduce taxes on electricity bills, and this will not allow us to continue paying for the fuel... we need to make sure our aid is exclusive for the benefit of the population... we are ready to resume payment within hours once we have assurances that these taxes will not be introduced."⁴⁰

The EU resumed funding on Aug 22 after it had received assurances that revenues from selling the fuel would not be diverted to Hamas. The crisis was solved through negotiations between the Europeans and the Palestinian Government in the West Bank and after Hamas leader Ismail Haneyeh vowed that his organization would "accept any conclusions reached by an independent investigation of the issue by an external committee."⁴¹

Jimmy Carter (the US president from 1977 to 1981, and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2002) criticized the US and EU policy towards Palestinians. He said during his speech to Ireland's Eighth Annual Forum on Human Rights on Jun 19, 2007 that "the American-Israeli-European consensus to reopen direct aid to the new government in the West Bank, but to deny the same aid to Hamas represented an effort to divide the Palestinians into two peoples... this effort is a step in the wrong direction. All efforts of the international community must be to reconcile the two, yet there is no effort whatsoever to bring the two together."⁴² Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said that Hamas' existence was a fact, and the group must be integrated into the political process rather than excluded. On Aug 14, 2007, the Spokesman for Hamas Sami Abu Zuhri said, "We received Mr. Prodi's statements with care and appreciation. His words coincide with other positive European officials' statements. We hope that the calls to launch a dialogue with Hamas would find an echo and would lead to fruitful results. We reiterate our willingness and readiness for an open dialogue with the West."⁴³

However, since Hamas forcibly took over the Gaza Strip in July 2007, there has been a rising chorus of voices calling on Europe to talk with Hamas. In fact, the French Foreign Ministry even established "unofficial" contacts when it dispatched a retired senior diplomat to Gaza to impress on Hamas leaders what was necessary for official relations to begin.⁴⁴

On Aug 13, the British Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee called London to consider direct contacts with Hamas. The report, published by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee,

³⁹ <https://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/2007/08/31/why-the-european-union-finally-sidelined-hamas>

⁴⁰ <http://haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=895874>

⁴¹ <http://haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=895874>

⁴² <http://www.iht.com/bin/print.php?id=6207946>

⁴³ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-08/14/content_6526530.htm

⁴⁴ Mark Heller, "Should the European Union talk to Hama", *Transatlantic Institute* 2008, pp.1.

criticized Britain's role in the international boycott of Hamas, saying it had contributed to the collapse of the Unity Government in the Palestinian territories. Its report concluded that "the boycott of the extremist Hamas was counterproductive. Britain should make an effort to form a new Unity Palestinian Government in the West Bank and Gaza."⁴⁵

The report also concluded that "given the failure of the boycott to deliver any results, we recommend that the government must urgently consider ways to politically engage with the moderate elements within Hamas. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair must personally engage with Hamas to facilitate the reconciliation with its rival Fatah movement, given his new role as an envoy for the Quartet of the Middle East mediators."⁴⁶

On Aug 12, Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said to a conference in central Italy, "There is a need for dialogue with Hamas to help the Palestinian resistance group develop politically. Hamas exists. It is a complex structure that we should help to evolve, but this should be done with transparency. One must push for dialogue so that it happens without shutting anyone out." Prodi's Spokesperson Silvio Sircana told Reuters, "You cannot close any possibility of dialogue with Hamas because one must try to bring it along to a more moderation position."⁴⁷

Israeli opinion that EU decision to talk with Hamas is likely to produce little in terms of transforming the movement and could well have negative consequences. Europe would be better advised to remain committed to the Quartet position.⁴⁸

Israeli Foreign Minister Livni Tzipi remarked that "dialogue with terrorist organizations will pull the rug out from under the feet of moderates and block any chance of reaching a real agreement with the Palestinians." On the other hand, the deposed government in Gaza welcomed Prodi's declarations. On Aug 14, 2007, Spokesperson of Hamas Sami Abu Zuhri affirmed the steadfastness of the movement in its readiness to open negotiations with the western leaders. He expressed his interests in the recent statements made by the Italian Prime Minister who urged the western states to enter into dialogue with Hamas. Abu Zuhri issued a statement declaring that the recent European pronouncements reveal the West's realization of the mistakes they have made in their dealings with Hamas.⁴⁹

On Sep. 6, 2007, The EU Commission declared that the monthly assistance (21 million Euros) according to the temporary international mechanism would be integrated with the monthly salaries of the Palestinian government, not separated as before. It added that the EU had introduced 326 million Euros through the temporary international mechanism as of June 2006. On Sep 4, 2007, Solana said that the EU would not leave the Palestinian people caught in the Gaza Strip to starve. He added that the EU had given the Hamas-run Gaza Strip 70 million dollars in cash, in addition to food and fuel supply, thus effectively helping 600,000 Palestinians.⁵⁰

In a statement issued by his office on Sep 28, 2007, Haneyeh said that his government was willing to hold direct talks with France and other European Countries. He added that "he believes in the importance of maintaining strong and solid relations with international countries in order to achieve

⁴⁵ <http://www.haartz.com/hasaen/objects/pages/printArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=892820>

⁴⁶ <http://www.haartz.com/hasaen/objects/pages/printArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=892820>

⁴⁷ Mark Heller, "Should the European Union talk to Hama", p. 2.

⁴⁸ <http://www.almanar.com.lb/NewsSite/ArticlePrintPage.aspx?id=22696>

⁴⁹ Jerusalem Post: "Livni bids to maintain Hamas boycott", August 13, 2007.

⁵⁰ Al-Ayyam, vol. 4181, 6/9/2007, p. 21

peace and security. Moreover, he expressed hopes that Sarkozy and France will have a positive role in solving the contacts in the region and lifting the siege imposed on the Palestinian people⁵¹. The European Union remained silent towards the Israeli measures against the people of the Gaza Strip after Hamas' control. Israel only allowed the fundamental humanitarian needs to enter Gaza, such as food, medicine and fuel, and on the other hand completely banned Gaza's exports.

Adding to that, the EU's reactive policy in 2006-09 with regard to Hamas has led it to lose its credibility. Its support for democracy was discredited in the eyes of the local Palestinian population and the wider Islamic world after the dubious signal, to both Arab authoritarian regimes. Moreover, the reversal of the EU's earlier reform policies in the PT since Hamas's electoral victory to the advantage of the West Bank Abbas-led government has undeniably helped deform more than reform the fragile Palestinian institutions and put a question mark over the EU's honesty as a democracy and reform promoter in the Middle East.

This is particularly significant given that Hamas, despite its isolation by the international community, is "still strong and in control of the Gaza Strip", while "disorder and radicalization are spreading across the Strip, where the social fabric has been severely weakened by the humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's border closures and military conflict between Hamas and the Israeli army."⁵²

If not recognition, what would Hamas leaders be willing to offer Israel in return for accepting a "phased solution"? Hamas would agree to a *hudna* or truce—that is, to a suspension of military actions against Israel for a specific period, such as ten to twenty years.⁵³

The EU should encourage Israel to agree to a long-term ceasefire, and should highlight the potential benefits of working with Hamas to end violence. Hamas has shown its potential by the improved order it has enforced in Gaza since it seized power. With a *Hudna* in place and Hamas and Fatah reconciled, Abbas' men or third parties, such as the EU, or Turkey, could start testing the ground to assess whether Hamas would consider peace with Israel on the basis of a two-state solution. There is only a slim chance that Hamas will take part in a peace process in the near future. Notwithstanding the positive claims from some Hamas leaders, there are still many hardliners in the group who are opposed to breaking off hostilities. But the *Hudna* would offer the strongest prospect for changing the balance of forces within Hamas. In a process that might take a few years, the *Hudna* could increase trust between Hamas and Israel, and allow Hamas to continue its process of political transformation. There are risks in recognizing Hamas as a legitimate player.

Some argue that international recognition would increase Hamas' legitimacy and therefore strengthen its rule. But this is not a convincing argument. Hamas is not only already firmly in control in Gaza, but it is also ruling unchecked. Hamas is not a uniform group, but a collection of competing factions of hardliners and more moderate elements. Since the 2006 elections, the influence of the moderates has declined - partly as a result of the pressure of the international boycott and the fighting with Israel, which are encouraging radicalization. The EU should instead try to strengthen the moderates and encourage them to continue transforming Hamas.⁵⁴

⁵¹ http://www.imemc.org/article/50107?print_page=tru

⁵² Rouba Al-Fattal, "The Foreign Policy of the EU in the Palestinian Territory", *Center for European Policy Studies*, May 2010, pp. 99, 105.

⁵³ Paul Scham - Osama Abu Irshaid, "Hamas Ideological, Rigidity and Political Flexibility", *United States Institute of Peace*, June 2009.

⁵⁴ Clara Marina O'Donnel, "The EU, Israel and Hamas", *Center for European Reform*, London 2008.

For Europeans, the key issue here is not necessarily formal “recognition” of Hamas. Indeed, given the EU’s ability to talk indirectly to them through intermediaries such as the Norwegians or the Swiss.⁵⁵

The EU often pronounced demand from Israel to remove its blockade on the Gaza strip claiming that it violates international law. Israel regards the blockade on Gaza as a top security issue intended to prevent Hamas intensive smuggling of weapons. Israel argues that the Gaza blockade is compatible with international law, since Israel enables a constant supply of goods to the civil population, except for war materials.⁵⁶

Like it or not, Hamas is a fact on the ground. A negotiated, lasting solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved if Hamas is involved. That means Hamas has to be accepted as a legitimate political player and the one-sided backing of Fatah has to come to an end.⁵⁷

Despite the recent turn against Hamas, there are still countless politicians, civil servants, political advisers, and security officials across the E.U. who, driven by anti-Israel sentiment, anti-American motives, or a naive belief in Hamas’ goodwill, are desperately seeking ways to forge ties to the Islamist rulers of Gaza. That Europe continues to resist these pressures is crucial. Without Europe, Hamas has very few places left to turn.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The EU must stop their double standers by laying pressures on the Palestinians only. They must give Hamas the opportunity to enter the Palestinian official political system and give them a chance to change their views gradually in order to become more moderate. They should also encourage Hamas' participation in the democratic process in the occupied territories and integration in the political official system. In addition, they must realize that the Palestinians need not only a financial aid, but also a political aid against the Israeli measures. It is neither logical nor realistic for the EU to ask Hamas for quick radical changes in their political and ideological mentality since it is the first time for Hamas to be in the office. The EU must realize that the process of change within Hamas is slow yet stable since this is the case with all dogmatic and ideological movements. The European Union can draw lessons from the experience of the Welfare and Development Party which is an Islamic Turkish party that was able to adapt itself to the secular setup in Turkey. Hamas too can do the same after a while since it is a very moderate movement that can coexist with the secular and nationalistic political parties. It is worthy of note that Hamas students' bloc formed a coalition front with many secular and even leftist groups in the Palestinian universities as a part of the preparation for the students' council election. More importantly, the Hamas movement is unique in their political setup given the fact that it is a political party with religious agenda and a resistance movement fighting against the Israeli occupation to liberate the Palestinian lands before establishing an independent Palestinian state. Where the Europeans have gone wrong is that “while their support had political objectives - to form the nucleus of a Palestinian state and to provide the environment for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab -Israeli conflict - Europeans have remained reluctant to get directly involved at the political level. Rather they have seen their role as complementary to the political negotiations facilitated by the US.

⁵⁵ Nick Witney, *Europe and the Vanishing Two-State Solution*, European Council on Foreign Relations, London 2013, p. 56.

⁵⁶ Tsilla Hershco, “Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations in the Context of the Arab Spring”, *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, 2014, no: 25, pp. 1-15.

⁵⁷ Almut Möller, “After Gaza: A New Approach to Hamas”, *Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy*, 2009, pp. 1-4.

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