

المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES
(Doha Institute)



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Research Paper

*The European Union's position
toward the Palestinian cause: 1993-2009*

Mohammad Hisham Isma'i

Doha, December - 2011

Series (Research Papers)

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Introduction

The European Union is considered a major actor on the global stage, playing an increasingly central role on many international and regional issues, especially in the Middle East region. In many instances, this role has appeared to be different, in terms of vision, content, and tools, from that of the United States of America. It should be noted that Europe was able to draw the contours of a proper foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict as early as 1980, when the European Community issued the Venice Declaration, which was the first official European statement outlining a clear stance vis-à-vis the conflict. The Declaration included an acknowledgement of the Palestinian people's legitimate right to self-determination, juxtaposed with "Israel's right to exist." The statement also called for an end to Israel's occupation of Arab lands, condemning the building of Jewish settlements in occupied territory.

The Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991 was Europe's first appearance as an active actor in the peace process, having officially been given the status of an observer inside the conference, and through active participation in the multilateral committees charged with the discussion of technical issues and matters of common cooperation in the region. By holding the Madrid Peace Conference on its territory, Europe discovered an important shift in the political role it could play in the peace process as it sensed Israel's softening of its previous stance rejecting any European role. The United States, however, quickly marginalized this newfound European role.

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty sought to draw the outlines of a unified foreign and security policy for Europe, with the official announcement of the birth of the European Union. The treaty was followed in 1996 by the appointment of a special representative for the Middle East to transmit European proposals and guarantees to all parties in the conflict. Since that date, the European Union has had a policy coordinator who tours the Middle East in much the same manner as American officials with similar responsibilities.

Despite the official emergence of a common foreign and security policy for the states of the EU, and the appointment of a high representative of this policy, these conditions did not lead to the disappearance of national diplomacy, especially those of major member states such as the United Kingdom and France. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that no analysis of the EU position toward the Arab-Israeli conflict can take place without reference to the effort exerted by the European Union to formulate a veritable foreign policy.

The European Union did not cast an independent foreign policy tailored specifically to the Palestinian issue, viewing it instead as part of a more comprehensive policy that includes the Arab region and the Middle East in general. However, Arab states and the European Union have a shared interest in the latter's playing a growing role in the political resolution of the conflict, as

opposed to Israel and the United States, which clearly share a desire to limit and marginalize the European role.

Research problematic

The process of European integration and the metamorphosis of the European Community into the European Union – as per the Maastricht Treaty signed on December 10, 1991, which entered into effect on November 1, 1993 – constituted a historic juncture in the history of the European Union as a regional and international organization. The treaty introduced a common defense and security policy on matters relating to the security of the European Union, which became the doorway for the Union's emergence as a major international actor. In its attempt to fill the void left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union saw the Arab-Israeli conflict – and at its heart, the Palestinian issue – as the litmus test for its stature on the international level. In this regard, the European Union sought to intervene in the Arab region, using a policy of economic and security cooperation in hopes of achieving the objectives of European policy.

With these premises as a starting point, the problematic of this study boils down to answering the following question: **What was the stance of the European Union toward the Palestinian issue between 1993 and 2009?**

From this research question, several secondary ones branch out, including:

1. What are the determinants of European policy toward a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?
2. What is the nature of the European role in the search for a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between the European and American roles in the peace process?
4. What is the stance of the European Union toward the issues surrounding the final resolution of the conflict?
5. What limits the European role in the process of political resolution?
6. How do both parties to the conflict view the European role in the peace process?

Study hypothesis

This study aims to test the thesis that the European Union (after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, its entry into effect in 1993, and its refinement by the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997) has increased its capacity to help restore balance in the region and to undertake an active role in the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue.

The hypothesis of this study presumes the existence of a mutual link between the European and American roles in the Middle East peace process, with the role of the European Union remaining limited and more of an extension of the American one.

I. European Foreign policy and the Palestinian issue

A. The determinants of European foreign policy and its relevance to the Palestinian issue

1. The determinants of European policy toward a Palestinian-Israeli settlement

Since its emergence, the Arab-Israeli conflict has become one of the principal determinants affecting the relationships of Arab states with the world. Since this conflict predates the birth of the European Community, it was natural that it would impose itself as one of the determining factors in the shape and content of the European Community's relationship – throughout its various stages – with the Arab homeland. European policies and stances toward the Palestinian cause and vis-à-vis repeated Israeli aggression against the Palestinian side are decided according to several determinants, the most notable of which are:

a. The European Community's conception of itself and of its role in the world

This self-conception is a dynamic vision that attempts to constantly adapt itself to the changes occurring on the regional and international scenes. This approach is supported by the dynamic of an integrative European experience that has continued to expand both horizontally, with the joining of new member states, and vertically, with its spread to new sectors and fields. The posture of the European Community toward the Arab-Israeli conflict when the Community was a mere union of coal and steel, or a common market with only six member states, was very different from its posture once it became a Union with a common foreign and security policy and seeking to establish a unified constitution.

Furthermore, the Community's position toward this conflict during the bi-polar global system differed from that which has emerged during the era of uni-polarity. Its position following the events of September 11, 2001 differed from what preceded them. It could be said that the European Community's ambition has constantly pushed it to seek an independent role in the conflict, but the balance of power on the ground often has limited its ability to play such a role. As a result, the European role has oscillated, between one that resembles that of an independent and effective partner and one that resembles that of a follower or a secondary partner.¹

b. Israel and the Jewish question:

The posture of the European Community vis-à-vis the Jewish question has been linked to cultural and historical determinants relating to the reality of European persecution of Jews, and a guilt complex due to the practices of Nazi Germany during World War II, which, in addition to

¹ Hasan Nafi'a, **The European Union and the Learned Arab Lessons**, (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2004, p.528.

interest-based factors relating to the participation of the Jews and the Zionist movement on the side of the Allies against the Axis during the war.

Israel has exploited these factors, especially the guilt complex, in order to blackmail Europe and extract the largest amount possible of material and political support. This was made clear by the commitment of states that participated in collective action to guarantee Israel's security from its beginnings, offering the nascent state military and political support, and fighting alongside it in wars against Arab states – such as the Tri-Partite Aggression against Egypt in 1956. Israel also has exploited the stereotype of the “victim,” which is inscribed in European collective consciousness, in order to force Europe into silence regarding Israel's aggressive policies toward the Palestinian people.

For these reasons, the European role – seeking its place in the process of settling the Arab-Israeli conflict – has varied according to the European margin for maneuver and in relation to the aforementioned contradictions. After 1967, Israel became – due to its occupation of Arab lands and its so-called “special relationship” with the United States – the dominant actor in determining the nature of the European role in the region and in the conflict itself. Israel was never enthusiastic about granting Europe an independent role in the peace process, except within those limits that Israel perceives as beneficial to its interests.

c. The lack of a unified administration representing the Arab side

Despite the Arab homeland's being a direct party – as a whole – to the conflict with Israel, not all Arab states have been engaged to the same extent. The extent of Arab cooperation in the management of the conflict has varied from one era to another, and therefore Arab demands from the outside world in general – and the European Union in particular – regarding the conflict were neither unified nor clear, and sometimes not even determined. These demands have appeared contradictory on some occasions, opaque and unclear to the point of obscurity on others. This has made it difficult for outside parties, including the European Union, to maintain a stable and consistent position toward the Arab demands. And despite the fact that European economic and political interests in the Arab world are far greater than those with Israel, multiple historical and cultural factors – in addition to Arab divisions about the optimal way to manage the conflict – have prevented a beneficial employment of the European role. In addition, the divisions in question have afforded various European parties the opportunity to evade Arab demands or skirt them.²

² *Ibid*, pp. 528-529.

2. The prospects for the European role and its weight in the peace process

It can be said that the financial and economic contributions of the European Union in the peace process have increased its chances of securing an active role in it, and this for the following reasons:

- 1- The role of the European Union in the peace process can be described as a supporting one, or as an extension of the American one; it does not act as a competitor or an opponent of the US role in the region due to its desire to maintain good relations with the United States and Israel. This direction reflects a pragmatic policy on the part of the European side, which wishes to preserve a political position for itself in the peace process by advancing slowly in order to avoid American-Israeli resistance.
- 2- The European role helps to contain potential tensions that occasionally arise in US-Arab relations during negotiations. The United States is often interested in responding positively to these European initiatives, which prevents the emergence of a political void or diplomatic stasis. Thus, the European role can be a catalyst for American policy.³
- 3- Various Arab and European statements assert the centrality of the American role and its prominent position in the process of negotiations, which is equivalent to accepting both the American position, especially during times of crisis in the negotiations, and the red lines that are placed against the interference of third parties. This is especially true when the role of third parties consists in supporting the legal and political foundations of the Madrid process or when this role is attempting to move the process of negotiations according to these principles.
- 4- The major European parties have adopted a belief, to varying degrees, in the necessity to not remain on the margin of events in the Middle East, and of the need to act within the limits of the possible. As such, the European discourse focuses on the importance of creating a balance between the size of European interests in the Middle East and the ability to affect the course of events influencing these interests.
- 5- The European Union also holds a number of important political cards, in addition to its political and economic weight, in terms of its relations with Israel, and these forms of leverage can be employed in the interest of the European role. Despite Israeli reservations regarding the European role, Israel's need of the European Union – especially some of its major member states – weakens these reservations, especially when the European Union

³ Hisham Zuheir Tafish, "The Posture of the European Union towards the Palestinian Cause 1993-2003", (Arabic), Master's dissertation, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, University of Al-Azhar in Gaza, 2009, p. 74.

firmly expresses its desire to play a role in the negotiating process. The aid card appears to be the European Union's most important leverage, for it is the largest donor in the context of the diplomacy of peaceful settlement in the Middle East. This aid aims to build and support stability, as well as to encourage cooperation and common projects among the parties of the peace process. Economic relations represent another important card for the European Union, with Israel's foreign trade with EU states representing 55 percent of the value of its total foreign trade. It is also in Israel's interest to maintain its partnership agreement with the European Union and to develop it further, with this pact being the most advanced of all similar treaties signed between the European Union and other states. It also involves critical fields relating to scientific and cultural cooperation, and Europe's ability to threaten to suspend some aspects of the agreement allows it to create a form of gradual linkage between the application of the agreement and Israel's acceding to respect the principles of Madrid.⁴

B. The limits of the European role and its perception by the parties to the conflict

1. The chains imposed on the European role in the peace process

The Middle East region is among the most important for the United States, which seeks to be the main actor in managing its affairs and deciding its various issues, a desire that is obviously due to the geo-strategic location of the region and its wealth in natural resources.

This does not mean that the Middle East region is completely under the hegemony of the United States; it also is affected by other global players such as China, Russia, the European Union, and Japan. These influences are of an economic nature at some times and of a political one at others, but the United States remains the main actor.

Some parties in the Middle East region, especially the Arab side, often have operated on the assumption that Europe was capable of playing a role parallel to the American one, leading to the emergence of a bipolarity that would be an alternative to the uni-polar behavior of the United States since the fall of the Soviet Union. However, these assumptions have not reached the level of practical application due to the lack of agreement among EU members over a unified foreign policy.⁵

⁴ Naseef Hatti, "The Limits of the European Role and its Opportunities in the Settlement in the Middle East", *Al Mustaqbal Al-Arabi Journal*, (Arabic), Issue 215, January 1997, pp. 14-15.

⁵ Mehdi Shihadah, "Europe and the Middle East: A Timid Approach", *Middle East Affairs Journal*, (Arabic), Issue 132, Spring 2009, p.53.

It is widely believed that European Union has not played an effective political role in pushing forward the cause of peace in the Middle East, with its actions frequently being limited to statements, which stems from several reasons:

- 1- The failure of the European Union to formulate a clear definition of its interests in the Middle East, and to forge a clear foreign policy, due to the existence of multiple internal divisions within its organizational structures. Thus, the peace process came at the bottom of the agenda for many European states.

In order to formulate a common, unified, and detailed European foreign policy, the members of the European Union sought to stake out a relative middle ground among their varying stances on most issues, including the peace process in the Middle East.⁶ Three principal currents exist within the European Union regarding the best means of dealing with Israel, with these differences imposing chains on the level of European intervention in the peace process of peaceful resolution, including:

- a. The first current, represented by France, Italy, Spain, and Ireland, holds Israel responsible for the crisis in the peace process at the end of the last century, and calls for an active and effective European role regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁷
- b. The second current, represented by the United Kingdom, does not differ radically from the first in terms of holding Israel responsible for the suffering peace process, albeit while maintaining a modicum of discretion and calm in transmitting this position. However, it differs from the first current due to its reservations toward the idea of the European Union's undertaking a role that might place it in opposition to the United States. This stance is governed by traditional Atlantic considerations in British politics and British relations with the United States.
- c. The third current, consisting of Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark, is characterized by a certain degree of flexibility and avoidance reluctance to hold Israel responsible for the deterioration of the peace process. This current also prefers to place its bet fully on the American role, dismissing European participation in the peace process.

These contradictions among European national foreign policies toward the Arab-Israeli conflict constitute an element of pressure that limits the formulation of a coherent EU foreign policy. This is especially true because such a policy for a regional organization would require an

⁶ Narmin Al-Nawawi, "The European Union and the Middle East", *International Politics Magazine*, (Arabic), Issue 142, October 2000, p. 113.

⁷ Hussein Talal Muqalid, "The Determinants of Common Foreign and Security Policies", *The University of Damascus Journal for Economic and Legal Sciences*, Tome 25, Issue 1, 2009, p. 662.

effective consensus among different priorities that reflect the positions and interests of each member state. Such an effort also would require a creative and flexible diplomacy aimed at preserving this consensus in the midst of an environment whose demands and pressures keep shifting.⁸

- 2- An additional element limiting EU action is the European worry regarding Israel's traditional negative reaction to any initiative issued by the EU states in the peace process. This is because Israel believes that the overarching strategy of European policy in the region is usually built on the relevant international resolutions, all of which fall – from the Israeli perspective – in the interests of the Arabs. For this reason, Israel and the United States long prevented the participation of the European Union in the peace process, and Israel prefers to address the conflict through direct bilateral negotiations with the Arabs, without any foreign participation. If and when such participation is necessary, Israel accepts only the United States as a third party. For instance, in April 2001, Shimon Peres – then Israel's foreign minister – publicly rejected an offer from the European Union to mediate in the conflict, affirming that Washington was Israel's preferred peace partner.⁹
- 3- The Arab regional situation forms another challenge for the European role in the peace process because Arab states are not in agreement regarding a political resolution, with some Arab states supporting the American role more than the European one. Some Arab states also do not take European initiatives seriously due to their unshakable belief that, at the end of the day, the United States is the sole holder of influence.

At the same time, the United States also does not hide its displeasure toward any potential European role in the peace process if it does not take place under the American umbrella. During the Cold War, the United State saw any attempt to crystallize a European political role as a weakening of its position and an attempt to confound it, or even as a threat to the coherence of the Western position in the context of the strategic confrontation with the Soviet Union. America also believes that any sign of a European political initiative may encourage the Arab parties

⁸ Ali Al-Haj, *The Policies of the States of the European Union in the Arab Region after the Cold War*, (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2005, p. 318.

⁹ Mohammad Al-Sayyid Salim, "The European Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", *International Politics Magazine*, (Arabic), Issue 182, October 2010.

<http://digital.ahram.org.eg/Policy.aspx?Serial=362570>

toward further intransigence in their positions toward the American stance on the peace process.¹⁰

- 4- The nature of the relationship between the American and European roles in the peace process is that the United States constitutes an extremely influential factor in deciding the European position toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is for two reasons: first, the extent of common strategic interests between Europe and the United States, and second, the “special relationship” linking the United States with Israel. The European position has been kept entrenched within the lines whose crossing might damage its strategic relationship with the United States, a reflection of Europe’s understanding of three essential truths pertaining to the conflict:
 - a. That Israel has become more of an internal American affair, so European positions that are seen by Israel as unfriendly could be interpreted as Europe taking sides against the United States.
 - b. The influence of the Zionist lobby in the American decision-making process is extensive, leading some in Europe to imagine that Israeli policy is leading American policy in the Middle East region.
 - c. That the interests of the project of the American right for global domination, especially following the September 11, 2001 attacks, coincide almost fully with the interests of the project of the Israeli right to dominate the region. This endows American-Israeli relations with an unprecedented momentum in the context of the United States’ seeking complete hegemony over the world, and the presence of widespread mistrust in Israel toward European policies. In this regard, a full American-Israeli collusion took place to marginalize the European role in the Middle East region in general, and in the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular.¹¹

Thus, we can say that European-American relations have played an important role in determining the ceiling under which the European Union operates when drawing its policy – independently of the United States – in the region. The European Union has not been capable of imposing its visions in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, having been compelled generally to stand behind US policies, with some limited initiatives on the part of France,

¹⁰ Ali Al-Haj, *The Policies of the States of the European Union in the Arab Region after the Cold War*, (Arabic), op.cit., 2005, pp. 319-320.

¹¹ Al-Zaytoonah Center for Studies and Consultations, *Information Report (16): The Role of the European Union in the Course of the Peaceful Resolution of the Palestinian Cause*, (Arabic), Beirut: Al-Zaytoonah Center for Studies and Consultations, 2010, pp. 17-19

Great Britain, and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy –especially during the reign of Javier Solana.

On a different front, the Europeans claim that they are undertaking a role that completes the American one in the peace process, especially in terms of economic support. However, the European political and security role remains banned in the practical sense due to both American reservations and perpetual Israeli rejections of such a role.

The weakness of the European role has been particularly glaring on two main fronts:

- a. The failure to obtain international United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Israeli violations of human rights in occupied Palestine.
- b. Concessions to pressure by the United States and Israel in terms of dealings with the Palestinian resistance movements, factions of which have been placed on the European Union's list of proscribed "terrorist organizations."¹²

۲. The perception of the European role in the peace process by the parties to the conflict

a. The Israeli perception of the European role

Israel views the European Union as an important economic partner but as a political ally lacking in objectivity and honesty, given the existence of great differences between the Israeli and European visions for the settlement of the conflict.¹³ As a result, Israel prefers the American role, which unconditionally supports its demands and justifies its aggressive policies under the pretext of legitimate self-defense. In arriving at this perception, Israel refers to the following European Union positions:

- 1- The EU's declaration that a just and balanced settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict can only take place with the rise of a Palestinian state, and with the acknowledgement of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, chief among them the right to self-determination.

¹² Jawad Al-Hamad, "European Foreign Policy and the American Determinant", *Middle Eastern Studies Journal*, Issue 31, Spring 2005. (In Arabic).

<http://www.mesc.com.jo/OurVision/2005/4.html>

¹³ For further details on the Israeli posture toward the European role in the peace process see: Nidham Barakat, "The Israeli Position Towards the European Role in the Settlement of the Palestinian Cause", research paper presented to The European Foreign Policy towards the Palestinian Cause (Conference), Al Zaytoona Center for Studies and Consultations, (Arabic), Beirut. The conference took place on November 3-4, 2010, pp. 8-11.

- 2- The European Union's insistence on the necessity of the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the peace negotiations as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
- 3- The European Union's rejection of Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem, in compliance with the text of Security Council Resolution 242 rejecting the forcible annexation of the territories of other countries, in addition to Europe's insistence on the fact that the Fourth Geneva Convention remains in effect over East Jerusalem and all Arab lands occupied by Israel.
- 4- The EU's condemnation of Israeli settlements, the policy of forcible displacement and the confiscation of Palestinian properties by Israeli authorities as illegal acts that contravene the texts of international law.
- 5- The EU's affirmation of the notion of land for peace as the only cornerstone for a just and permanent settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict question, while rejecting Israeli propositions that favor the notion of security for peace. This was made clear in the text of the closing statement of the European Summit held in Berlin in March 1999.¹⁴

b. The Arab perception of the European role

Divisions and variations exist among the Arab states regarding a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the roles of international actors in the process. Some Arab states assert the centrality of the American role in the negotiations, giving more credence and support to this role than to the European one. In contrast, another cluster of Arab states places great importance on the European role. Nevertheless, we can say that the Arab perception of the European role in the peace process is generally negative, which has to do with two factors:

1. Arab states believe that the countries of the European Union have not exerted any meaningful effort to assume a sure role in the direct bilateral negotiations, despite possessing several pressure cards that could afford these countries the potential for political effectiveness in such talks – whether through their relationships with Israel or the United States. Instead, bilateral negotiations were left completely to American supervision, and the sequestering of the European role to the economic side dovetailed with the American and Israeli perspective, contradicting the Arab desire for an active and effective European role.

¹⁴ Dariya Shafeeq Basyuni, "The European Union and the Limitations to the Formulation of the Unified Foreign and Security Policy (The Case of the Arab-Israeli Conflict)", *Middle East Affairs Journal*, (Arabic) Issue 5, 2003, p. 92.

2. The Arab perception of conformity between European and American policies on the Palestinian issue carries a negative sense, for this conformity lies in pressuring the Arabs on the one hand, while neglecting Israeli aggression on the other. The voting patterns of European Union states in the Security Council, and the increase in the number of states abstaining in matters where the Arab position seems unassailable –such as the building of the Separation Wall – and the classification of Hamas and Islamic Jihad as terrorist organizations have shocked Arab circles.¹⁵

II. The nature of the European role in the peace process

A. The economic aspect of the European role in the peace process

1. The early appearance of the European economic role as a sponsor of the peace process

The European Union was content with a supporting economic role in the peace process founded in Madrid in September 1991 under the shared sponsorship of the United States and the Russian Federation. Within the Madrid framework, a multilateral working group charged with regional economic cooperation was founded, with the presidency granted to the European Union. From the beginning of the commission's meetings until mid-1996, the European Union remained within the bounds of this economic role and its associated mechanisms and arrangements.

The chief concern of the European Union was focused on invigorating and encouraging regional economic cooperation as a necessary condition to encourage all parties toward progress in a political resolution of the Middle East conflict. This did not mean that Europe neglected other facets of the peace process managed by the other working groups, but the practical interest remained focused on supporting regional economic cooperation. It was in the context of this European economic role that important aid packages were unilaterally provided by the European Union and its members to the Palestinian Authority.¹⁶

The role filled by the European Union in the peace process became more specific with the signing, in Washington, of the accords negotiated in Oslo. This time, and unlike the 1991 Madrid Conference, Europe was well represented at the request of the Palestinians themselves. Despite the efforts exerted by the European Union to avoid being placed in a position of competition with the United States, a kind of implicit division of roles – which went beyond the pure financial aspects – appeared during this phase, with the United States becoming Israel's funder, while the

¹⁵ Hasan Abu Talib, "The Arab Perception of European Union Policies towards the Conflicts in the Region" in: Wafa' Al-Sharbini (Editor), *The European Union and the New Political Dispossession in the Arab Homeland 1991-2003*, (Arabic), Cairo: Center for Research and Political Studies, 2005, pp. 100-101.

¹⁶ Hani Khallaf and Ahmad Nafi', *US and Europe: Concerns of the Present and Horizons of the Future*, (Arabic) Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1997, p. 205.

European Union became the sponsor of the Palestinian Authority.¹⁷ The European Union was among the first parties to move, following the signing of the Gaza-Jericho agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, to develop the Palestinian economy and to achieve regional economic cooperation, under which the European Union would have a leading role due to its chairing of the relevant working group.

2. The development programs for the year 1993 and the contributions of the European Union

The European Community provided the Palestinian Authority with 90 million European Currency Units (ECUs)¹⁸ in developmental aid for the year 1993, which included direct aid for the refugees and the funding of common projects with non-governmental European organizations – to which the European Community contributed 12.8 million ECUs, representing about a third of the total value of these projects. Fifteen million ECUs in direct aid was also provided to encourage agricultural exports from the Occupied Territories to the markets of EU member states, in addition to other outlays equivalent to 5 million ECUs as emergency aid.

Sixteen days after the announcement of the signing of the Oslo Accords on September 13, 1993, a paper was presented by the European Commission to the Ministerial Council and the Parliament, titled “The European Community’s Support of the Peace Process in the Middle East” and including the following:

- a. Allocating 500 million ECUs, equivalent to USD 600 million, for the period 1994-1998, with the European Investment Bank providing half of these allocations in the form of long-term loans.¹⁹
- b. Focusing in the short term on projects that had already begun, most importantly – at the time – those in agricultural, infrastructure, water, education, institution building, and technical assistance and research; additional assistance was earmarked for the formation and equipping of a Palestinian police force.
- c. Working in the medium term to remove the distortions in the Palestinian economy and to allow it to function in a normal manner in the domains of infrastructure and social development. Additionally, working to provide employment opportunities in the fields of communications, energies, and road-building.

¹⁷ John Marco, “Europe and the Middle East: A Desire Awaiting Ability! (A French Perspective)”, *International Politics Journal*, (Arabic), Issue 148, April 2002, p. 74.

¹⁸ Before the promulgation of Euro on January 1, 2002, the European Union used the ECU as a unified exchange currency, the currency had no physical form in the shape of coins or money, and was solely used in accounting.

¹⁹ Amani Mahmoud Fahmi, “The European Role in the Middle East Region”, *International Politics Magazine*, (Arabic), Issue 115, January 1994, p. 116.

- d. Contributing to the formation of the financial, monetary, and physical mechanisms that would allow the Palestinians to absorb international assistance.

In order to permit the continuous flow of aid monies and their optimal management, the European Union representative and his staff moved to an office established in East Jerusalem to supervise projects for which EU funds were disbursed.

In the early years, financial assistance and the effective implementation of European aid programs were hampered by recurring acts of violence and Israel's frequent closures of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and by differences over the size and armaments of the Palestinian police, as well as some significant disagreements regarding the organization of the electoral process. However, these issues – or most of them – were resolved, and the processes of supporting Palestinian institutions and municipalities, upgrading the infrastructure in schools, and supporting Palestinian exports were put in place. An agreement was made between the European Commission and the Palestinian Planning Department to provide support for these operations during 1996 and 1997.²⁰

The European Union has stressed the importance that all economic aid to the Palestinian territories be served through a single channel, namely the European Community itself. The European Commission has issued a report that set a clear vision for this goal, consisting in the formation of what was termed the Regional Economic Development Working Group, from which emerged another working group that specialized in Palestinian economic development, with the participation of donor states and the supervision of the World Bank, and convening once every three months.²¹

۴. The evolution of European economic assistance to the Palestinian Authority

The period during which European economic assistance was provided can be divided into four stages, with their differing circumstances leading to variations in the value and regularity of aid, as well as variations in the shares of the different sectors benefiting from this aid. These stages were:

The first stage, from 1994-2000, witnessing relative stability, the building of the Palestinian Authority's institutions, and economic growth due to private investment.

The second stage, from 2001-2005, characterized by instability on all levels.

²⁰ Hani Khallaf and Ahmad Nafi', **US and Europe: Concerns of the Present and Horizons of the Future**, op.cit., pp. 206-208.

²¹ Amani Mahmoud Fahmi, "The European Role in the Middle East Region", *International Politics Magazine*, op.cit., p. 117.

The third stage, from 2006 to mid-2007, characterized by a sharp deterioration due to the international siege, as well as noticeable internal tensions.

The fourth stage, extending from the middle of 2007 to 2009, witnessing a state of partial relaxation, relative stability, and a return to economic growth in the West Bank while living conditions deteriorated in the Gaza Strip.

The sum total of international assistance to the Palestinians during the 1994-2005 phase is estimated at USD 7.5 billion during the first and second stages, with an annual average of USD 500 million before the year 2000, rising afterward to USD billion a year – equivalent to an annual per capita share of USD 300. Over 15 percent of the assistance provided during the first phase came in the form of loans, most of which carried favorable terms, while the rest of the aid came in the form of grants, including monetary, in-kind, and technical assistance. The proportion of loans rose during the second phase (2001-2005) to around 19 percent, mainly reflecting the rise in the proportion of loans presented by Arab countries under the mechanisms of the Jerusalem and Aqsa Intifada funds, which were founded during the Arab League Summit of 2002. As for assistance during the third stage (2006 through mid-2007), they have exceeded USD 1.2 billion, most of which came in the form of grants and donations. The majority of these funds were dispensed directly to the beneficiaries according to the Temporary International Mechanism adopted by the so-called Quartet; while another chunk flowed through the institution of the Palestinian Authority's Presidency) and a minuscule portion was disbursed through the government.²² The change in the mechanisms of distributing aid was due to the international decision to boycott the Palestinian government formed by Hamas.

During the fourth stage, which followed the formation of the interim cabinet headed by Salam Fayyad in the West Bank after Hamas seized power in Gaza, the international community resumed its assistance, and at an extremely high pace, leading foreign assistance to register a new record, exceeding USD 1 billion in 2007, twice the annual average since the signing of the Oslo Accords. International pledges for the funding of the National Plan for Reform and Development during the Paris Conference (late 2007) exceeded USD 7.7 billion, to be spent between 2008 and 2010.

The most notable characteristic of the assistance provided during the first stage (1994-2000) was the continual increase in the funds earmarked to supporting the budget in order to cover its serious and perpetual shortfall; the same applied to the share of emergency relief programs,

²² Nasr Abdel Karim, "European-Palestinian Relations: The European Economic Role", research paper presented to the Conference on European Foreign Policy towards the Palestinian Cause, (Arabic), Al-Zaytoonah Center for Studies and Consultations, Beirut 3-4 November 2010, p. 5.

which constituted over 90 percent of the assistance, which came at the expense of developmental aid. European states contributed over 30 percent of this assistance, while the United States provided around 15 percent. As for the contributions of Arab states, they accounted for 30 percent of the total aid during the last three stages, having constituted no more than 8 percent during the first and second.²³

B. The political role of the European Union in the peace process

1. The position of the European Union toward some of the issues pertaining to a final resolution of the conflict

I shall focus here on the issues that the European Union has addressed with a vision as for the resolution, they are as follows:

a. The question of Jerusalem

The European Union's position toward Jerusalem can be summed up in the following headings:

- 1- The European Union's position adheres to Security Council Resolution 242 issued in 1967, which prohibits the occupation of other people's land by military force. Several resolutions have followed, asserting the same principle and insisting on the necessity of Israel's withdrawal from occupied Arab territory, including Jerusalem.
- 2- Refusal to acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and suspension of the transfer of the embassies of European Union states to Jerusalem until the conclusion of a final settlement over the city. This was decreed in the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles, and the other agreements that followed.
- 3- Abstention of European states from any action that could be interpreted as an implicit recognition of Israel's occupation of Jerusalem, or that could endow this occupation with legitimacy.²⁴

b. The question of settlements

²³ Ibid, p. 6.

²⁴ Hisham Zuheir Tafish, "The Posture of the European Union towards the Palestinian Cause 1993-2003", op.cit., p. 82.

The European posture regarding the persistence of Israeli settlement activities is that these acts are in contravention with the principles of international law and represent a major hurdle to peace. The European Union has repeatedly demanded that the Israeli government revise its settlement policies in the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem, and put an immediate end to all settlement activities, albeit without these statements reaching the level of condemnation. This posture is a perfect illustration of the balanced character that is jealously maintained by European policy.²⁵

It could be said that these EU positions come out of pre-arranged American-European coordination on a common platform created by the Mitchell Commission, which gave Europeans confidence in their efforts to reach a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict with the support of the United States.²⁶

c. The Separation Wall

European criticisms of Israel abounded due to its construction of the Separation Wall; Javier Solana, the former high representative of the European Union for foreign and security policy, stated that Israel's plan to build the wall damaged the peace process and imposed facts on the ground, and that the Israeli government should not have elected to take that decision. European Commissioner Chris Patten blasted Israel for its decision to build the Separation Wall, arguing that the action fully and directly contradicted the two-state solution, that Israel's insistence on building the wall would have dire consequences, and that the international community should bring the matter up with the government of Israel.

Moreover, the European Union believed that the wall could undermine the coming negotiations, making it practically impossible to reach a solution based on two states; they warned that the Separation Wall – with its current course – would escalate the dire human and economic situation of the Palestinians, and called on Israel to halt its settlement policies and disassemble the settlements built after March 2001.²⁷

d. The European perception of a Palestinian state

²⁵ Marwa Fikri, "Collective European Policies", *My Nation in the World*- The annals of the causes of the Islamic World, (Arabic), Issue 5, 2001, p. 107.

²⁶ Hisham Zuheir Tafish, "The Posture of the European Union towards the Palestinian Cause 1993-2003", op.cit., p. 94.

²⁷ Reem Taysir Khalil, "The Israeli Separation Wall in International Law", Master's thesis, Al-Najah National University in Nablus, 2007, (Arabic), pp. 79-80.

With the end of the 20th century, a new formula for peaceful settlement in the Middle East emerged, whose main targets included the establishment of a Palestinian state. In addition to the United States, Russia, and the United Nations, the European Union was part of this new initiative, dubbed the “Quartet,” and through its membership, the European Union sought to occupy a position that defined its vision of a Palestinian state according to the following points:

- 1- The way to the establishment of a Palestinian state is through negotiations, and there is no other path. Thus, the acts of violence waged by some Palestinian factions are rejected by the European perspective, which labels these operations “terrorism.”
- 2- The central principle from which negotiations aimed at the establishment of a Palestinian state emanate is “land for peace.”
- 3- Any negotiations occurring between the Palestinian and Israeli sides with the objective of reaching a formula for the sought-after state must be based on the reference of UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338, and 1379.
- 4- As for the regional circumstance prefacing the birth of the state, it took the form of the Arab Peace Initiative declared during the 2002 Beirut summit, which called for full normalization between Arab states and Israel in the context of a final settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
- 5- Lastly, the mechanisms adopted to facilitate this vision are “the roadmap” and the “Quartet.”²⁸

۲. The European Union's stance vis-à-vis developments in the Palestinian-Israeli peace track in the post-Oslo phase

a. European support for the Oslo Accords in 1993

Despite the intentional political marginalization of the European role within the peace process at the Madrid Conference in 1991 and in the resulting bilateral negotiations, the European Union did support the Oslo Accords signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel in Norway on September 13, 1993. The European political position has acquired great importance, since Europe is the main financial donor to the Palestinian people, providing 45 percent of international assistance to the Palestinian people. The Oslo Accords led to an increase in sympathy for the PLO within the decision-making institutions of the European Union, especially

²⁸ Mohammad Abdel 'Ati, “The European Position towards the Establishment of the Palestinian State”, Al Jazeera.net, (Arabic), July 31, 2005.

<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/E7A41237-AFE3-4B6D-9D40-984F4DA423C2.htm>

in the European Parliament²⁹, so a qualitative leap took place in the relationship between the two sides.

The Oslo Accords led to the opening of three avenues for European initiative, which were:

- The European Union's support of the peace process by funding the administration of the Palestinian Authority and supporting the Palestinian economy. The European Union is the biggest donor to the Palestinian Authority.
- Increasing cooperative relations between the European Union and Israel, including the signing of the Partnership Agreement.
- The designing of a Mediterranean project that aims to achieve economic integration among the countries of the Southern Mediterranean coast, which would not have been possible under the shadow of the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁰

The signing of the Oslo agreement helped the European Union prepare its Mediterranean initiative, which aims to foster economic integration among the countries of the Southern Mediterranean, including Israel. Before the signing of Oslo in 1993, it was impossible for the European Union to gather the Arab states and Israel around one negotiating table.³¹

b. The political position of the European Union in light of the deterioration of the peace process

With the halting of the peace negotiations following the 1996 arrival of the extreme right to power under Netanyahu, European diplomacy sought to save the peace process, was an effort made evident through:

The Florence Declaration

In the Florence Declaration (June 22, 1996), the European Union warned of the gravity of Israeli policies, stressing the need to support comprehensive and just peace, especially in terms of “the right of the Palestinians to self-determination” and the principle of “land for peace.” The declaration was a new start for the European Union in undertaking an active diplomatic and political role in the Arab region, with the focus being placed on the following factors:

²⁹ Issam Hamdan Mohammad, “The Role of the European Union in Political Development in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (1991-2007)”, Master's thesis, An-Najah National University in Nablus, 2009,(Arabic), p. 54.

³⁰ Mohammad Mustafa Kamal and Fuad Nahra, Decision-making in the European Union and Arab-European Relations, (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2001, p. 175.

³¹ Issam Hamdan Mohammad, “The Role of the European Union in Political Development in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (1991-2007)”, op.cit. p. 54.

- That the European Union has an essential interest in the peace process in the Middle East;
- The necessity of respecting and implementing signed agreements;
- The principle of land for peace and the Palestinians' right to self-determination cover all of the outstanding issues, including Jerusalem;
- Cautioning that the closure imposed by Israel on occupied Palestinian territories has dangerous consequences for the Palestinian economy; and
- The necessity of resuming both negotiations between Israel and Lebanon and Syria, and reviving discussion of the issues of a final resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.³²

The creation of the position of the European envoy for Middle East peace

In the context of the political and diplomatic efforts by the European Union in the Middle East peace process, the General Affairs Council confirmed on November 25, 1996 the official appointment of a peace envoy whose headquarters, and that of his staff, would be in Brussels. The mission of the envoy was defined as follows:

- Communicating with the parties involved in the peace process and other states in the region, as well as with the United States and countries interested in the peace process and involved international organizations, in order to coordinate with them regarding the peace process;
- Observing the peace negotiations among the parties and being at the ready to offer the advice of the European Union and its goodwill if so asked by the parties in question;
- Contributing – if asked – to the implementation of any international treaties that are reached and contacting the parties through diplomatic channels if the articles of these treaties are not applied;
- Communicating with the parties signing peace treaties in order to support the commitment to the basic principles of democracy, including respect for human rights and the supremacy of the law;
- Informing the organs of the European Ministerial Council on the possibility of the European Union's intervention in the peace process, as well as the best methods to pursue

³² Ibid, p. 66.

the initiatives of the Union, and the political aspects of the developmental projects that are undertaken by the Union;

- Observing the actions of both sides that may undermine the results of the final-status negotiations; and
- The envoy acts upon the directives of the General Affairs Council, presenting it with both regular reports and others as required. The European Commission will also have a role in terms of these tasks.

The envoy, Miguel Angel Moratinos, summed up his perception of the European initiative as:

- Establishing a follow-up mechanism with the parties in order to compensate for the lack of direct European participation in the negotiations;
- Listening to the various viewpoints regarding the European initiatives and a continual presence in the region;
- Seeking to garner the confidence of the Israeli side and to intensify communication with all facets of Israeli public opinion;
- Full coordination with the American side;
- Focusing on the question of the settlements in Jerusalem and developing the European position regarding visits to both the Eastern and Western parts of the city; and
- Attempting to reach an advance on the Syrian track and to revive multilateral negotiations.³³

The European initiative (March 1998)

This initiative was presented with the help of the British foreign secretary at the time, Robin Cook. Before Cook's visit, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson announced that the visit "is to reaffirm positions that are well-known to the European Union concerning Israeli colonization on Palestinian territories, a colonization that we consider illegal since it is against international law, including East Jerusalem where we do not recognize Israeli sovereignty."

³³ Hani Khallaf and Ahmad Nafi', *US and Europe: Concerns of the Present and Horizons of the Future*, op.cit., p. 217.

Furthermore, the European Union supported at the time the notion of the unity of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks (as Syria desired), considering that peace can only be realized through a comprehensive settlement.

The United States expressed neither support nor opposition to this initiative, which was viewed as a green light by the influential Jewish power centers in the United States and Great Britain, which waged a broad campaign against the European initiative, leading the United States to move along two tracks:

- Convincing the European Union to reduce the rate of Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian lands according to that initiative, which reached 20 percent as a first stage toward final resolution; and
- Convincing Israel, if it approved this amendment, to accept the initiative after its declaration as an American one. However, Israel rejected the American request, leading to the faltering of the European initiative even before its official announcement.³⁴

The Berlin Declaration (March 26, 1999):

The Berlin Declaration is widely viewed as the strongest and boldest statement of position by the European Union regarding the peace process in the Middle East since 1971. Its terminology was clear and unambiguous in affirming “the permanent and unrestricted right of the Palestinians to decide their fate, which includes the option of a state.”³⁵

3. The stance of the European Union toward the Palestinian-Israeli peace track in the post-September 11, 2011 phase

a. The European Union declaration issued on October 30, 2001

In this declaration, the Union announced its desire for negotiations to resume between the two sides, calling for the talks to be based on the following elements:

- The principles of the Madrid Conference, especially those relating to peace in the Occupied Territories;
- Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338;

³⁴ Said ‘Ukasha, “European Initiatives in the Middle East: Scratches on a Solid Wall (An Arab perspective)”, *International Politics Journal*, Issue 148, April 2002, p. 79.

³⁵ Issam Hamdan Mohammad, “The Role of the European Union in Political Development in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (1991-2007)”, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

- The agreements signed between the two parties and their practical results on the ground, as well as the progress achieved in previous negotiations;
- Israel's right to peaceful existence within borders that are safe and internationally recognized, as well as the right of the Palestinian people to see an end to the occupation of its territory, and the establishment of a de facto democratic state;
- Negotiating over aspects relating to permanent status, including Jerusalem and the refugees, through the settlement of the situation on the ground based on the implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell Report, and through the edification of the notion of the political resolution of the conflict; and
- Applying the same principles in resolving the outstanding issues with Syria and Lebanon.³⁶

b. European representation in the international Quartet:

The Middle East Quartet was formed in late 2001, more than a year after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada and the formation of the American Mitchell Commission, which put in place a plan for ending violence – on the heels of the proposition of the Tenet Plan, which sought the same objectives. Consequently, the Quartet was created to help end violence between the two sides of the conflict.

The Quartet plays an influential role in designing European Union policy toward the Arab region and is an unofficial gathering composed of the United States, the European Union, the United States, and Russia. The stated goal of the body was to help Israelis and Palestinians implement the Mitchell Recommendations and the Tenet Plan, and to contribute to “putting an end to the violence accompanying the Intifada, and to resume the peace process.” During 2002, the Quartet formulated the “roadmap.” The creation of the Quartet was seen by some as an attempt to organize the competition between the United States and the European Union in the region.³⁷

c. The position of the European Union toward the plan for unilateral withdrawal from Gaza

³⁶ John Marco, “Europe and the Middle East: A Desire Awaiting Ability! (A French Perspective)”, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

³⁷ Abdel Hakim Halasa, “The European Role in the Peace Process, The Unilateral Israeli Withdrawal, and the Victory of Hamas in the Legislative Elections”: http://www.oppc.pna.net/mag/mag22/new_page_2.htm.

The European Union supported Israel's unilateral steps to withdraw from Gaza, despite their violation of the roadmap proposed by the Quartet. In its third phase, the plan contained an article stating the need for "the two sides [to] reach a final and comprehensive agreement that ends the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 2005, through a compromise negotiated between the parties on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, and 1397, ending occupation and guaranteeing an agreed upon, fair, and realistic solution to the question of the refugees, and a negotiated solution for the status of Jerusalem that takes into consideration the political and religious interests of both sides; achieving the two state solution."³⁸

Europe played a key role after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, when the Palestinian National Authority, Israel, and Egypt reach an agreement permitting the opening of the Rafah border crossing on the Palestinian-Egyptian border, conditional on the presence of European observers with authorities determined in the agreement signed between the concerned parties. Based on that, Israel transferred security responsibility over the crossing to the Palestinian Authority under the supervision of European observers charged with overseeing the movement of those entering and leaving through surveillance cameras. As for the importing of goods into the Gaza Strip, this remained under Israeli control.

Following the events in Gaza that resulted in Hamas taking control of the Strip in June 2007, the European observers withdrew from the crossing under the pretext that the Palestinian Authority was no longer present, which led to the complete closure of the crossing and to the Strip's falling under Israeli siege.³⁹

d. The position of the European Union toward Hamas following its victory in the 2005 legislative elections

In 2003, Hamas was placed on the European terror list. Then-French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin announced after the September 2003 meeting of European Union foreign ministers that the member states had unanimously decided to include Hamas on the list of terrorist organizations, and to freeze its assets in European countries.

After Hamas' participation in the 2005 mayoral elections, some confusion arose in the posture of the European Union. In the post-election phase, the European Union adopted the conditions of the Quartet, and European states attempted to push Hamas to approve these principles, one way

³⁸ Issam Hamdan Mohammad, "The Role of the European Union in Political Development in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (1991-2007)", op.cit., pp. 106-107.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 108-110.

or another, in order to be a principle partner; otherwise, it would have to face a political and economic siege.⁴⁰

The position of the European Commission, declared after Hamas' win in the legislative elections, was specific and clear to the effect that it would deal with any Palestinian government that resorted to peaceful means. The European Union used the card of economic assistance to pressure Hamas after its victory in the elections. The European Commission's Council of External Relations and General Affairs Council issued a decision on April 10, 2006 halting assistance to the Palestinian government and severing political communications until Hamas committed to the principles of peace as enunciated by the Quartet. As for the high representative for foreign and security policy, Javier Solana, in an address to the European Parliament in Strasburg on April 5, 2006, he expressed his disappointment at the failure of the Palestinian government formed by Hamas to acknowledge the concepts of peaceful resolution based on abandoning violence, recognizing Israel, and accepting the two-state solution. Solana cited these European conditions as the only way to engage in dialogue with Hamas, arguing that the European Union was not aiming to sabotage the Hamas government. Hamas, he said, must adopt the Quartet's conditions regarding the peace process, and respect the law and peaceful rotation of power, which would qualify it for political partnership with the international community.⁴¹

e. The position of the European Union regarding the siege of Gaza

The European Union then announced the disbursement of 120 million Euros to the Palestinian side to pay for fuel imported from Israel, as well as to support the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees, on the condition that these funds did not reach the Palestinian government formed by Hamas. The European position was made clear in a decision issued by the EU foreign ministers, upon meeting in Luxemburg on April 10, 2006, in which they affirmed the freezing of direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority, an escalation of the collective punishment imposed following the Palestinians' democratic choice.

At a meeting of the Quartet on May 9, 2006, French President Jacques Chirac proposed the creation of a trust fund managed by the World Bank to pay the salaries of Palestinian civil servants. Chirac's proposal evolved into a European position based on the creation in June 2006 of what was called the "temporary international mechanism" in order to transfer money to Palestinian individuals through banks without the funds passing through the Palestinian government.

⁴⁰ Osama Hamdan, "The European Stances in Dealing with Palestinian Resistance Movements: Hamas as an Example", op. cit .p.10.

⁴¹ Al-Zaytoon Center for Studies and Consultations, Information Report (16): The Role of the European Union in the Course of the Peaceful Resolution of the Palestinian Cause, op.cit. pp. 48-49.

Economic sanctions remained in place against the Palestinian Authority until an emergency cabinet was formed on June 17, 2007 by an order from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The European Union welcomed this government and announced the ending of economic sanctions against the Palestinian Authority.

The European stance vis-à-vis the Gaza siege did not go beyond verbal demands to end it and open the crossings, and the provision of European humanitarian assistance. Then-European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner urged Israel on February 20, 2008 to lift the siege on the Gaza Strip and to open the border crossings in order to ease the situation on Palestinians living in Gaza. She also expressed concern regarding the humanitarian situation in the Strip, asserting that the European Union continued to work to lessen the suffering of the Gaza Strip population through several measures, including humanitarian aid.⁴²

f. The European Union position regarding the aggression against Gaza

The European position regarding the aggression against Gaza was subject to a host of determinants, chiefly:

- The general position toward Hamas, with the European Union adopting the conditions of the Quartet in its relationship with the Hamas movement. This engendered the general stance of the Union, which affected the positions of states that were not members of the EU;
- Changes affecting the European Union and its foreign policy, including a shift in the French position that supported the Palestinian cause since the arrival of Nicholas Sarkozy to power; and
- The European position regarding the Rafah crossing. The Europeans were an important party in the management of the crossing, and the departure of European observers led to its closure, which signified that the Europeans represented a party to the siege imposed against the Gaza Strip.

Due to these considerations, European action was expressed during the aggression against the Gaza Strip, through two main measures:

⁴² Ibid, pp.50-51.

The European Union resolution calling for the halting of the aggression

The EU member states convened on December 30, 2008 and adopted a resolution that included several solutions to end the crisis, including:

- An immediate, permanent, and unconditional ceasefire, the halting of missile launches by Hamas, and the stopping of Israeli military actions; and
- The resolution stressed the importance of resuming the peace process as per Security Council Resolution 1850. It should be noted that the European position did not condemn Israeli military operations, or the war crimes committed by Israel against civilians, calling on both sides to cease their operations, as if there were a veritable war on going between the two sides.⁴³

The policy of French president Sarkozy during the aggression

The French president's statements, which he termed the French Initiative, called for:

- A ceasefire;
- Opening passages for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians in Gaza; and
- Providing guarantees for Israel's security, and the halting of missile attacks against its territory from Gaza.

The European position regarding the aggression against the Gaza Strip was characterized by great confusion, morphing into several European positions rather than a unified one. The Czech prime minister, whose country then held the Union's rotating presidency, said that Israel's was a "defensive war", and while he later backtracked, this did not change the impact of the statement. As for France, it focused on demanding a ceasefire based on humanitarian arguments, while at the same time indirectly placing the responsibility for the aggression on Hamas, since it was the party that had not agreed to extend the previous truce. Great Britain, on the other hand, adopted a position that was not trenchant, but had a stronger tone in demanding an immediate ceasefire.

With the announcement of the ceasefire, the European position took two tracks:

⁴³ Raed Nu'airat, "The International Positions Regarding the Aggression", in: Abdel Hamid Al-Kayyali (Editor), *Studies in the Israeli Aggression Against the Gaza Strip*, (Arabic), Beirut: Al-Zaytoon Center for Studies and Consultations, 2009, pp. 232-234.

- Participating in naval supervision to stop arms smuggling into Gaza, per an American-European agreement (meetings followed in Brussels to coordinate efforts on that front); and
- Contributing to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, which the European Union linked to the formation of a unity government in which the Palestinian presidency would participate.⁴⁴

g. The 2009 Swedish initiative

A draft resolution proposed by the Swedish presidency of the EU regarding a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital represented a major turn in European diplomacy. Since the 1991 Madrid Conference, Europe had not taken positions independently of American policies in the Middle East in such a clear manner. The draft clearly stated that the future Palestinian state should include the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, which was considered a European achievement that lifted the low ceiling of the “roadmap”.⁴⁵

The Swedish initiative elicited angry reactions in Israel, followed by rapid maneuvers on all political and diplomatic levels with the aim of aborting the initiative. Israel called on European leaders, asking them to oppose the Swedish draft, and affirmed its position that the European Union must not determine *a priori* the results of the final-status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Israel also warned that the Swedish initiative, which called for adherence to international law regarding Jerusalem, would not contribute to the resumption of the peace process, and would in fact lead to the marginalization of the European role, undermining the ability of the European Union to participate as an important mediator in the peace process. Israel also called on the European Union to exert pressure on the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table.⁴⁶

In a joint declaration of the EU states, European foreign ministers in Brussels expressed their concern at the paralysis of the peace process, affirming that they had never recognized Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, and that they rejected alterations made to borders after that date, except for those approved by both sides. Thus, the statement was made less sharp than the

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 235.

⁴⁵ Khalid Sa'd Zaghoul, “Europe and Israel... Tense Relations?”, *International Politics*, (Arabic), Issue 179, January 2010, p. 111.

⁴⁶ Osama Farouk Mkheimar, “The European Stance towards Development in the Peace Process”, *Middle East Papers Journal*, (Arabic), Issue 47, January 2010, pp. 80-81.

original Swedish draft, with European ministers refusing to be more specific regarding the borders of a future Palestinian state. The statement also said that the Union would not accept any alterations to the 1967 borders.⁴⁷

h. The European Union's position toward the Palestinian effort to UN Bid for Palestine statehood

Although the European Union was conspicuously slow in enunciating a stance over the UN membership request presented by the Palestinian Authority on September 20, 2011, the Union's preference for reaching a solution through negotiations was of long standing. In this regard, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Catherine Ashton, paid a visit to the region on June 16, 2011, even as US Middle East envoy David Hill and White House Middle East advisor Dennis Ross were in the region for the same purpose, which was the revival of the peace process and the resumption of negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.⁴⁸

Divisions within the European Union over recognition of a Palestinian state

In general terms, the European Union states are divided in terms of their voting stance on the declaration of a Palestinian state into three clusters; the first includes the countries that would possibly oppose the declaration, headed by Germany; the second groups many East European countries that are hesitant in determining their voting positions; and the third contains states that are likely to support the Palestinian state, headed by the United Kingdom and France and also including Sweden and Portugal.⁴⁹

The positions of the major powers in the European Union

The British position: British Prime Minister David Cameron informed his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, that the United Kingdom might declare its support for the desire of the Palestinian Authority in announcing an independent Palestinian state if the paralysis in the immobile peace process were to persist. David Cameron warned Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu that the UK is prepared to recognize an independent Palestine at a United Nations meeting in September. A senior Downing Street source made clear Britain is ready to recognize a Palestinian state when he declared 'Our clear preference is for a negotiated settlement where everyone can endorse a two state solution.'⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Israel warns the European Union against supporting the declaration of a Palestinian state", Al-Shuruq online, 19/6/2011, (Arabic), <http://www.echoroukonline.com/ara/international/77818.html>

⁴⁹ Khalid Shmitt, "An Israeli Scheme to Prevent the Declaration of the State of Palestine", Al-Jazeera.net, 11/6/2011. (Arabic), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/917D1D20-3472-4038-AFA6-8AD4E0428DA9.htm>

⁵⁰ "Cameron threatens to recognise Palestine state unless Israel opens peace talks", Mail Online, May 4, 2011, , <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1383670/David-Cameron-threatens-recognise-Palestine-state-unless-Israel-opens-peace-talks.html#ixzz1fN9zmrFG>

The French position: France revealed that together with other European states, it was considering recognition of a Palestinian state after the membership request was presented. This was announced by the French ambassador to the UN, Gerard Araud, during a Security Council meeting on the Middle East, the aim having been to provide a political horizon to re-launch the peace process. He also affirmed that the Palestinian people's aspirations in the establishment of a sustainable state that exists in peace and security, side-by-side with Israel, are not less legitimate than those currently being expressed across the region, adding that the international community had no other choice but to respond to these aspirations.⁵¹

The German position: reports in Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine said that German Chancellor Angela Merkel rejected the effort to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state and that Germany viewed this attempt as hasty and negative.⁵²

The Israeli move to abort the declaration of a Palestinian state at the United Nations

Before Mahmoud Abbas stood at the lectern of the United Nations, presenting a formal request for Palestine's membership in the organization, the Israeli Foreign Ministry had prepared a secret plan to involve its diplomats in all countries – especially European ones – in a broad campaign aimed at securing a rejection of the Palestinian declaration when it was voted on in the United Nations. This plan was formulated by the secretary general of the Foreign Ministry, Rafael Barak, and other senior officials. The plan stressed the importance of diplomats' using active social forces, such as Jewish groups and non-governmental organizations, in addition to the employment of the media and the coordinating of public diplomacy campaigns to affect public opinion and the influential actors in the targeted countries.

Conclusion:

This study has shown that despite the efforts exerted by the European Union to earn an active and effective role in the Middle East peace process, its political role remains extremely limited and disproportionate to the amount of economic and financial aid that it extends to both sides of the conflict. This role faces a critical challenge due to its complete inability to influence events. This can be explained by a number of reasons, headed by the United States' discomfort with the idea of the European Union's participating in the formulation of general Western policy toward

⁵¹ « Reconnaître la Palestine, la France y pense », Europe 1, April 21, 2011
<http://www.europe1.fr/International/Reconnaitre-la-Palestine-la-France-y-pense-509693/>

⁵² "Lip Service Is No Longer Sufficient for the Palestinians", *Der Spiegel*, September 16, 2011
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,786684,00.html>

the Middle East region. This limited European role has also to do with the importance of the United States and its role in achieving European security in the cases of several member states. The European Union's weak influence over the path of peaceful resolution in the Middle East is also a result of the EU's inability to formulate a unified foreign policy due to the varying positions of the major member states regarding peaceful settlement, as well as Israel's reservations about the inclusion of Europe as an active party.

Through this study, one also can draw a broad outline for EU policy toward the Palestinian issue, represented in the following elements:

1. The European Union has a limited political role, only intervening in instances where the American role recedes. Even then, however, such interventions are usually limited, and declared positions are rarely transformed into programs, policies, or executive mechanisms;
2. The European Union undertakes an active economic role by funding a specific notion of peaceful settlement that is supported by the United States. It also contributes by offering humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and financial aid to Israel, with which it attempts to build closer commercial relations. This comes in tandem with the increasing economic importance of the European Union globally and regionally, but this economic role, is not employed as an effective tool for political pressure on the Israeli side to be an active and effective partner in the peace process;
3. The European Union launches regional initiatives to confront some American initiatives, in order to maintain what Europe considers to be regional stability and to protect European interests. For instance, the European Union proposed the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (EUROMED) project to stand up to the Middle East Project, as well as the "Union for the Mediterranean" initiative to be facing the Greater Middle East Initiative;
4. The ranking of the Palestinian cause on the foreign policy agenda of the European Union has not changed, despite the widening of the agenda due to the Union's expansion;
5. Crises in the Arab region have always been, and will remain, a litmus test to examine the rigidity of the European political structure.

The Arab states and the Palestinians must work to organize efforts and coordinate policies under a single umbrella – with the Arab League as a preferred candidate – in order to develop Arab-European cooperation to include the political aspects so that Europe's role is no longer limited to

the economic sponsorship of the peace process. The European Union finds justifications for its meek positions on Arab causes, specifically the Palestinians issue, in the absence of coherence in visions and policies among Arab states, and among the Palestinians, regarding these same questions. This reflects a tragic irony: instead of the Palestinian cause combining the wills of Arab states, above any differences, for the achievement of a lofty goal (the liberation of the land), the history of the Palestinian cause bears witness that it has always been, and remains, an arena for Arab struggles and divisions. A clear manifestation of this reality is the current tension among Arab countries and their division between “moderate states” and “rejectionist states.” The matter is further complicated with the presence of divisions on the Palestinian scene between the movements of Fatah and Hamas. It is indispensable to work on unifying Palestinian and Arab ranks to attract further support for the Palestinian cause, and to use all available means of pressure to push the European Union into a greater political role in the peace process. This could take place through the formation of strong Arab lobby groups, i.e. an “Arab Lobby” that exerts pressure on the major European states inside the Union in a manner that supports Arab and Palestinian goals.

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