



European Foreign Policy and the Arab-Israeli Dispute: Much Ado About Nothing?*

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The Arab-Israeli issue is one of the oldest themes addressed by European political cooperation (EPC) and it has been a prevalent topic for about two decades,¹ during which an identifiable European core position has emerged. Significant developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, namely the end of the cold war and the decision of the EC Member States to deepen their partnership through a Political Union and a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), suggested a more active involvement by Europe in international affairs and Middle Eastern problems. But a careful assessment of the European record during the 1990s demonstrates that Europe has been of little influence in the monitoring of the Arab-Israeli peace process and the management of the numerous crises that emerged and currently hinder the whole process. Even when the EC/EU has shown the will to play a role and had ideas of its own, practically it never carried out its policies. Of course, while many options underlying the peace process launched in 1991 match some of the principles long promoted by the Europeans, close examination shows that direct European influence has remained marginal.

Circumstances have evolved significantly since the second Intifada erupted in September 2000, with the changes of government and administration respectively in Israel and the USA in early 2001, and with the global war against terrorism launched in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks on US territory.² But though some recent analyses attempt to demonstrate that in

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¹ The issue has scored about one quarter of all the EC statements (73) from 1970 to 1986. See Rémy Leveau, 'Le Moyen-Orient' in Françoise de La Serre, Jacques Leruez and Helen Wallace (eds), *Les Politiques Etrangères de la France et de la Grande-Bretagne depuis 1945* (FNSP, Paris, 1990), p. 209.

² For different insights on the incidence of these changes on the Arab-Israeli peace process, see Jerrold D. Green, 'La Politique Américaine et le Conflit Israélo-Arabe' (2002) 3 *Politique Etrangère*, pp. 617–628; Charmaine Seitz, 'The Palestinian Elections That Never Were', *Middle East Report*, 24 January 2003 <www.merip.org/mero/mero012403.html>; Geoffrey

this new context ‘an active role for the EU in Middle East peacemaking has become possible’,³ the latest developments display abundant evidence that the EU is nowhere close to becoming a significant peacemaker.

Emerging from these long-term observations, the key hypothesis is that the EU is both unable and unwilling to assume the role of a significant world power that is supposed to resort to persuasion as well as coercion to assert itself in such a conflict. The development of the argument will go through three steps. The first one will highlight the key stances adopted by the EC/EU from the early 1970s to the late 1990s and the extent to which these stances have had influence. The second one will attempt to explain and illustrate the on-going ‘Power Deficit’⁴ of Europe through an analysis of its identity and scope as an international actor. Based on a parallel approach, the last step will focus on the most recent period and uncover the main elements that belie positive assessments of European action even as a member of the ‘Quartet’ that gathers together the USA, Russia, the UN and the EU in an effort to revive the peace process.⁵

I European Positions 1973–2000: An Assessment

It took Europe several decades to elaborate what can be viewed today as a common core position. As these decades brought substantial developments at every relevant level,⁶ a progressive shift in European attitudes vis-à-vis

Aronson, ‘Au Proche-Orient, les Partis Pris de la Maison Blanche’ (May 2002) *Le Monde Diplomatique*, pp. 18–19; Charles D. Smith, ‘The “Do More” Chorus in Washington’, *Middle East Report*, 15 April 2002 <www.merip.org/mero/mero041502.html>; Jeff Halper, ‘Sharon's National Unity Government. Shoring Up the “Iron Wall”’, *Middle East Report*, 13 March 2001 <www.merip.org/mero/mero031301.html>.

³ Ben Soetendorp, ‘The EU's Involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: the Building of a Visible International Identity’ (2002) 7 EFA Rev, pp. 283–295 at p. 283.

⁴ This is the title of a book edited by Barbara Roberson. See Barbara Roberson (ed.), *The Middle East and Europe: the Power Deficit* (Routledge, London, 1998).

⁵ The Quartet is an informal arena where the four actors started consultations in the aftermath of the Second Intifada. Although some observers say that it was created during the Clinton Administration (see the Summary of the First Working Group Meeting about ‘The United States and Germany in the Middle East’ in the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, <www.aicgs.org/events/2003/middleeast_summary.shtml>), the Quartet became familiar to the public in April 2002, when the Israeli wide-ranging assaults on Palestinian cities compelled the Americans to join other diplomatic efforts to help ease tension.

⁶ Developments can be summarized as follows: first, the actors of the conflict, and its structure and nature, evolved, as did the regional system; secondly the international scene also underwent major changes, particularly with the end of the cold war and the assertion of the USA as the sole enduring superpower; thirdly, the European polity changed deeply with the successive enlargements and the many practical and institutional developments that took place.

the Arab-Israeli conflict materialized through a growing awareness of the Palestinian reality, an increasing will to play a role in the resolution of the conflict and a diversification of the initiatives and tools of intervention. The evolution didn't take place in a steady and linear pattern: involvement has been occasional and hesitant for years, with a few pioneering stances completing initial steps and paving the way to greater involvement, particularly as the Oslo peace process started to lose momentum.

1. European Involvement from a Historical Standpoint

The then nine Member States made their first official contribution to the search for peace a month after the beginning of the Yom Kippur War by issuing a statement (6 November 1973) that referred to UN resolution 242 and mentioned the 'legitimate rights' of the Palestinians while the resolution used the term 'refugees'.⁷ This statement was very important because for the first time the EC Member States departed from their previous rather unconditional support to Israel and explicitly broke with the American vision. This new European concern about the Palestinian question grew stronger as the American step-by-step diplomacy failed to yield tangible results because of what was perceived as Israel's intransigence. Hence, after the victory of the hard line Likud in May 1977, the EC leaders went a step further by proclaiming on 29 June 1977 that an overall and workable settlement should necessarily acknowledge the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a homeland and that any negotiation should include Palestinian representation. When President Sadat made his dramatic overture in November 1977, the Europeans welcomed it but emphasized their attachment to comprehensive negotiations leading to a just and lasting settlement. This 'reserve' hardened as talks about Palestinian autonomy in the framework of the Camp David process conspicuously went into a deadlock. Though under heavy pressure from both Israel and the USA, the EC leaders asserted on 13 June 1980 Palestinians' full right to implement self-determination, the necessity of associating the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) with any peace settlement, and the willingness of the EC Member States to monitor this settlement and to get in touch with all the parties, including the PLO, to elaborate accordingly a European peace initiative.⁸ However, by July 1981 and the assumption of the

⁷ For further details see Françoise de La Serre, 'L'Europe des Neuf et le Conflit Israélo-Arabe' (1974) 4 Vol. XXIV *Revue Française de Science Politique*, pp. 801–811.

⁸ For an overview on the evolution of the EC Member States' perceptions of and attitudes towards the Camp David process and the inception of the Venice initiative, see Ilan Greilsammer, and Joseph Weiler, 'European Political Cooperation and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: an Israeli Perspective' in Ilan Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler (eds), *Europe and Israel: Troubled Neighbours* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1988), pp. 140–146.

EC presidency by the United Kingdom, the European resolve faded away for a long time, the only noticeable actions being the upgrading of relations with the PLO and an increased aid to the Palestinians in the occupied territories starting from 1986. But when the situation deteriorated in 1986–1987, the Europeans felt it necessary to come up with new proposals. At the end of February 1987, the foreign ministers lent their ‘full support for the first time to the idea of a Middle East peace conference involving Russia, America and the regional powers, and said the Europeans were “willing to play their part” in bringing the conference about’.⁹ These orientations were reinforced by the eruption of the Intifada and the violent Israeli reaction, and in December 1988 the Europeans finally appointed a contact group of foreign ministers entrusted with promoting the principle of a peace conference.

In the following months and years, events unfolded dramatically and left the then 12 Member States again in a reactive position. When in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War the USA decided to seek a definitive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Europeans asserted their desire to participate in the forthcoming conference but they found themselves confined to the multilateral track. A couple of years later, when the PLO and the Israelis signed the unexpected Oslo agreement, the EU pledged to sustain financially the peace process and the establishment of a Palestinian National Authority. Then in November 1995, the now 15 European Union Members States launched a new Mediterranean initiative that was more or less supposed to back the peace process on the regional level by improving the economic and political relations between all the Mediterranean countries.

The first setbacks of the peace process following the assassination of Rabin and the election of Netanyahu (May 1996) ushered a new period in which the Europeans pressured for a more political role as the USA appeared unable to efficiently handle the unfolding crises. On 1 October 1996, the EU Member States issued a severe statement exhorting the defiant Netanyahu government to respect the obligations contracted by his country. In an unprecedented step, they entrusted a special envoy with an innovative role. M.A. Moratinos was quick to tailor a modest yet helpful role: in the first year of his mandate he managed to fill ‘the vacuum created by the stalemate in the process and the reduced activity of US mediator Dennis Ross’ and to maintain ‘momentum between Israel and the PLO, that is, in providing additional assurances for the January 1997 Hebron agreement, and in arranging the Weizman-Arafat meeting’.¹⁰ The Hebron episode is of particular importance because for ‘the

⁹ Richard Owen, ‘European Alarm over the Middle East: Twelve Propose International Peace Conference’, *The Times*, 24 February 1987.

¹⁰ Joseph Alpher, ‘The Political Role of the European Union in the Arab-Israel Peace Process: An Israeli Perspective’ (1998) 4 *The International Spectator*, pp. 80–81.

first time that the EU was actively involved in the US peace diplomacy and was able to demonstrate its value to the peace process'.¹¹

As the deadlock persisted, the Europeans devised a 'code of conduct' suggesting practical steps to relieve the distrust between Palestinians and Israelis and to resume talks. As the situation further deteriorated with the Americans standing still, the European Commission issued in January 1998 a report on Europe's role in the peace process that stated that no real progress could be expected if the parties involved didn't fully abide by their international commitments. It suggested re-evaluating the dialogue with Israel and re-examining the EU's relations with the USA, pleading for participation alongside the Americans in support of the bilateral negotiations. When the interim period scheduled at Oslo was about to elapse, the European leaders, meeting in Berlin in March 1999, officially declared that the Palestinians had the permanent and unrestricted right to a state. This move didn't however enhance the EU position. As new elections brought a Labour government in Israel, the American administration revived its peace efforts and the EU re-adopted a low profile although the appointment of Solana improved its potential visibility. Therefore, the EU was excluded from US efforts and particularly from the Camp David summit of July 2000, and they watched with great impotence the summit fail and the second Intifada erupt.

2. The European Influence: A Modest Score

This brief review undeniably shows a growing involvement of the EC/EU and an increased 'visibility' in the long term. Some of the European positions were highly valuable since they had a real effect at the symbolic level by making the unspeakable 'speakable'. Stressing the national rights of the Palestinians, envisaging a Palestinian homeland, granting the PLO national and diplomatic legitimacy, calling the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories illegal; all such initiatives helped to modify the perceptions of the conflict and suggested accordingly new recipes for peace. The Europeans particularly contributed to the promotion of the now familiar precept that supposes that the creation of a Palestinian state is the fundamental prerequisite for an enduring peace.

In parallel the EU has often endorsed the role of guarantors of American initiatives: though they constantly attempted to remain in full charge of the brokerage of peace, the Americans always requested Europe's support because it appeared to be a legitimating factor and a convenient tool to appease the doubts of moderate Arab states. For example, the Carter administration laid heavy pressure on the Europeans to get the EC's full approval of the Camp

¹¹ Ben Soetendorp, note 3 above, p. 290.

David process; later on, it obtained EC Member State participation in the international force for Sinai in 1981. During the last decade too, European approval has always been sought by the USA and the various parties at every major circumstance. Moreover the EU attempted to offer, as much as possible, practical and helpful services: it monitored the first elections in the occupied territories in January 1996; when security issues gained top priority on the Israeli agenda, it adopted a common action allowing it to help the Palestinian Authority in its fight against terrorism.¹² By means of its Barcelona process, the EU attempted to weave a regional network of multilevel cooperation that would enhance perceptions of mutual benefit. On a strictly financial level, the EU became the most important supporter of the peace process. As underlined by the European Commission, the EU and its Member States' assistance between 1993 and 1997 amounted to 54 per cent of the international effort, and it helped in preventing a total collapse of the Palestinian economy when the territories were locked up.¹³

But however important the European efforts were, they lacked political depth and weren't enough to give the EU a leading role comparable to that of the USA: until the second Intifada all the negotiations and agreements were directly monitored by successive US administrations, and the EU has only been associated at the margins to a few of these diplomatic undertakings. The European Parliament itself complained about the fact that the EU was not included in the discussions on the future of the region in spite of its economic role, and it stated that a strengthening of the CFSP in that domain was necessary.¹⁴ This was a mere recognition of the fact that economic wealth is not enough to secure an efficient foreign policy and that in order 'To be credible in purpose and enduring in effect it needs a center of political decision-making, a common political will and the appropriate instruments that make the latter come to pass'.¹⁵

II The European Union: Acting Outside the Realm of Power Politics

The Arab-Israeli dispute has so far escaped the positive effects of the transformation of international relations in the sense of the relative loosening

¹² Common action 97/289/PESC, 29 April 1997.

¹³ European Commission, General Report 1998, <www.europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/rg/fr/1998/x0849.htm>. For figures covering the whole post-Oslo period (1994–2002), see the Annex to the European Commission document IP/02/1561 (28 November 2002) about the approval of a EUR29 million aid package in support of the Palestinian reform and in reaction to the deteriorating situation <www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/02/1561|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display>.

¹⁴ OJ C 175, 21.6.1999.

¹⁵ Curt Gasteyger, *An Ambiguous Power: The European Union in a Changing World* (Bertelsmann, Gütersloh, 1996), p. 57.

of the rigors of the self-help Realist world. It is still an active conflict that regularly claims lives and threatens to destabilize the whole region. It has resisted 55 years of international law-making with dozens of UN resolutions and several agreements. It has also contributed to the persistent social and economic underdevelopment of the whole region. Consequently, it confronts the EU with the enduring realities of international relations that are still characterized by the possible use of force and by issues of might and power, and it questions the role of the EU as an international actor.

As such, the EC/EU has displayed a permanent will to facilitate the settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute, but this will has never been translated into effective policies because numerous weaknesses hinder such policies. My contention is that in spite of the development of its foreign policy, the EU is not only unable but also unwilling to take upon itself the responsibilities of a world power that are needed in the settlement of as complex and volatile a conflict as the Arab-Israeli one.

1. 'Power Deficit' and Self-Restraint Mechanisms

The EU is not a traditional actor since it is neither a state nor a classical regional organization,¹⁶ and 'in spite of the creation of an institutionalized framework for the making of a common foreign policy at the EU level, foreign policy making in Western Europe is still the foreign policy of 15 nation-states rather than the foreign policy of one supranational state'.¹⁷ Despite the improvements brought by the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties and by less solemn decisions and new practices, the intergovernmental character of the CFSP has been maintained through a set of institutional bolts.

There is a first obvious explanation to this situation: each Member State is a 'state', that is, an independent and distinct foreign policy actor. As such the EU members have been careful to retain important powers in the making and implementation of the CFSP in order not to get involved in policies they don't agree with and not to relinquish one of the major components of their sovereignty. This concern corresponds to one of the two fundamental dilemmas thoroughly analysed by N. Gnesotto and which have weighed heavily on the emergence of a political Europe: the 'Nation or Integration' dilemma and the 'America or Europe' dilemma.¹⁸

¹⁶ For a discussion about the relevance of considering the EU as a foreign policy actor, see Brian White, 'European Challenge to Foreign Policy Analysis' (1999) 1 *European Journal of International Relations*, pp. 37–66.

¹⁷ Ben Soetendorp, *Foreign Policy in the European Union: Theory, History and Practice* (Longman, London, 1999), p. 147.

¹⁸ The author has investigated these two dilemmas at length in a book about Europe and Power. In the introduction she states that: 'L'Amérique ou l'Europe, la nation ou l'intégration,

a) *The 'Nation/Integration' dilemma and its repercussions on the Arab-Israeli scene.* The first dilemma is about how to conciliate national sovereignties with a shared political power. The Member States have unequal abilities and resources and enjoy very different positions on the world scene. Each of them has deep-rooted foreign policy-making methods and diplomatic traditions. They don't often have identical relations to third parties. They don't necessarily have the same analysis of external issues, or the same interests, concerns and stakes. They also do not always react to the same events in the same manner. Besides, the previous traumatic European experience of power has ensured an enduring suspicion of whatever may approximate power politics. Therefore, distrust about each other's ambitions has not totally disappeared in spite of the exponential development of dialogue. Such a discomfort is particularly felt when sensitive issues are at hand, such as those of the Middle East.

As regards the Arab-Israeli issue, the combination of the institutional bolts that reflect the permanent tension between 'integration' and 'nation' and of the lasting divergences between the Member States has weakened European policies in many ways. Firstly it accounts for the 'smallest common denominator' phenomenon which was denounced as early as the 1970s and which has deprived the EC/EU of an indispensable margin in the follow up of the taken decisions. Another related problem is the sluggishness of reactions: verbal reactions to particular events may have become quicker to appear, but the elaboration of political initiatives remains very slow when it occurs at all. A third phenomenon is the chronic inconstancy and shortsightedness of European policies. For example, in July 1997, the EU signed two agreements with Israel, notwithstanding the obstructive policy of the Netanyahu government which the EU rebuked. Another weakness can be described as the occurrence of scattered reactions and/or contradictory stances on the part of national administrations in the face of a specific situation or event. For example, in September 1996, the foreign ministers of the 15 Member States were not able to overcome their differences concerning the appropriate answer to give to the Israeli Prime Minister who warned the European troika, on the eve of its Middle Eastern tour, not to even consider the possibility of visiting the Palestinians in their unofficial head office in Jerusalem. The last weakness is what can be depicted as 'free-riding'. For example, when in April 1996 the Peres government undertook massive retaliation on Lebanon, French diplomacy went into intensive activity but it hardly included its European partners.

tels sont les deux dilemmes fondamentaux, et jamais résolus, qui opposent les différents partenaires de la Communauté puis de l'Union...'. Nicole Gnesotto, *La Puissance et l'Europe* (Presses de Sciences Po, Paris 1998), p. 11.

b) *The 'America/Europe' dilemma and Europe's high sensitivity to US pressure.* The second dilemma concerns the relations between the USA and Europe. More precisely, it is about the American role in Europe's security, an issue that still strongly influences the degree of European autonomy in foreign policy. Since the end of World War II, the Europeans have sought the protection of the USA, which materialized through the creation of NATO. The primacy of the Atlantic organization has never been seriously questioned even after the cold war. Some progress has been made since the Saint Malo meeting in late 1998 towards the constitution of autonomous European defence capacities,¹⁹ however these capacities, as has been constantly repeated by EU leaders, are not intended to challenge US predominance. On the contrary, it seems that some kind of psychological dependency has survived the cold war, taking discrete guises as it becomes deeply interiorized.

This dependency has been translated as regards the Arab-Israeli dispute into a very high degree of sensitivity to US pressure. From the very beginning of EC involvement, the USA was very hostile to any European meddling. When for example the Camp David process started, the US government 'asked [the EEC Members] explicitly to stay out of Middle East affairs and not to interfere'²⁰ except by unconditionally backing American diplomacy. In 1980, when it became clear that the EEC Members were about to devise an initiative, 'The Carter Administration brought down all its weight and put pressure on those EEC countries that were the most closely bound to the US'.²¹ Consequently, the Venice declaration was much milder than could have been expected. After the Madrid conference in 1991 the Europeans finally accepted the predominance of the US role and in the following years the EU actors became increasingly careful to present themselves as only attempting to back and complement American policies rather than compete with them. This state of mind has induced another source of diplomatic weakness: Europe has never been able to conduct any initiative to its term. For example, the Euro-Arab Dialogue has been emptied of any significant political content due to the suspiciousness of the USA. More recently, when the EU Member States issued their Berlin declaration, the scope of the statement had been immediately downgraded as the Europeans urged Arafat to delay the creation of a Palestinian state.

These few examples show how the fundamental dilemmas that hinder the emergence of an autonomous and consistent EU foreign policy translate into an array of weaknesses and in an undeniable power deficit. But is there a real will to remedy this lack of power? The 15 Member States had an opportunity

¹⁹ For a quick overview on the evolution of the common defence, see Philippe Moreau Defarges, *Les Institutions Européennes* (Colin, Paris, 2001), pp. 175–180.

²⁰ Greilsammer and Weiler, note 8 above, p. 139.

²¹ Greilsammer and Weiler, note 8 above, p. 142.

to move towards a more integrated foreign policy on the occasion of the Nice Treaty. It wasn't used.²² More recently, European divisions and powerlessness during the Second Gulf War led to a new effort towards a more credible defence policy; proposed by only four Member States, this very cautious initiative however bears the hallmarks of both dilemmas and in no way fundamentally overcomes them.²³ This may be because the present situation reflects a general balance that is, for the moment, perfectly *acceptable* to all the actors of EU foreign policy. This balance is no doubt a dynamic one: it has evolved significantly over the last decade and it will probably develop further and bring changes in the CFSP, but it is impossible to say if it would evolve towards more autonomy and integration. For besides the two pending dilemmas, there is an ultimate issue related to the *finalité* of the European polity and its vocation as an international actor, and it is unlikely that the Convention that is currently entrusted with the elaboration of an EU Constitution will manage to deal with all ambiguities.

2. *The European Relationship to Peace and War, Persuasion and Coercion*

Long ago, Raymond Aron isolated one specific element that gives international relations their distinctive feature: the ever-present alternatives of war and peace, military constraint and diplomacy.²⁴ This Realist vision has of course been challenged both by the evolution of the international relations and by new theoretical approaches. Yet even though it has had incalculable effects on the international system, the end of the cold war has not given way to a more peaceful world, and questions of peace and war are still relevant.²⁵ It could be argued that today's conflicts are increasingly settled (if settled) due to the involvement of external actors such as the USA, the UN and the EU. Though they are not often faced by the eventuality of being entangled in a war as peacemakers, these actors are expected to wield 'power', where power – whatever its nature and sources – is defined on the world scene as the capacity

²² For a further discussion on the ambiguities of the Nice Treaty see Françoise de La Serre, 'Le Traité de Nice: Déconstruction ou Refondation de l'Union ?' (2001) 2 *Politique Etrangère*, pp. 258–275.

²³ For a brief analysis of the constraints that weigh on this initiative made on 29 April 2003 by states who were opposed to the Anglo-American war in Iraq, refer to 'France, Allemagne, Belgique et Luxembourg lancent un groupe pionnier dans le domaine de la défense', *Le Monde*, 2 May 2003.

²⁴ Raymond Aron, *Paix et Guerre entre les Nations* (Calmann-Levy, Paris, 1984), pp. 18–19.

²⁵ For a synthetic assessment of the challenges to Realism and its actual status, see Timothy Dunne, 'Realism' in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999), pp. 119–124.

of a political unit to impose its will on other units.²⁶ In fact their leaders don't have to solve the traditional equation of peace and war for their own countries, but that of coercion and persuasion in order to find the efficient blend of both that might bring reluctant actors to compliance.²⁷ This double equation of 'peace and war' and 'persuasion and coercion' offers a relevant tool for understanding Europe's policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute. In fact, this policy has displayed some features that clearly indicate that the EU Member States have chosen to keep the EU outside the scope of power politics, and the examination of Europe's very identity, its stated missions and means of action reinforces this idea.

a) The choice of peace and persuasion. The European project is in itself the consecration of peace between its adherents: it was conceived of as an instrument to eliminate the eventuality of a new war in Europe. Furthermore, to make sure that the ancient 'demons' would not rise again, the Europeans renounced the option to take charge of their own security and accepted US protection instead. This situation has had two contradicting results: on the one hand the EC/EU prospered and became a major economic world power; on the other hand, the absence of a common security and defence policy maintained it in the status of a 'political dwarf'. Nevertheless, the economic stature of the EC/EU allowed it increasingly to involve itself in international affairs. As the EPC and then the CFSP developed, the growing economic leverage of Europe was partly translated into diplomatic tools and it has dedicated itself to the 'exportation' of peace and the promotion of the principles embodied in the UN Charter, principles which have been formalized in all the texts about Europe's role on the international scene.

This ambition generally has been served through a wide variety of 'soft' channels: development programmes, strategic dialogues, free trade, association and cooperation agreements, regional projects such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership etc. On a very few occasions, economic sanctions were taken against actors overtly violating international law. The Balkan conflicts pushed the Europeans to contemplate participating in 'Petersberg' missions, that is peacekeeping intervention. Later on, they undertook the building of a credible EU force dedicated to such missions. So even nascent EU military capacities are only envisaged as tools to serve peace and they do not question Europe's identity as a 'civil' and 'civilizing power' relying on persuasion and 'soft' coercion. Frequently, this preference for the mild tools of

²⁶ Raymond Aron, note 24 above, p. 59.

²⁷ For an insight on the recent developments of diplomacy as regards 'strategies of peace', see Charles-Philippe David, *La Guerre et la Paix: Approches Contemporaines de la Sécurité et de la Stratégie* (Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2000), particularly the last section 'Les Stratégies de Paix', pp. 331–445.

diplomacy has been highlighted, particularly when debate has centred on the practice of conditionality: 'In the EU's application of conditionality, positive measures are preferred, and negative measures de-emphasised. Sanctions, including the suspension of agreements, are to be imposed only as a last resort.'²⁸

*b) The positive 'repertoire of action'.*²⁹ More than anywhere else, Europe has played it 'soft' in the context of the Arab-Israeli dispute: there is nearly nothing in the EC/EU's attitude up to now that might be labelled as real coercion. Except for a few verbal eruptions of criticism towards one of the parties that never had far-reaching effects, and in spite of a large list of theoretically available means of action, the EC/EU has adopted a strictly 'positive' 'repertoire of action' that reflects the consensual preferences of the Member States rather than the assessment of the relative appropriateness and efficiency of the means used. This has translated into an enduring 'incitement' approach to the Arab-Israeli problems rather than a 'punitive' one.

For a long time, the Europeans have relied exclusively on official statements and these still retain an important position. But in the last decade reliance on economic and financial instruments has increased considerably. Immediately after the Oslo agreement was made public, the Israelis and the Palestinians converged on Brussels to ask the EU for active help. As the PLO-Israeli agreement was predicated on the assumption that the economic mechanisms of cooperation were the basis on which peace was to be built,³⁰ and since that logic coincides with the philosophy of the European enterprise, the EU adopted it wholeheartedly. They immediately pledged to back financially the

²⁸ Karen Smith, 'The Use of Political Conditionality in the EU's Relations with Third Countries: How Effective?' (1998) 3 EFA Rev, pp. 253–274 at p. 265. For an additional insight on the European efforts in the field of conflict prevention, promotion of human rights and general support for the spread of democracy, particularly through the use of conditionality, also see Marise Cremona, 'The European Union as an International Actor: the Issues of Flexibility and Linkage' (1998) 3 EFA Rev, pp. 67–94.

²⁹ This concept of 'repertoire of action' has been borrowed from the field of social movements analysis; it refers to the collection of all the strategies a group may employ at one moment to achieve a specific purpose. The extent of this repertoire depends on two things: the resources and 'know-how' available to the group at that time, and its members' representation of the relevance of each of these strategies to reach the goal or of the necessity to use an alternative and unexperienced method (and thus, enlarging the 'repertoire'). Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution* (Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1978), p. 153. Christopher Hill also uses this idea when speaking about the 'repertoire of conflict prevention tools'. See Christopher Hill, 'The EU's Capacity for Conflict Prevention' (2001) 6 EFA Rev, pp. 315–333 at p. 327. Our use of 'repertoire of action' is an attempt to be as comprehensive as possible in our review of available means and tools of action for the European Union.

³⁰ See the analysis of Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient Éclaté, 1956–2000* (Gallimard, Paris, 1999), pp. 707–710.

peace process and to contribute to the economic development of the whole region.³¹

By the end of 1993, the European Council authorized the Commission to negotiate an Association Agreement with Israel. This Agreement was signed under the new Euro-Mediterranean label in November 1995 while another Agreement on scientific and technical cooperation came into effect in April 1996; two further Agreements were signed in 1997. As regards the Palestinians, the European Commission suggested as early as 29 September 1993 to grant them approximately XEU500 million for the 1994–1998 period, and the proposal was adopted by the Council in March 1994. Specific aid was also given for basic needs (the training of the Palestinian police, elections etc.) and infrastructures (such as the Gaza airport, funded on a bilateral basis by some EU Member States). A Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement was signed with the Palestinians in July 1997.

As the peace process started to stumble, European goodwill was repeatedly tested as the parties violated more or less overtly their international commitments. And this goodwill has seldom, if ever, faltered. The most telling indicator is that the EU has until now abstained from using the suspension clauses integrated in its Agreements with both parties though it has the juridical ground to do so. Besides abstaining from the use of economic tools as coercive leverage, Europe has also been cautious not to use symbolic violence.³² It has always avoided irremediably stigmatizing any of the actors of the conflict: it has until now refused to declare Arafat at fault, just as it refused in late 2001 to label the Lebanese Hizbollah a terrorist organization. But all in all, such a benevolent attitude seems to have weakened the EU's credibility in the face of the parties.

Since the early 1970s the Arabs have attempted to push the EC Member States into a more active political role with little success, so until now their eyes are fixed on the USA. When the Arabs turn to Europe in times of crisis, it seems that the only thing they ask for is that it tries to influence the American position on their behalf. For them, the USA is still the only credible peace broker because of its supposed leverage on Israel. For example, in July 1998, when the USA failed to force Netanyahu into a more accommodating position, President Mubarak reasserted nonetheless his faith in the Americans, firmly declaring that they are 'the basis of the peace process' while 'Europe's action

³¹ As early as 8 September 1993, the European Commission adopted a communication about the future of relations and cooperation with the Middle East (Bull. 9-1993, point 1.3.18).

³² We label here as 'symbolic violence' a 'speech act' aimed at stigmatizing an actor and shifting the balance of power at his/her expense by denying the legitimacy of his/her position.

can consolidate the American role, but under no circumstances can it be an alternative to it'.³³

On the other side of the spectrum, the Israelis regularly turn to Europe to ask for new agreements. But when it comes to politics, they are very hostile. Since de Gaulle's tough words on the Israeli pre-emptive use of force in 1967, the Israelis have been worried about the ability of the French to push their European partners towards positions more favourable to the Arabs, and these worries materialized. Even though they have implicitly acknowledged the validity of the principles the Europeans regard as sound basis for an overall and just settlement by taking the road of Madrid and Oslo, the Israelis however continue to see the European efforts as fundamentally biased in favour of the Arabs.³⁴

For the outside observer, this suspicion doesn't account for the real independence Europe has shown in its relations with the Arabs and for its permanent care for Israel in international fora and its effort to promote economic and cooperation ties with Israel. There is abundant evidence that Europe has never engaged in any initiative that could really harm Israel: as François Duchêne put it, their support of Israel's right to survive has always been unquestionable, even though 'that support is set in a European and not an Israeli perspective'.³⁵ Nonetheless, the Europeans have accepted the marginalization to which Israel condemns them and never sanctioned the aggressive attitudes Israel displayed on many occasions. In March 1998, Netanyahu cancelled the dinner he was to offer the British Foreign Minister (acting as the Council's president) because Mr. Cook had dared to criticize the pursuit of Jewish settlement in the Palestinian territories. And when he met his European guest, the Israeli leader squarely told him that he wanted Europe to stop meddling in the peace process. Two months later, when the European Commission proposed on judicial grounds to stop applying ordinary customs advantages to Israeli exports originating from the Jewish settlements,³⁶ Netanyahu warned that if such a decision was taken, his employment policy in favour of the Palestinians would be suspended. As a

³³ 'Israël maintient ses exigences au sujet du redéploiement de ses troupes en Cisjordanie', *Le Monde*, 28 July 1998.

³⁴ Joseph Alpher's article is very telling about the extent of Israeli suspicion toward the EU. In his analysis he gives a list of Israeli objections to a real European mediatory role and suggests that, beside the adoption of less pro-Arab policies, the EU should rely on a low profile and back channel diplomacy wholly supportive of the American peace efforts and avoid any counterproductive move by resorting to economic sanctions against Israel. Joseph Alpher, note 10 above, pp. 82–86.

³⁵ François Duchêne, 'Israel in the Eyes of Europeans: a Speculative Essay' in Ilan Greilsammer and Joseph H. H. Weiler (eds), *Europe and Israel: Troubled Neighbours* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1988), p. 22.

³⁶ Bull. 5-1998, point 1.3.85.

result, the Commission backed off even though the European Parliament and the Council officially supported its proposals.³⁷

III Recent Developments: How Effective a Peacemaker has Europe Become?

These examples, mainly borrowed from the early EPC decades and the 1990s CFSP years, substantiate the idea of a European power deficit. Now remains the question of whether the EU's position on the Middle East chess game has significantly improved with the most recent events. A lot has been expected from EU participation in the Quartet since early 2002; although some elements prove that the Europeans have acquired a higher profile and a better visibility, it is still far from clear whether they have gained the power to influence Arab-Israeli affairs. Therefore, after an attempt to highlight the incentives that push Europe towards more action and the guises this action takes, another one will be made to underscore the factors that still hinder an efficient contribution to the peace process and which are so familiar when compared to the historical record.

1. Filling the Vacuum

The European yearning for a more effective contribution has grown steadily after the outburst of the second Intifada and it has been regularly reaffirmed since. Beyond stated intentions, many developments on the ground explain why the EU increasingly felt compelled to intervene and how it did so.

Since early 1996 the US management of the crises opened the path for a reassessment of the EU's involvement because 'The way that President Clinton's Administration has reacted to Israel's change in mood and government has not inspired confidence in many of the US's European allies'.³⁸ As soon as March 1996, the Clinton Administration displayed in the follow up of the anti-terrorist Sharm el Cheikh summit a clear tendency to assess the problems in terms too close to Israel's own perceptions, which was adamant in considering terrorism as the most immediate threat to the process. When Netanyahu won the Israeli elections in May 1996 and multiplied statements and measures challenging the basic principles of the peace process, the Americans adopted an inert attitude that betrayed their reluctance to

³⁷ Bull. 6-1998, point 1.4.98. The issue has been discussed again when the EU/Israel Association Council met for the second time on 20 November 2001.

³⁸ Claire Spencer, 'New European Approaches to the Middle East Peace Process?' (1997) *Brassey's Defense Yearbook 1997*, pp. 97-163.

press Israel towards a milder position. During this period that witnessed one single positive outcome (the Wye Plantation agreement of October 1998), the conspicuous lack of US resolve strengthened the EU's concern over what they viewed as risks and deficiencies of the USA's policy.³⁹

Moreover, the setbacks of the peace process highlighted the vanity of the massive financial involvement of the EU. On the one hand, 'As the largest single aid donor to the Palestinians, Europe's stake in the Arab-Israeli peace process [has become] direct and material'⁴⁰ and it felt increasingly threatened by Netanyahu's policies which stifled the occupied territories.⁴¹ On the other hand, the blocking of bilateral negotiations seriously endangered the rationale of the EU's financial role in the Middle East and the Mediterranean as a whole. The EU also started to fear the destabilization the stalemate could bring. This concern was clearly stated in the aforementioned European Commission's report of January 1998. And indeed, three months after the failure of the USA to help the parties bridge the remaining gap at the Camp David summit, the long-expected and dreaded destabilization erupted. With the take-over by the new Bush Administration in early 2001, the peace process was deserted by the USA⁴² and the Europeans were left more involved than ever in their attempts to prevent the worse from happening. When they and some Arab leaders finally obtained from the USA the commitment that it pays the agonising peace process attention, they discovered that the new Administration had clear pro-Israeli inclinations⁴³ which hardly could be balanced by the few positive gestures done in favour of the Palestinians (such as Bush's commitment in a speech delivered on 24 June 2002 to the establishment of a Palestinian state by the end of 2005).

Thus reasons for a more effective EU have lately gathered momentum. The question now is what has the EU really done since the beginning of the new Intifada? The first significant contribution to diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring calm dates back to the Sharm el Cheikh meeting of October 2000. There, at Arafat's request, Solana was appointed member of the Mitchell Committee. In early 2001, the EU participated in another last-chance meeting at Taba and its team wrote down what had been proposed by the parties

³⁹ See Volker Perthes, 'Points of Difference, Cases for Cooperation. European Critiques of US Middle East Policy', *Middle East Report*, Fall 1998, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁰ Rosemary Hollis, 'Europe and the Middle East: Power by Stealth?' (1997) 1 *International Affairs*, p. 17.

⁴¹ For an assessment of the debate that took place inside the European Union, see Isabelle Avran, 'Comment l'Europe peut faire pression sur Israël' (July 1998) *Le Monde Diplomatique*, p. 5.

⁴² For an assessment of the Bush Administration policy, see Jerrold Green, note 2 above; and Kenneth Stein, 'La Doctrine Bush et le Moyen-Orient' (2002) 1 *Politique Etrangère*, pp. 149–171.

⁴³ See Geoffrey Aronson, note 2 above, pp. 18–19, and Charles Smith, note 2 above.

and almost agreed upon, with the hope that it might offer a basis for future talks. Then, as US diplomacy retreated, the EU attempted to fill the vacuum while trying to convince its transatlantic counterparts not to disengage. In June 2001, at Göteborg, the European Council endorsed the conclusions of the Mitchell Committee, and as the situation in the occupied territories dramatically deteriorated, the European Commission started to provide the Palestinian Authority (PA) with a monthly budgetary assistance and additional specific aids to counterbalance the effects of the crisis in the territories and 'to preserve some degree of social stability, service delivery, basic health conditions, law and order and a governance structure which can be developed for the future'.⁴⁴

Later on, when attention shifted on the reform of the PA, the EU attempted again to contribute as effectively as possible by bringing new ideas and by pushing the Palestinians towards substantial reform. In February 2002, European officials suggested the organization of Palestinian elections at the municipal, legislative and eventually presidential levels that would be followed by the declaration of a Palestinian state. The French and the Germans came up with separate peace plans that were discussed by their European colleagues but these initiatives were brushed aside when the USA finally accepted in May 2002 to join efforts in the framework of the Quartet. So far, it has initiated a Palestinian movement towards reform and it has worked out a roadmap programming the implementation of the stated objective of a two-states solution by the end of 2005. This roadmap has been recently submitted to the parties and more or less accepted by them.

2. Beyond Visibility: The Persistence of Traditional Weaknesses

This brief account shows that Europe has somehow achieved its 'international actorness'.⁴⁵ It has been welcomed at the negotiating tables, it has spoken with an astonishingly clear and unified voice, it has been consistent in its choices (such as the permanent support to the PA), it has succeeded in partly filling the diplomatic vacuum and in coming up with new ideas, and it has demonstrated a real agreement of all its Member States on their interpretation of the current crisis and on how to get out of it.

Moreover, the EU has managed to influence the course of the crisis by refusing to deny Arafat his legitimacy and by securing a minimal dose of

⁴⁴ See European Commission, 'EU Budgetary Support to the Palestinian Authority' in *The EU & the Middle East: Position & background*, Latest update: 05/08/02, <www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/mepp/faq/index.htm>.

⁴⁵ On the notion of 'international actorness' see Stelios Stavridis and Justin Hutchence, 'Mediterranean Challenges to the EU's Foreign Policy' (2000) 5 EFA Rev, pp. 35–62 at pp. 38–39.

oxygen to the PA to avoid its death. This vital assistance granted the EU a position of strong leverage on the Palestinian leadership: as Chris Patten reminded the European Parliament again in June 2002, 'We have attached clear, concrete and tangible conditions to assistance, and we have obliged the Palestinian Authority to carry out concrete reform measures. Through Commission help the Palestinians have already achieved a lot.'⁴⁶ Thus by saving the PA both symbolically and practically in spite of US condemnation of Arafat and repeated Israeli assaults, the EU has added considerable weight somehow to the course of past and present scenarios and by way of consequence to future ones.

However, two sets of traditional weaknesses still prevent the EU from playing an efficient role in the resumption of the peace process, if one agrees that the peace process must be resumed and that third party intervention is both possible and desirable:⁴⁷ the reliance on a positive repertoire of action, and the high sensitivity to US preferences. One of the first obvious elements that belie the supposedly increased clout of the Europeans is their inability to prevent the situation from worsening. As the violence overwhelmed both the Palestinian and Israeli societies, driving both to extremes, none of the EU efforts to bring them closer or at least to prevent them from slipping farther away has succeeded; even its inquisitorial support to the Palestinian Authority that aimed at making it more credible didn't convince the Israeli government.

The problem partly derives from the fact that the EU has provided a minimal diplomatic service when the USA was absent. Even though the terms of the problem and its solution were more or less clearly defined by the EU and reassessed in internationally accepted texts such as the Mitchell Committee, no diplomatic assault was launched to rush the actors out of the lethal dead end. Instead, European voices repeatedly urged Washington to come back to the Middle Eastern scene. In a typical interview from spring 2001, Solana noted that in the previous months Europe had been more present in the Middle East than the USA and he swiftly added that this wasn't an objective per se, Europe's preference being that Washington remains actively involved.⁴⁸ This position reflects a pervasive yet persistent European

⁴⁶ Chris Patten, Statement to the Foreign Affairs Committee on EU budgetary assistance to the Palestinian Authority, Brussels, 19 June 2002, Document SPEECH/02/293, <www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=SPEECH/02/293|0|RAPID&lg=EN>.

⁴⁷ There is no unanimous agreement about the manageability of the peace process and the desirability of external intervention. Some observers, like J. Green, keep repeating that none but the Palestinians and the Israelis should and can make the peace process progress, while others like Robert Malley, consider that 'Time has come for an effort that is neither top-down nor bottom-up, but outside-in: the forceful presentation by external actors of a comprehensive, fair, and lasting deal.' See respectively Jerrold Green, note 2 above, p. 128; and Hussein Agba and Robert Malley, 'The Last Negotiation. How to End the Middle East Peace Process' (2002) 3 *Foreign Affairs*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Javier Solana, 'L'Europe Puissance' (2001) 2 *Politique internationale*, p. 223.

interiorization of US supremacy, a sentiment that still divides the EU on occasions. For example, when in April 2002 events brought on the European Council's agenda the eventuality of trade sanctions against Israel, no agreement could be reached. While some Members favoured the adoption of sanctions, others 'found such measures counterproductive and preferred to back the Middle East mission of the American Secretary of State, Colin Powell. Now that the USA decided once more to take the lead in Middle East peacemaking, after a long period when it was quite reluctant to do so, the time was not right for high-profile gestures that would strongly antagonize Israel.'⁴⁹

There is still further evidence that the EU, even with its current association with the USA in the framework of the Quartet, has not come closer to 'parity'. Indeed it is far from certain that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have really made the USA embrace a truly multilateral approach to the peace process, as has been argued by B. Soetendorp,⁵⁰ and many examples taken from the Quartet experience irrefutably demonstrate that the formulation of the conditions and contours of a future peace and the agenda are still monopolized by Washington.

When the Quartet was set up, its first objective was to convene a Middle East peace conference in the following months.⁵¹ Yet in early June 2002 Bush espoused the views of Sharon who didn't want the conference to be held: the President squarely stated that the time was not ripe for a Middle East peace summit since 'no one' had confidence in the Palestinian government. Consequently, the project, strongly supported by the EU, had been practically buried. Later that very month, the US President made another statement that drew him farther away from his European allies. While the latter stressed that negotiations should not be left hostage to extremism, Bush asserted that the reform of the PA was a necessary prerequisite. In his view, the reform should entail the departure of Arafat and the setting up of a new constitutional framework. Once this was done, elections could be organized, and the new national leaders would negotiate security agreements with their neighbours and only then could a Palestinian state be created, with provisional borders, that would be entitled to negotiate with Israel final questions before acquiring its definitive status and shape by the end of 2005.

Although they refrained from backing the idea of replacing Arafat, the EU lauded Bush's speech and expressed satisfaction at the renewed US involvement.⁵² When they met again on 17 September, the members of the

⁴⁹ Ben Soetendorp, note 3 above, p. 293.

⁵⁰ Ben Soetendorp, note 3 above, p. 283.

⁵¹ Todds Purdum and David E. Sanger, 'US in surprise announces global talks for Mideast', *New York Times*, 3 May 2002.

⁵² For an assessment of the embarrassment the speech of President Bush caused to the

Quartet adopted a plan that drew closely from the new American orientations and in the following months they attempted to elaborate a roadmap that would allow the implementation of the stated objective of a Palestinian state in 2005. By the time the document – which has been worked out mainly by the then Danish EC presidency – was nearly ready, two crises had gathered momentum: the US-Iraqi one and that of the Israeli government (which ended up with the scheduling of new elections). As a result the US administration gave in to Israeli demands two days before the Quartet was to meet and adopt a final version of the roadmap: Colin Powell stated on 18 December that the US would not allow the roadmap to be adopted before the Israeli elections.⁵³ Unsurprisingly the Americans postponed the publication of the roadmap once again after the Israeli elections, then again when they focused on their war against Iraq. Once the victory was achieved, the USA made the publication of the document conditional on the constitution of a new Palestinian government led by a first Prime Minister who would replace the undesirable President Arafat. One day after the Palestinian representatives approved the government of Mahmoud Abbas, the Quartet officially submitted the roadmap to both parties on 30 April 2003. While Abbas unconditionally accepted the plan, Sharon's government attempted to reject it, until the American resolve compelled it to embrace it (but with a number of reservations the USA promised to take fully into account, which is a first act of unfaithfulness to the role of the Quartet and to the spirit of the roadmap).⁵⁴

Beside this lack of influence on the formulation of preferences and on the agenda, the EU has also displayed an enduringly low profile in its dealings with Israel that frequently meets with rebuff. As early as October 2000, the Israelis charged President Chirac with encouraging terrorism by supporting Arafat's demands during his meeting in Paris with Barak on 5–6 October 2000; consequently the Biarritz Council which was held later that month under the French presidency adopted a very prudent statement. In April 2002, when a high level EU mission was not allowed to meet with the besieged Arafat, Solana modestly reported to the European Parliament by saying that 'I do not consider that to be a humiliation for Europe, but as a political error of Israel, to whom I have said this in the clearest of terms'.⁵⁵ More recently, Prime Minister Blair invited some Palestinians leaders to meet with the Quartet members in January 2003 to discuss the progress of the Palestinian

European diplomats, see 'La Volte-Face de Washington plonge les Quinze dans l'embarras', *Le Monde*, 27 June 2002.

⁵³ 'M. Bush renvoie les travaux du Quartet à l'après-élections israéliennes', *Le Monde*, 22–23 December 2002.

⁵⁴ 'Le gouvernement d'Ariel Sharon accepte la feuille de route', *Le Monde*, 27 May 2003; 'Israel's road map reservations', *Haaretz*, 27 May 2003.

⁵⁵ Summary of the intervention of Javier Solana at the Plenary meeting of the European Parliament, 9 April 2002, Doc. ST0058/02.

reform. However, in early January, following new bombings that claimed 22 Israeli lives, the Israeli government refused to allow the Palestinians to attend the meeting convened by the United Kingdom. Though the British diplomats were vocal in stating that this decision was counterproductive, they had to bow and finally conduct their meeting by phone. Furthermore, during a press conference held by Sharon on 18 January 2003, the Likud leader airily dismissed the Quartet's roadmap as 'nothing' and then denounced the EU's attitude as being not balanced. This statement has not reportedly raised strong outspoken European reactions, neither did Sharon's recent refusal to meet with Solana and de Villepin, the French foreign minister, because they met with Arafat in spite of Israel's interdiction.

Beside these conspicuous demonstrations of Israeli hostility, the EU has been the target of a real campaign incorporating two main charges: anti-Semitism and the funding of Palestinian terrorism through financial support to the PA. Criticism has emanated both from the outside (the USA and Israel) and from the inside. Even European civil society initiatives asking for the boycott of Israeli products, for the suspension of the Association Agreement or of scientific cooperation have unleashed violent accusations of anti-Semitism. French leadership and citizens have been particularly attacked, by the American public, by the Sharon government and even by French people. In a recent interview, Ouzi Landau, one of Sharon's ministers, warned that Europe as a whole was not over anti-Semitism, and that France still has huge efforts to make in terms of minorities rights.⁵⁶ On the whole, official EU reactions to such attacks have been exclusively verbal. In his appearance at the plenary meeting of the European Parliament in May 2002, Solana soberly reported that he had been 'shocked and saddened by the tone of some commentators in American think tanks and media. According to the most virulent of these commentators, Europe is in the grip of a wave of anti-Semitism . . . and it motivates European policy towards the Middle East'.⁵⁷ Chris Patten has been less soothing when he had to defend the Commission against accusations stating that its financial support to the PA ended up as support for terrorism. In a statement made in June 2002 he reacted to questions inspired by incriminating articles published by German and American newspapers by squarely saying

I suspect that some critics may not be particularly interested in facts, preferring to try to fit reality to their theory rather the other way round. . . . I should also add that repeating unproven allegations, wrapping them into a tissue of insinuation and amplifying them without bothering to check the

⁵⁶ Ouzi Landau, 'Survivre à tout prix' (2002) 3 *Politique internationale*, p. 179.

⁵⁷ Summary of the appearance of Solana at the plenary session of the European Parliament, 15 May 2002, Doc. S0089/02.

facts, does not make for distinguished journalism. . . . I repeat, we have found no evidence of EU funds being used for purposes other than those agreed between the EU and the PA. The documents presented to us by Israel do not prove that EU funds have been misused.⁵⁸

But this verbal defence didn't stop accusations from being voiced again, leading in February 2003 to an investigation conducted by the independent anti-fraud office (OLAF) on allegations of misuse of budgetary support to the Palestinians.

Therefore, since there has been no kind of tangible counter-measures to stop such assaults on Europe, it is not likely that the Israeli government and its staunchest allies will need to alter their attitudes in the near future. On the contrary, the recent Franco-German opposition to the US projects in Iraq has given new opportunities for Israeli disdain, with Sharon's diplomatic advisor, Zalman Shoval, stating that 'The attitude of a number of European countries, and especially France, has proved once again to Israel that it is impossible to trust Europe. . . . This behaviour can only further reduce Europe's role in relation to that of the United States regarding any settlement with the Palestinians'.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* has reported that Sharon is lobbying the Bush Administration in order to make it definitely 'drop the [Quartet's roadmap] project altogether in response to Europe's Iraq policy'.⁶⁰ Now that the Israeli government has had to accept the plan, it is working hard to discard the Quartet and make sure that the USA will have a total monopoly on the running of the process. And again, the Europeans strive to remain involved, whatever the intensity of the Israeli rebuff.⁶¹

IV Conclusion

Hence, while the European leverage on the paralysed PA relatively has increased, leverage on both Israel and the USA has remained minimal and this largely accounts for the EU's ineffectiveness in its attempts to resuscitate the peace process. Contributing effectively to the Middle East peace process would require a painful metamorphosis the EU does not seem ready to undergo. Beyond its clear statements, the EU has avoided or failed to significantly pressure their American and Israeli counterparts into policies

⁵⁸ Statement to the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on EU budgetary assistance to the Palestinian Authority, 19 June 2002, Doc. SPEECH/02/293.

⁵⁹ Quoted in 'Israel says Franco-German Stance on Iraq shows EU cannot be Trusted' *Agence France Presse*, 12 February 2003, Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ 'Face à ses députés, Ariel Sharon justifie l'adoption du plan de paix' and 'Dominique de Villepin veut éviter la marginalisation des Européens', *Le Monde*, 28 May 2003.

closer to its views. Up to now, its strategy has been three-fold: an attempt to prevent any status quo from degenerating out of hand; as much as possible, to keep the USA in charge of the process; and as regards the warring parties, to encourage, facilitate, and 'bribe', rather than impose, punish and retaliate. This analysis confirms the idea that the EU as an institution is not a political 'superpower' able and willing to turn into an international actor capable of using coercive means to back its diplomacy. Curt Gasteyger grasped the spirit of this 'ambiguous power' in a short sentence: 'What the Union tries to do is what might be called a 'foreign policy without tears', i.e. a policy that pretends to serve the interests of all but does not want to harm anybody.'⁶² As the EU attempts to export its own standards by way of negotiations and pledges of assistance, it speaks a language of responsibility, of law and of reason. Yet this language doesn't always make sense to the actors involved in lethal conflicts and who are not as 'rational' as Europe would like them to be.

In the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the European 'foreign policy without tears' has proved to be a failure. One may argue that US diplomacy has not been more successful: it didn't manage to prevent the peace process from descending into a quasi-total war, with thousands of victims, that refuelled mutual hatred. For the time being the peace process is clinically dead, and no one can predict when and how it might be resuscitated. As long as no final and global settlement has put an end to the conflict once for all, the EU may find an opportunity to play a more significant role in the search for peace, but the latest events don't seem to indicate a new era in which the EU would be more proactive and assertive.

If one puts aside the possibility that the EU as a whole might disintegrate or at least get paralysed with the forthcoming enlargements and international turbulence, three possibilities remain in sight. The first one is the transformation of the EU into a traditional military power under the pressure of external events and the necessities of power politics. The second possibility is the persistence of both present foreign policy patterns and methods, either because the acceptable balance commanding the evolution of the CFSP has not significantly developed, or because the 'civilizing' power and the 'soft methods' of the EU have started to yield results even in thorny issues. The last eventuality is the possible persistence of present patterns with a consensual extension of the repertoire of action to non-military coercive means. It would be interesting to closely examine in the following years the evolution of the European repertoire of action. More than the institutional transformations that might be introduced in the foreseeable future, this evolution could tell us more about the real changes in the Europeans' perception of themselves, of their relation to the world, and of the best way to further the causes in

⁶² Casteyger, note 15 above, p. 126.

which they believe. The current Middle East crisis, with its two dimensions – the Iraqi one and the Arab-Israeli one – is a perfect occasion for observing eventual changes in European attitudes and policies, however slight, that could hint to any future transformation of the EU's identity as an international actor.