

EU-Israel Relations: in Search of Coherent and Consistent EU Foreign Policy

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For many reasons, Israel and the European Union shall be linked by a close relationship. The Jewish culture has been part of the European culture in many fields such as philosophy, history, literature and arts, and the Jewish community still contributes to the affirmation of a European multicultural identity. The history of the Jewish people and the history of Europe have been intertwined for many decades. Several documents such as the 2005 action plan¹ adopted in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) refer to the idea of a common heritage. Both the EU and Israel have reached a high level of development, allowing them to develop a strong commercial and economic partnership. They also share the same idea of a democracy based on the representation of the people, free and fair elections, and rights for the opposition.

However, the EU-Israel relationship has been complicated by the longstanding conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Of course, the Middle-East conflict did not prevent the EU Member States from opening diplomatic relations with Israel in 1959, nor did it stop the process of signing an economic agreement in 1975. But it created grounds for potential disputes. When the European countries decided to get involved in the political debate, it was clear that this would interfere with the development of bilateral relations.

The specificity of the EU foreign policy is another factor that shall be emphasized while studying the EU-Israel relationship. The European Union is a rather complex international actor compared to a Nation State. This highlights the difficult emergence of a clear European position towards Israel.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm#2.

Since 1948, each Member State has defined its own relationship with Israel, based on historical, cultural, economic as well as political considerations. In the 1970's, these national positions were adapted to fit with both the external relations of the European Community and the newly created European Political Cooperation (EPC). In the 1990's, the constraints on national diplomacies increased, due to the launching of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which followed the EPC. The purpose of the CFSP is not to create a single foreign policy, which would replace the national ones, but rather to make national foreign policies converge, defend common positions and carry out common actions. In order to act collectively on the international scene, the EU must combine the common foreign policy with the national ones, and coordinate the different parts of its external action. Hence, two kinds of coherence must be achieved: a vertical coherence between the EU and the Member States and a horizontal coherence between the CFSP and other external policies. This specificity must be kept in mind when studying the EU's position towards Israel.

In the mid 70's, the European Community had no political position on the Arab-Israeli conflict but it succeeded in establishing an economic relation with Israel. The 1975 bilateral agreement was indeed a mainly economic achievement although it had some political significance (as it was strongly criticized by the Arab states). It took more time to reach a consensus on the Middle East conflict. During a Venice meeting of the Foreign ministers in 1980, the EU issued a declaration which, contrary to the US pro-Israel position, tried to balance the rights of the Palestinians with the rights of Israel to existence and to be security. Since then, the EC and the EU have kept on defending the two states solution, i.e. the co-existence of Israel and Palestine within the borders of 1967. In the meantime, the European Community has tried to include Israel in collective regional frameworks (starting with the Mediterranean global partnership in 1972).

The basic principles of the European position towards Israel were set up in the 1970's. The objectives of the European Foreign Policy have never changed since that period, except some minor adjustments. The EU still ambitions to strengthen the economic ties with Israel, contribute to the peace process and use multilateral forums to facilitate the cooperation between Israel and its neighbours. However, the capacity of the European Union to achieve these goals is challenged by the lack of unity among EU Member States and institutions. A lot needs to be done to define and implement a European foreign policy that would be both consistent (there should be no major divergence among the different external policies

conducted by the EU and the Member States) and coherent (these external policies should mutually reinforce).

The lack of coherence and consistency is a permanent difficulty for European external action. In 1970, the EPC was created outside the European Community, which did not favour a close interaction between the political and the economic dimensions of external affairs. The creation of the European Union by the Maastricht treaty was a limited step towards coherence, but the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the EC's external relations remained separated.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the basic structure of the EU is simplified. The new Union has a single legal personality. The distinction between the European Union and the European Community disappears, as well as the three pillars of the Union. Agreements with third countries and international organisations are signed in the name of the Union. This includes the specific agreements with neighbouring countries, for which art.8a par.2 of the revised TEU gives a definition (saying that they "may contain reciprocal rights and obligations as well as the possibility of undertaking activities jointly.") Under the new treaty, the European Council elects a president for two and a half years, meaning an end to its rotating six month presidency. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, appointed by the European Council, has an enhanced profile. She is at the same time the EU's Commissioner for External Relations and the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Council. She will be supported by a new body called "European External Action Service" (EEAS), covering both external relations and CFSP, with the exception of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The delegations of the European Union, which are no more Commission delegations, are placed under the authority of the High Representative.

This paper addresses this issue of coherence and consistency in EU's external action by focusing on three kinds of incoherence : between bilateral and multilateral policies of the EU; between economic and political relations; between the EU and the national foreign policies. The purpose is to assess the EU's capacity to act as a unitary actor in its relation with Israel and try to see / foresee what kind of impact the Lisbon treaty may have on the EU's external coherence.

1. Coherence and consistency between bilateral and multilateral policies

The European Community has started to develop its relationship with Israel at a bilateral level since the mid-1970's. Two decades later, the 1975 agreement was replaced by a more ambitious treaty signed on 20 November 1995, and entered into force on 1st June 2000. The European Council in a meeting in Essen (December 1994) announcing the new agreement stated that: " Israel, on account of its high level of economic development, should enjoy special status in its relations with the European Union on the basis of reciprocity and common interests "². In addition, several specific agreements were adopted in the field of scientific and technical cooperation.

The association agreement has established two main bodies: the EU Israel Association Council (held at ministerial level) and the EU-Israel Association Committee (held at senior officials level). Both meet at regular intervals, to discuss political and economic issues as well as bilateral or regional cooperation.

In parallel to bilateral relations, the EU has tried to favour Israel's participation in two main multilateral frameworks: the European Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), relaunched by the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UM) on 13 July 2007, and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The Mediterranean dimension of the EU Foreign policy mirrors the strategic ambitions of Member States such as France and Spain, and to a lesser extent Italy or Portugal, which see this region as a geopolitical priority. It also mirrors the EU's interest for regional cooperation and its willingness to act as a soft/normative power in a world made of regional organizations.

Does the EMP/UM have any impact on Israel? On the one hand, it can be argued that Israel is well placed to be an important actor in the UM. Indeed, Israel was the first Middle East country to sign an agreement in the framework of the Mediterranean Global Partnership that had been launched in 1972³. It was the first country to sign a renewed agreement after the creation of the European Mediterranean Partnership in 1995 (the so-called "Barcelona process")⁴. And it has many assets that can be used within the Union for the Mediterranean.

² European Council Meeting on 9 and 10 December 1994, Presidency Conclusions, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00300-1.EN4.htm.

³ Two agreements were signed with Middle East countries prior to the Global Mediterranean Partnership: Lebanon in 1965 and Egypt in 1972.

⁴ The EMP also includes South Mediterranean Arab states (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Jordania, Lebanon), as well as Turkey and the Palestinian territories. Since 1999, Libya has been invited to join the group, provided that the conditions for participating are respected.

On the other hand, the EMP has not really helped to bring Israel and the Arab countries closer together. The Middle East peace process was kept apart from the Barcelona process. And the EMP did not really bring added value to EU-Israel relations. The cohesion of the Mediterranean area was overestimated, especially in the political field. For example, the MEDA programme was difficult to use in the case of Israel as it supposed finding partners among its neighbours. Unable to exert influence, the Europeans, at least, have succeeded in maintaining within the EMP a balanced position between Israel and its neighbours.

Since 2004, another multilateral forum, the European Neighborhood Policy, has been used as a framework for strengthening the EU-Israel relations. The ENP gives the partners a greater access to the European internal market, better commercial conditions and financial aid (the European instrument on neighbourhood and partnership represents 14 billion euros for the period 2007-13). It aims at stabilizing EU's neighbourhood both in the East and the South, in accordance with the European Security Strategy adopted by the European Council in December 2003.

The Mediterranean countries have been included in the ENP although this policy was primarily focused on far East in the context of the EU's enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries. And the Member States have finally decided that Israel should be part of the ENP, which was not so clear at the beginning of the negotiations. Israel, as a "neighbouring country", has gained a position that is quite close to the European Union. But in the meantime the specificity of EU-Israel relationship has been taken into account. Israel is very different from these countries which need to engage in political and economic reforms in order to get rid of the Soviet legacy. And it is much more developed than the other Mediterranean countries. As acknowledged by the Commission's Country Report: "Once a traditional economy based on agriculture, light industry and labour intensive production, Israel has evolved into a knowledge-based economy, with internationally competitive service and industrial sectors »⁵. To some extent, Israel is the only country within the ENP that can develop an equal to equal relationship with the European Union. Now Israel can benefit from financial assistance in the ENP whereas it is excluded from bilateral assistance in the EMP⁶. But there is no comparison with the assistance provided for other neighbouring countries which highly rely upon the EU for transforming their economies and political systems.

⁵ Commission Staff Working Paper, Country Report, Israel, Brussels, 12.5.2004, SEC(2004) 568, COM(2004)373 final, p.13.

⁶ Although some kinds of financial assistance were possible before the ENP: assistance to civil society, EU partnership for peace, European Initiative for democracy and human rights.

Consequently, the EU cannot apply conditionality to Israel to the extent it applies conditionality to other ENP countries.

The ENP is a flexible instrument that focuses on cooperation between the EU and third countries, and is adaptable to the specificity of each partner (differentiation principle). This is the reason why the ENP, which was not meant at Israel primarily and did not seem to be a suitable framework for enhancing EU-Israel relations, has proved to be very efficient in this regard. Compared to the EMP, the neighbourhood policy has no real regional ambition. It gives impulsions to bilateral relations thanks to the adoption of documents such as the action plans, where the partners commit themselves to further cooperate. Not surprisingly, the first action plan to be adopted in April 2005 was the one concerning Israel. The EU-Israel relation within the ENP mirrors the EU-Israel successful bilateral relation.

. It can be argued that the ENP also reflects the limitations of the European influence in the neighbouring areas. The EU often insists on the crucial importance of regional integration. It is a strong supporter of multilateralism at both international and regional levels. If we put aside the idea of a « Middle East Partnership » in 2002 or the « Greater Middle East Initiative » in 2004, the United States relies much more on privileged partnerships with regional powers such as Israel (as well as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan). For years, the European Union has been trying to stimulate regional cooperation in the Mediterranean area as a means to pacify the relations between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab countries. This was not successful. The ENP, which has no real regional dimension, does not compensate the failure of the Mediterranean Partnership. It rather acknowledges the incapacity for the EU to export its model of regional integration to the Middle East.

There is no big contradiction between what is done at the bilateral level and what is done in multilateral frameworks such as the EMP/UM and the ENP. The main goals are to strengthen the partnership with Israel while creating the conditions for peace in the Middle East. But the ENP has certainly made things more complicated in terms of EU external coherence. The EU's action towards Israel can take place in different EU policies, which multiply the risks of incoherence.

On top of that, three commissioners deal with these policies. Catherine Ashton, commissioner for external relations and High Representative, may have a kind of primacy in dealing with Israel. But Karel De Gucht, as the commissioner in charge of trade, and Stefan Füle, commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy, may also be involved. And the risk of incoherence between the actions of different commissioners has not been addressed

by the Lisbon treaty. The new Treaty does not designate the Commissioner for external relations as the leader of the Commissioners in charge of external affairs. Yet, many reasons would justify such a hierarchy, in particular the scope of action of Mrs. Ashton and her privileged status as a vice-president of the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. For the time being, Mrs. Ashton has to deal with possible interferences from other Commissioners. One of the main problems might be the coordination between Catherine Ashton and Stefan Füle, the Commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy. The latter seems to be more favourable to Israel than Mrs. Ashton. Surprisingly, it might be difficult to achieve coherence between the ENP and the other external policies, while in the meantime coherence between the economic and political aspects of external action might be improved by the Lisbon treaty.

2. Coherence between the economic and political dimensions of the EU's external action

The European Union and Israel have built a strong economic partnership. The EU represents 38% of Israel's exports and 28% of Israel's imports. Contrary to the other Mediterranean states, Israel's economy is diversified and does not really suffer from the competition with East European countries. In this regard, its situation differs from those of the Arab countries and is closer to the Turkish position towards the EU.

Several agreements give a legal basis to EU-Israel's economic cooperation. The association agreement entered into force in 2000 confirms the existence of free trade in manufactured goods and strengthens the arrangements for free trade in industrial products. It also contains provisions on freedom of establishment and liberalization of services, the free movement of capital and competition rules, the strengthening of economic cooperation on the widest possible basis and cooperation on social matters, supplemented by cultural cooperation. Another agreement entered into force in January 2004 liberalized the agricultural trade. Israel was the first non-European country to be associated to the European Community's Framework Programme for Research and Technical Development (as soon as 1995). This special status is the result of Israel's very high level of scientific competence. For the same reason, Israel has been allowed to participate in the Galileo programme. Finally, three other agreements shall be mentioned: two agreements on Procurement by

Telecommunications Operators and on Government Procurement (came into force on 1st August 1997) and the agreement on Good Laboratory Practice (came into force on 1st May 2000).

This high level of cooperation gives evidence of the existing proximity between Europe and Israel. This is quite logical given that the two partners share some core values related to history, culture, democracy, the rule of law, market economy, free trade... Not surprisingly, Israel has showed to other ENP countries how the new possibilities offered by the Neighbourhood Policy shall be used. The ENP has facilitated Israel's progressive participation in the EU's internal market and in EU policies and programmes. In 2008, the EU even envisaged to enhance the economic cooperation by further integrating Israel in EU's policies and programmes. This was seen by some observers as a way of giving Israel the status of a quasi-Member State. This process was interrupted by the Gaza war in 2009.

Contrary to the economic field, the political dimension of the EU-Israel relationship is weak. Some positive results shall be mentioned. The association agreement foresees regular political dialogue at ministerial and senior official, and at parliamentary level. At Israel's request, the agreement has been complemented by a Joint Declaration on the importance both parties attach to the struggle against xenophobia, antisemitism and racism. There is regular cooperation on several issues: international terrorism, migrations, organized crime and human beings trafficking... But the EU is seen by Israel as an economic more than a political partner by Israel, due to the differences existing on the Middle East conflict.

As it was already mentioned, the Member States of the European Community took a clear position on the conflict in 1980, ten years after the launching of the European Political Cooperation (EPC). In the Venice declaration, they emphasized the right to existence and to security of all States in the region, including Israel, and justice for all the peoples, which implies the recognition of legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Thanks to this balanced position, Europe has showed that it was capable of defining a common position. This did not lead to a European influence, however, as Israel and the United States on one side, and some Arab states on the other side, rejected this position, for opposite reasons.

The creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy in 1992-93 has indicated the European willingness to become an influent actor in international affairs, including the Middle East peace process. A Special Representative (EUSR) for the Middle East was

appointed in 1996⁷, in order to inform the European institutions on the ongoing peace process, coordinate the EU's action, and stay in permanent contact with the different actors involved in the conflict, in close cooperation with the United States. This was real improvement compared to the Troika. The EU was accepted as a member of the Quartet that was supposed to facilitate the negotiations⁸. The Roadmap was adopted with a European contribution. Since 1999, the High Representative has been very active in the negotiations. For example, he participated in the redaction of the Mitchell Report in 2001. Since 1997, the EU has given assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in order to promote economic, social, and political and security reforms in the territories, the main goal being to make the PA credible enough to negotiate with the Israeli government. The creation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) between 1999 (Cologne summit) and 2003 (launching of the first ESDP operation) brought new opportunities of action. Two operations have been deployed on the Israeli territory: EUPOL COPPS, in support of the Palestinian police, and EUBAM Rafah, which was supposed to monitor the Rafah checkpoint between Gaza and Egypt (this operation is on stand-by since the border has been closed).

It is not doubtful that the EU is more active in the Middle East peace process than it used to be a few years ago. It is a "player" now, not only a "payer". But it does not make the difference either.

As far as the Palestinians are concerned, the EU witnessed the election of the Hamas in the beginning of 2006. As a member of the Quartet, it has asked the newly elected authority in Gaza to favour non-violence, recognize Israel and accept existing agreements, including the roadmap. Confronted to the intransigent position of the Hamas, the EU has decided to suspend any direct assistance.

As for the government of Israel, the EU continues to be quite critical. ENP documents and CFSP declarations put the emphasis on the situation of the Arab minorities, the restrictions to the free movement of people in Gaza and the West Bank, the settlements in East Jerusalem and West Bank, the destructions of Palestinian houses in Jerusalem... Thanks to an ongoing dialogue with Israel, the EU has had a few limited successes such as the improvement of trade between Israel and the territories, or a better access to the Israeli territory for Palestinian businessmen. But these improvements remain limited. In spite of its new status in the Peace process, the EU's influence on Israel is weak. The multilateral frameworks led by the EU,

⁷ Miguel Angel Moratinos in 1996, then Marc Otte in 2003.

⁸ As soon as 1998, the participation of the European Union in the Peace Process is reinforced. The EU plays the role of a "facilitator".

especially the EMP, have been of very limited use for the peace process. They were not meant at finding a solution to the conflict but they could have had a kind of spillover effect, the multilateral cooperation creating the conditions for a pacific settlement of the dispute. On the contrary, the Mediterranean Partnership has been hindered by the Arab-Israeli conflict⁹.

For some, the EU could influence Israel by using conditionality. Changes in Israel's position towards the Palestinians could be obtained by applying economic sanctions. On the contrary, the EU intended to upgrade the existing agreements with Israel in 1988. This idea was criticized by those who argue that the only way to find peace in the Middle East is to exert pressure on Israel. As the process was stopped in the context of the Gaza war, we may say that, to some extent, some sort of conditionality has been used against Israel. Indeed, the upgrade of the economic relations has become a possibility that now depends on future evolutions from the part of Israel. The linkage between the upgrade of bilateral relations and the political choices made by Mr. Netanyahu can be considered a kind of conditionality, although a light one.

In the future, the coherence between the economic and political dimensions of the EU's external action might improve. The "new" High Representative is in a good position to ensure coherence and consistency. Mrs. Ashton shall be the only representative of the EU within the Quartet. She might also be in charge of the political dialogue as well as the economic cooperation with Israel. This should make the EU's position more credible.

Similarly, there should be more coherence in the permanent representation of the EU in Israel. Before the Lisbon treaty, there was no unity in EU's diplomatic representation: the Commission's delegation was in charge of the EC's external relations whereas the rotating presidency was responsible for CFSP. In Israel as in other countries, the delegation of the Commission has been replaced by an EU delegation which it is supposed to ensure coherence and consistency just as the "new" High Representative might do at a higher level.

3. Coherence and Consistency between the EU and national foreign policies

The evolution of the EU's position is related to the evolution of its Member States.

⁹ Sven Biscop, *Euro-Mediterranean Security: A Search for Partnership*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003.

In the 1970's, the Member States of the European Community were divided in two groups. The first one, comprising Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark¹⁰, was very close to Israel, whereas the second one, comprising France and Italy, was pro-Arab¹¹. The Venice declaration resulted from a compromise between these two groups. However, all the differences between the Member States have not totally disappeared although they have been reduced.

One of the debates among the EU Member States is about the necessity to make the upgrade of economic relations with Israel depend on progresses in the peace process. At the beginning of 2008, a large majority of Member States favours the idea of an upgrade with no prior condition. The new EU Members are friends of Israel. The Netherlands strongly supports the upgrade. The new governments in France and Italy have changed their position in favour of Israel. With M. Berlusconi as the head of government, Italy has become the main supporter of Israel among the Member States.

The idea defended by a large majority of Member States in 2008 was that the strengthening of EU-Israel relations may have a positive impact on the peace process. By getting closer to Europe in the economic field, Israel would more easily engage in a political dialogue with the EU and accept European points of view on the Middle East peace process. The Slovenian Foreign Minister M. Rupel, chairing the EU-Israeli association council in the first half of 2008, justified the upgrade of the cooperation by the impact it could have on the resolution of the Middle East conflict.

The evolution of the French position towards Israel is an important point. The French diplomacy may be less influent in the EU27 than it used to be before the last enlargements, it still has an impact. Since the 1970's, France has tried to influence the EPC and the CFSP in a way that would be coherent with its Arab policy. The difficult Franco-Israel relationship has had a negative impact on the EU's involvement in the Middle East peace process. Nicolas Sarkozy, the current French president, does his best to promote a more balanced foreign policy. In his views, traditional relations with Arab countries shall be counterbalanced by a strong partnership with Israel. In a meeting with the French ambassadors, on August 27th, 2007, Mr. Sarkozy said that he would never come to a compromise with the security of Israel. This position was reiterated in a statement made at the Knesset during an official visit on 22-24 June 2008. But this statement also emphasized the remaining disagreements between

¹⁰ History is the main driving factor for Germany and the Netherlands (70% of the Jewish people died during the Second World War). In 1967, these two countries have given their support to Israel whereas France and Italy defended the Arab states.

¹¹ The position of the United Kingdom was more ambiguous although close to the first group.

France and Israel on Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem as a two states capital, the settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank...

Jacques Chirac, the previous French president, had succeeded in finding an “internal” balance between the Jewish and the Muslim Community, but in foreign affairs he was seen as mostly pro-Arab. Nicolas Sarkozy will not go back to the 1950’s, when France was a privileged ally for Israel. But he might put an end to this image of France as a pro-Arab country, which stems from the Gaullist period¹². Since 2007, M. Sarkozy has paid several visits to Arab countries, including a meeting with the Hezbollah in Beyrouth, and has even welcome Assad and Khadafi¹³ in Paris. But this can be seen as an attempt to conciliate his friendship with Israel with the French Arab policy.

The evolution of the French position towards Israel, the new Italian position as well as the enlargement to Central and Eastern countries are important factors. They could have led to a truly pro-Israel position, in 2008, when the Member States envisaged an upgrade of bilateral relations. But, as we know, this shift in EU Foreign policy was interrupted by the Gaza war. This reminded us of one thing: the EU does not act in a political vacuum. The European positions not only depend on the equilibrium among Member States but also on the international and regional context.

Confronted to such a difficult context (the Gaza war and the blockade of the peace process), the EU Member States could decide to give priority to national positions, regardless of the common positions decided by the Council. In times of crisis, the Member States are often tempted to distance themselves from the EU common line. For example, Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Head of government, has recently evoked, during a visit in Israel on February 2010, that he would like Israel to be a Member of the European Union. The current position of the EU is more cautious as regards the enhancement of its relationship with Israel. So, in terms of consistency and coherence of the EU’s external action, these kinds of behavior can be seen as a problem. Israel does not hesitate to utilize the existing divisions between the Member States and to lean on those European countries that are closer to their views.

The impact of diverging national attitudes shall not be overestimated, however. The position of the European Union towards the Middle East peace process is quite permanent since the 1980’s. There is a kind of “path dependency” that tends to prevent possible

¹² In a famous press statement in November 1967, De Gaulle talked about the Jewish as a people “sure of himself and domineering”.

¹³ It must be noticed that Israel himself has diplomatic contacts with Syria and that Khadafi does not envisage getting a nuclear weapon anymore.

differences between the Member States. The main difficulty is not for the Member countries to find a compromise and conduct a common policy, it is rather to transform this common policy into influence and power.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, four points shall be emphasized:

1) Incoherence among the different external policies of the EU is a risk that shall be taken into considerations. In particular, the problem of possible discrepancies between the High Representative and Commissioner in charge of external relations (Mrs. Ashton), and Mr. Füle, commissioner in charge of the ENP, has not been solved by the Lisbon treaty which only addresses the issue of CFSP/external relations coordination. These discrepancies do not have a significant impact on the outcome of the EU's external action.

2) Coherence has been reinforced between the Political and the Economic dimensions of the EU Foreign policy, thanks to the new High Representative (and other provisions of the new treaty such as the creation of EU delegations). We should not expect too much. In the future we will have to check whether this newly achieved coherence may result in concrete progresses. Nevertheless, these progresses should not be spectacular, many aspects of the EU-Israel relations depend on factors that are clearly outside of the EU itself, especially the positions of Israel and the United States.

3) The Lisbon treaty has not really improved the way national foreign policies shall coordinate with the EU Foreign policy. On general topics, these policies are compatible. The existing mechanism of the CFSP is efficient enough to avoid any big discrepancy among the Member States. But we also know that the EU is not comfortable when it comes to power politics. National foreign policies often diverge from the common European position when they are put under pressure by an external event¹⁴. This problem exists although we should not publicize it too much.

¹⁴ The opposite trend also exists: it happens that an external pressure tends to bring the Member States together.

4) The lack of coherence is a difficulty that has been partly addressed by the Lisbon treaty. But this problem does not explain alone the EU's relatively weak influence on Israel and the Middle East Peace process. The European Union has no real power to put the local actors under pressure. Certainly, it has an economic weight that is not negligible, but there is no consensus among the Member States to use it in a coercive manner and apply sanctions to Israel. At the moment, Israel is too much a friend to be sanctioned, but not enough friendly to get closer to the EU. Actually, the factors that are most influent regarding Israel and the peace process are outside the EU. The contribution of Israel in the Middle East negotiations, the political evolution in the Gaza strip and to a lesser extent the support given by the United States to Tel Aviv might have a greater impact than any European position. A more coherent Foreign Policy may help the EU to be identified as a real actor; it will not necessarily make it more powerful in the Middle East.

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