

The European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Past European Peace Initiatives and Future Possibilities

24 - 28 February 2003 in Hofgeismar, Germany

organized by the PIE Project Team of AEGEE

– Documentation –

PIE

Palestinians Israelis Europeans

We would like to thank the **Robert Bosch Foundation** for supporting our conference. The Robert Bosch Foundation, established in 1964, is one of the largest foundations associated with a private German company. It supports philanthropic undertakings in the following areas: health care, international understanding, social welfare, education, training, arts, culture, the humanities, and the social and natural sciences.

In addition, we would like to thank the **German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)**, Programme “European-Islamic Dialogue”, for financing the travel expenses of the Israeli and Palestinian participants.

Dear Reader,

For one week about 20 European students and 12 students/young activists from Israel and the Palestinian Territories discussed core issues of the conflict in the following three workshops: Narratives of the Conflict, Refugees and Settlements and Shared Responsibilities beyond Borders. The main result is a common statement of the participants (see page 7) and various joint Palestinian-Israeli-European projects (see page 14).

The Hofgeismar conference is the second of a series of exchanges among European, Israeli and Palestinian students. By providing a neutral forum, the conferences – as main title “The European role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” – aim at establishing a network of strongly committed students and young activists who promote constructive PIE projects. The next conference will take place in Copenhagen in August this year (2003).

As a first step, all participants of the Hofgeismar conference formulated a vision for a certain time in the near future: 2008. With a common vision in hand, three main obstacles preventing us from achieving this vision were examined – given by the workshop topics. Identifying these obstacles was the most crucial part in the process since it uncovered our different perceptions. However, consensus upon each identified obstacle had to be reached before moving to the next step, and indeed, each workshop eventually succeeded to agree on the obstacles. This step of establishing a common basis was a precondition for thinking about possible ‘solutions’, which themselves shaped the third step of the process. As you can learn from the statement that is structured according to this threefold process, consensus could be found with regard to various important issues. Moreover, the dynamics developed by the successful passing of these steps led to many ideas in the ‘action’ part: several joint Palestinian-Israeli-European projects were gathered including commitments of participants and organizers to elaborate them further and carry them out. The aim of these projects is to further the understanding of the ‘other’ and to encourage more young people to join this process.

Even though each of us returned meanwhile to everyday life, I hope that we keep the “spirit” (or ‘vision’) of the conference in us. Sharing with the ‘other’ our thoughts and hopes, but also fears, may enable us to work – together – for the common vision we expressed at the first conference day, and to be strong enough to face and overcome the obstacles towards it.

We hope you enjoy reading our documentation,



Christine Binzel

Main co-ordinator of the PIE-Project Team

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Reflection - Insights given by participants

Tobias Lenz, Osnabrück

Narratives of the conflict

In order to solve a conflict between two people – the same holds true for two entire peoples – the perception of the other is a crucial concept. Two concepts are possible: in the case of being penetrated by a generalized negative concept (a feeling of superiority combined with a feeling of threat) of the other, a process of conflict solving faces almost insurmountable obstacles on the way to a fair resolution. In the case of having a more detailed picture distinguishing between strengths and weaknesses of the other, this will most likely favour the chances of a successful outcome. Keeping these general premises of psychology in mind, it will be easier to understand the difficulties on both sides in resolving the conflict and coming to a just solution that serves the needs of both, Palestinians and Israelis.

Speaking from my personal experience stemming from long conversations and controversial discussions with both sides, the perceptions held by both parties are one-sided generalizations and pre-conceived notions of one another. That of the Palestinian terrorist on the Israeli side and that of the radical Zionist settler and inhumane Israeli soldier from a

Palestinian point of view, not to speak of stubborn politicians on both sides. Secondly, the European picture of both parties is a little bit more versatile, but nevertheless simplified: Palestinians are, on the one hand, viewed as victims under a brutal occupation regime, on the other hand seen in great parts as terrorists (suicide bombers) disregarding their own lives. Israelis, on the contrary, are the inhumane occupants as well as the victims of terror attacks – pictures that are hard to match and therefore lead to a very miraculous mixture of feelings, which form an ambivalent public opinion. Thirdly, the Palestinian view of Europe is – in most cases I believe – a positive one whereas Israel views Europe as being biased towards the Palestinian cause.

These perceptions of the other are – in regard to Europe's view of both sides – exclusively determined by media coverage – a picture that is, in its claim for objectivity, certainly distorted. As only a few Europeans can extract personal opinions and perceptions from the other from personal contacts and experiences with people in Palestine, the biggest part of the European population relies on highly influential media information to form an opinion.

Concerning Israelis and Palestinians I cannot fully grasp the source of the prejudiced perceptions of each other because before the Second Intifada broke out, frequent contact between both sides certainly existed – be it on an economic, social or leisure-time basis. It appears to me that alongside the mutual alienation in the course of the Second Intifada, a demonization went hand in hand and was greatly accepted. Education – which in most parts evades my knowledge – might also play a crucial part in creating a certain – possibly prejudiced – perception of the other. Lacking any knowledge of the current every-day life of the other side, such distorted concepts allowed everyone involved in such a confusing and complex conflict to not lose the “overview” or at least the feeling of still having one.

Possible ideas of changing these perceptions are – to name only briefly – more personal contacts between all three parties, repressing generalized propaganda in media coverage and different contents of education based on a deeper knowledge of the social and cultural backgrounds of the other side respectively.

**Dima Abdellatif Mohammad,
Ramallah**

The other

How to see the other? When the other is Israeli, this question becomes really problematic. I was never able to define this 'other', and I've always thought about it. Why? While it might look easy to define the 'occupier' as the one that lives on my land, uses its resources and deny my right in doing that, as well as denying my rights in practicing my life freely and feeling safe because I can always be target for humiliation; suppression if not deprivation of life. While this might look easy, I've always felt the reality is a lot more complicated. The 'other' also feels love, can laugh and cry, and have wishes and dreams. The 'other' might like the same colour I do, we might share love for the same kind of trees. So why is it this whole conflict? Or maybe more important is why not to end this conflict?

I might start reflecting important sides of my personal experience with the Israeli 'other'. My father was expatriated from Palestine for 23 years, thus I was born and grown up in the Diaspora. The Israelis were for me the ones responsible for my father's being deprived from seeing his mother. I've grown up with the feeling that they're responsible of me being an alienated child, I share a lot with my peers but I belong to somewhere else.

Although their responsibility was almost always present in the details of my life, the experience of being this far from the occupied land prevented the direct contact with the occupier. I was not facing the daily fear and humiliation my Palestinian peers were facing. And was always confused in identifying a clear attitude towards them. After the Oslo agreement, my father was allowed to enter Palestine and we decided to live here. My direct contact with Israelis was established, but my confusion deepened.

In the occupied Palestine, I met the Israeli soldiers on the exits of my city, Ramallah. The first impression makes me see them as young men of my age, as different as ordinary. But when they stop me to check my Identity Card, in their eyes I could feel what perplexes me. What makes these young men whom I've never met before treat me with such a humiliating manner? How can any of them enjoy me feeling embarrassed without feeling guilty? I often try to think of it out of this context, I might be a friend for this man if we meet in another place.. can I really do it? I feel really confused.. What makes this soldier think he's allowed to enter my room and transform it into ruins? Looking deeper in their eyes, I feel what shocks me: they look at me as if I were their 'less human' 'enemy'. Even though they're the powerful side of the conflict, at

the checkpoint, both our eyes are full of fear and we mutually represent fear of the other.

What I keep trying to do is to look for an exit from all of this. It is correcting this misconception of the other that might help us do that. And it is when the relationships between us the Palestinians and them the Israelis are based on a mutual understanding and equal human basis, it is only then that our conflict can be resolved. Israelis have to recognize that we Palestinians are as human as they are, and that occupying us violates this human equality. It's only when they admit the fact that the atmosphere would be convenient for everyone to overcome his own experience through talks and negotiations that lead to a just resolution for the conflict.

Muriel Kahane, London

Refugees and Settlements

The refugee problem is one of the most controversial issues in the conflict on the Middle East, one that is close to people's hearts and thus a highly emotional issue for the two parties involved. It has proved to be, along with Jerusalem, one of the hardest obstacles to bypass in Middle East peace negotiations. The refugee problem, namely, the idea of the "right to return", dealt with in the UN General Assembly 194 is the source of grievances on one hand, and fears on the other.

There is firstly the question of who ought to be considered a Palestinian refugee. Some believe it to be only those who are still living in refugee camps, mainly in Lebanon and Syria. Other believe that it also includes those who settled elsewhere, creating a new life in other countries, be it Arab neighbouring countries, or in the West. However, there is also the problem of the Arabs living in Israel. Despite still living within the frontiers of Israel, many of them do no longer live in their original villages. Instead they have been resettled in whatever place they decided to go. These internal refugees may also be called refugees. Related to this definition issue, there is the problem of numbers. Israelis grossly miscalculate the number of refugees, leading to problems when actual solutions and quotas of return are tried to be established. For example, in 1948 Israel calculated the number of refugees to be 520,000. The UNRWA's list registered 726,000 whilst Palestinian estimations went up to 900,000.

The next problem that might be encountered is that of reaching a consensus as to what exactly is the extent of Israel's responsibility for the suffering and the problems of the Palestinian refugees. It is true that Israel is not the only one to blame for the displacement of Palestinians, but a certain limited degree of responsibility

must be admitted in order for Israel to implement resolution 194, whereby refugees have the right (and the choice) to return, to be restituted and compensated for losses.

Not only, the next problem encounters the question of where to return. Some believe refugees should have the option to chose between returning to their original villages, and others believe that only limited numbers should be allowed back into Israel, and that the majority should return instead to a separate state of Palestine, thus advocating the two state solution that a vast majority of the population, both on the Israeli and the Palestinian side seem to advocate.

This seems to be a major issue. Palestinians argue that they should have a choice to decide where they want to live, especially after over 50 years of living in exile. Israelis, on the other hand, believe that if Israel grants free entry to all Palestinian refugees, the country will soon loose its Jewish majority. It threatens the national identity, and many fear violence, especially after the rise of the second intifada, whereby voiced hatred of Jews is not an unusual occurrence.

The Taba conference of 2001 seems to have been a big step forward as far as negotiations go. It showed that there is hope for a solution, compromise can be reached. It is here where Europe can best contribute.

Europe has a long-standing tradition of democracy, as well as first hand experience of the atrocities of war. Europe should seek to act as a moderator, calling for cooperation between the two peoples. Not only, Europe's historical role in the creation of the state of Israel, dating back to the Balfour Declaration, and its lack of involvement over the last years mean that it should start to make an effort in order to reach agreement in the middle east peace process.

Noam Segal, Ketura

Refugees and Settlements

I believe the core obstacle regarding a resolution of the refugee problem is a major lack of understanding on both sides - maybe more than on any other issue - of the other side's position. Most of all, I would say that this is a result of some internal processes which Israeli society must go through before it is ready to negotiate the matter with the Palestinian public. In the following paragraphs I will try and describe briefly what I see as the major problem within the Israeli public, which I naturally know more of, after which I shall refer to what I know as the Palestinian position and conclude with what I see as Europe's possible contribution.

First, I would say that most Israelis are not at all aware of the background or implications of the refugee problem, and their

position is determined mostly by slogans and emotions. Israeli society has yet many internal questions to resolve - which have to do with many issues not at all related to the refugee problem but that do touch at its very core - regarding Israel's future as a democracy on one hand and as a Jewish state on the other. Only after these processes begin could a formal position on the refugee problem acceptable to the Israeli public be articulated.

Public discussion within Israel is therefore the first step forward. But as both large political blocks in Israel consistently reject any public discussion regarding Israel's historical responsibility in creating this problem in 1948, Israeli people have come to think that the problem does not exist, or at least that it is a matter that will be resolved only in many years to come. In schools and in universities, the topic is almost not touched upon, and it is barely discussed in the media. The Israeli public is not yet ready to face the full extent of this problem, and would rather postpone any decisions on the issue, and so it avoids any true discussion of the issue.

Judging by the arguments used in public discussions, most people rather see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a territorial dispute per-se, and do not realize that without solving the problem of Palestinian refugees - or even reaching some kind of a transitional

solution - a true agreement would never be reached between the sides.

On the other hand, from my few discussions with Palestinian colleagues, I can see that there, too, is yet more to be done in creating a better understanding of the fears the Israeli public is facing. As I have stated above, the refugee problem undermines many fundamental beliefs seen by Israeli public as the essence of existence of the State of Israel, such as the question of a Jewish state and what is seen as the natural right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel. I am not sure my Palestinian partners knew of such fears.

While it does seem obvious that the refugees should have a right to return to the Palestinian State - hopefully to be established soon (I know, I am being optimistic here) - if not to their homes within Israel, and be compensated for all they have been through, I think that the Palestinian public must adopt a pragmatically tactical approach - which I truly don't think I can express on their behalf - which should ease some of the fears on the Israeli side and at the same time should allow for agreements on other issues to be reached in the meanwhile, until trust is rebuilt between the two nations.

I think that Europe can contribute to the efforts by trying to facilitate understanding between both sides, such as those reached through the discussions between Dr. Yossi Beilin and Mr. Yasser

Abed Rabbo. While the documents produced by these two leaders do not seem relevant at the moment, under the current political regime, I am most certain that they will be the basis for future negotiations and agreements. Europe should encourage such understandings especially among young people on both sides, who are less obliged to prejudices and formal positions. Since there is almost no contact at the moment between Israelis and Palestinians at all ages, I think that such a dialog is essential, preferably on some kind of regular basis, even through email, and receive media coverage and public attention.

Unfortunately, at the moment, Europe it is seen by the Israeli public as though it is taking the Palestinian side of the conflict, thus not neutral. I think that Europe should try and regain trust within the Israeli public - by some very few simple gestures - and then take back its important role.

Since I believe the US is seen by the Palestinian people as supporting the Israeli side, while Europe is seen by the Israeli public as supporting the Palestinian side, a neutral facilitator does not exist at the moment. I think Europe should try and regain this role, as it had done successfully in the past.

Final Statement of the Conference in Hofgeismar

The first conference about Europe's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Hamburg in August 2002 showed the importance of mutual trust, and how the perception of the "other" and of the conflict itself can prevent its resolution and a rapprochement of both societies.

In the latest conference in Hofgeismar, 30 Palestinian, Israeli and European students and young activists, some of whom participated in the first conference, came together to deepen their understanding of the conflict, and of each others' fears and dreams. The participants were divided into three workshop groups, each dealing with a core problem: narratives of the conflict, refugees and settlements, and shared responsibilities beyond borders. In a common workshop at the beginning of the conference, all participants articulated a common vision.

Our Vision...

We could see, not so far ahead in the future, a new Middle East in which regional cooperation, security and prosperity is made possible as a result of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. A few of us had the long-term vision of a binational state for both peoples. The majority, however, saw two democratic states living side by side. The participants reached an unanimous agreement that Europe, and the EU in particular, should play a more active role in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Especially nowadays, as a result of the eminent enlargement of the EU, the EU is becoming a closer neighbour to the Middle East, and this should serve as an important incentive in order to strengthen partnership and cooperation.

Within and among these two states, human rights and mutual trust will be maintained, people will not be afraid anymore, and the dignity of everybody will be respected and protected. There will be cultural and educational exchange between the two states and security and freedom of movement for all will be guaranteed. The problem of the refugees will be resolved, and illegal settlements will be dismantled. We all agreed, Palestinians, Israelis and Europeans, that peace is possible, and that prosperity for all will be achieved through economic cooperation underpinned by mutually accepted and enforceable principles of justice.

We also agreed that Jerusalem will be the capital of both states, Israel and Palestine, which eventually will serve as cultural, economic and political role models not just for the region but for the whole world.

But Obstacles Still Remain...

Regarding the Narratives of the Conflict, three interdependent narratives were recognised: Palestinian-Israeli-European. We divided the obstacles into three main clusters: "reflective", "contradictive" and "communicative". Key elements regarding the problem of missing reflection included the complacency of oneself, as an individual in a community, and feeling comfortable enough not to challenge your identity. The existential fear on both sides is central towards an understanding of the other. Institutionally rooted narratives and the need to maintain consensus in the face of adversity also play an important role. Also,

the seeming invisibility or inaccessibility of alternatives limits oneself from entering a process of self-reflection.

The contradictory elements of one's own narratives are *an exclusionary identity*, the devaluation and even dehumanisation of the other, prejudices and stereotypes and a zero-sum outlook.

The third cluster – communicative – includes the interaction between one's narrative and the narrative of the other. Hence, the lack of communication, the competition of sufferings, and the lack of mutual recognition represent core obstacles that stand between us in order to achieve our vision.

As for the second workshop, Refugees and Settlements, nine obstacles were identified. Some of these are obstacles represented by the issues of refugees and settlements, which block us from achieving our vision. Others were obstacles that prevent the resolution of the problems of refugees and settlements.

The first set of obstacles includes:

1. Denial of individual rights and humiliation. Especially for the refugees, their freedom of movement is impaired, they lose their dignity, and on the whole, maintaining their present condition is a violation of some of their basic human rights.
2. Settlements prevent a full functioning state. There was no consensus on whether all settlements or only certain settlements prevented us from achieving the vision of two democratic states. However, we reached a consensus that under current conditions, Palestinians are being deprived of their land, and that any agreement without solving the settlements problem legitimises their growth.
3. Continuation of the cycle of violence. Without resolving the problems of settlements and refugees, attacks will continue, check points will remain, humiliation will continue, attacks will increase, and the conflict ends up becoming a vicious circle.

The other set of obstacles includes:

1. Fear of losing the identity of the Jewish state, specifically, a massive return of refugees to Israel is a threat to the purpose of the existence and the identity of a Jewish state.
2. Insufficient resources to absorb refugees. The massive return of refugees to the new Palestinian state might cause widespread poverty if resources were not made available.
3. Ambiguity of terms, which in previous agreements were too general and subject to different interpretations.
4. Internal Israeli and Palestinian political constraints. On the Israeli side, the nature of the political system impedes consensus, settlements are perceived as a solution to Israeli future demographic problems, and the Israeli government is not willing to dismantle settlements. On the Palestinian side, power struggles among different factions, particularly religious and secular impedes consensus building over a solution.

5. Deepening of mutual mistrust, which we agreed is both a cause and effect for continuing the cycle of violence. Historical background makes both Palestinians and Israelis less willing to understand each other's point of view. Mutual mistrust is exacerbated by non-compliance with international law.

The third workshop "Shared responsibilities beyond borders" began by defining what a border is. A border is not necessarily something physical but rather a concept, which is used to define "something"; we discussed the different kinds of possible characteristics of a border: physical or psychological, static or dynamic, open or closed. In addition, borders can be open for people and/or goods. Borders can be open to both sides.

The obstacles are divided into four clusters:

1. "Mistrust and fear prevent a peaceful solution", especially respect for borders can create a feeling of safety.
2. "Borders are a potential cause for conflict", primarily because they create negative identities. Secondly, when they are imposed and impair freedom of movement, they violate the sense of dignity.
3. "Lack of agreement on common interests results in a lack of mutually acceptable borders", in particular, occupation prevents installation of normal, legal and accepted borders. The lack of agreement on common interests derives from certain ideologies on both sides which reject the idea of a two-state solution and from the fact that both people claim the same land as their own.
4. "Borders limit cooperation", they represent obstacles for economic, cultural, environmental and educational cooperation.

These are all serious obstacles, but for every obstacle there is a solution...

The following are not solutions as such, but rather broad strategic directions leading to concrete solutions.

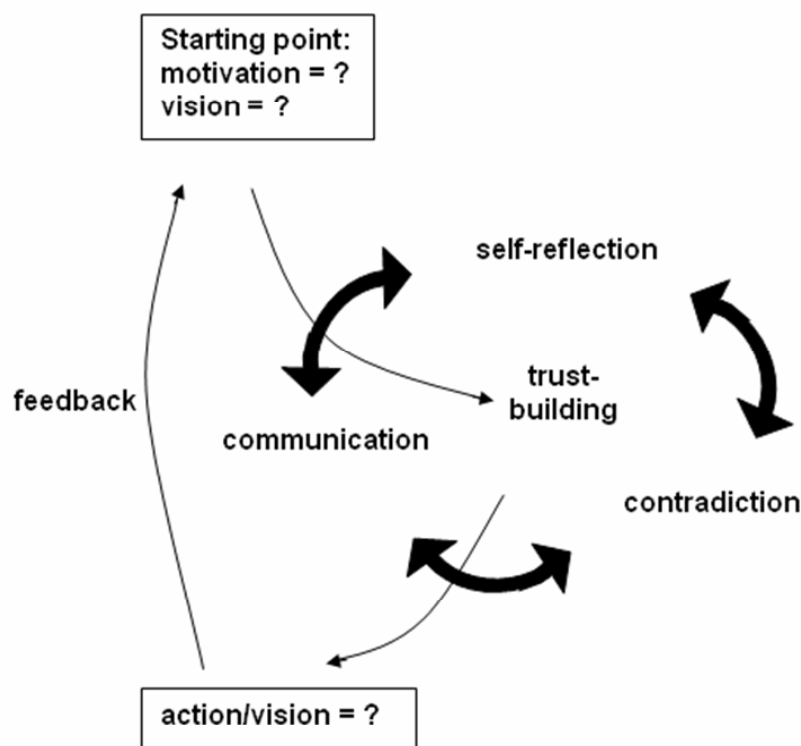
Regarding the narratives of the conflict, instead of speaking about "solutions" we preferred to speak in terms of an ongoing process, or a circle:

Admit, define and conquer your own fear. Confront fear first with yourself, then with the other. Come to terms with your fear and start building trust.

Building upon the obstacles elaborated before, we have developed a model, which is relevant to dealing with all three narratives. The process represented by the model encompasses three elements: reflective (within oneself and society), also described by the concept of the self and the concept of one's own society, contradictory, the concept of the other society, and communicative – i.e. communication¹. Within a virtuous circle, we can develop trust. We could not, however, agree on the motives and incentives, which make us, enter this process of self-reflection and questioning of one's own perception. We still have to resolve the question: What are our motives and incentives to enter the virtuous circle of building trust? A possible incentive could be a third actor, such as the European Union, in order to "facilitate" each society to enter into this circle.

¹ In order to emphasize the process character we preferred to use adverbs instead of nouns.

Core elements for self-reflection are: overcoming the fear of being “problematic” or different, self-criticism and questioning, reforming the memory culture, extracting marginalized histories, connecting with “socially outcast” narratives and addressing taboos. Moreover, it helps to put ourselves in the others’ shoes and point out different aspects of identity and not oppressing different voices. Regarding society it is important to allow a public discourse to empower people and to show how they can play a role.



Our perception of the other society can be changed by seeing the human face of the other. Moreover, the approach plays an important role: to realize that your own benefit depends on the benefit of the other and therefore to try to focus on solutions that benefit both sides: “win-win”. Furthermore, a step towards a different narrative can be reached by moving from an exclusionary identity to an inclusionary identity and, by this, to articulate a wider definition of identity.

Communication with the other and encountering the other’s historical narrative is the third core element of the solution process. We have to acknowledge the other’s history and the interconnection between the narratives. Truly listening, questioning and understanding (“intercultural dialogue”) are very crucial. Everyone should express and show his/her needs and think of means to prevent further suffering. We agreed that the recognition of the other’s dignity and suffering is crucial.

In the second workshop, Refugees and Settlements, we divided the solutions into five clusters:

1. Confidence building measures. For example, funding for suicide bombers should stop, establishment of a commission dealing mainly with charges of humiliation against Palestinians, and the removal of all check points. Although we did not reach consensus on this last point, the majority of us believe that this measure would decrease violence, the same way a decrease in violence could lead to a removal of checkpoints, and thus a virtuous circle could be developed.

2. Settlements: The majority agreed that all settlements in the West Bank and Gaza should be gradually removed, and that an empowered PA should ensure security during this process. A committee must be set up in the Israeli government to deal with the settlements' problem, and that there should be a freeze in the mean time of building settlements for new settlers. Funds for returning settlers should be made available.

3. Non-violent communication. We reached consensus on three points. a) Not responding to terror, in the sense that "real strength is restraint", b) Promotion of civil disobedience and non-violent resistance, and c) The gain and loss through collective punishment needs to be reconsidered.

4. Political reform in both societies, which includes reforms in political structures to achieve stability in the decision making process, and the decrease of the indirect influence of the Israeli Defence Forces on the political process in Israel.

5. Refugees. There was a consensus that all refugees should be given the full right of return to the newly created Palestinian state, if they choose to, and that individual refugees should be given the right to decide whether they should return or be compensated. The majority of us agreed that the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government should agree on a certain number of refugees who can return to Israel, however, we didn't manage to reach a consensus over this last point. We also agreed that an international body should be set up to deal with the future financial solution of the refugees' issue. As temporary and immediate measures, we agreed that the international community should put pressure on host countries to improve living conditions of Palestinians living there, and that refugees' family meetings, at borders of host countries, should be made possible. After their return, the safety and dignity of the returnees should be guaranteed.

As for the third workshop, Shared Responsibilities beyond Borders, the solutions are divided into six clusters:

1. "Promote cooperation" in the economic field mainly by creating a free trade area, initiating common projects on shared resources and encouraging bilateral and foreign tourism.

2. "Agree on the nature and location of borders", primarily, the peace agreement should be achieved in accordance with international law. An additional solution might be to talk about "seams", which connect, instead of "borders", which divide.

3. "Install trust building measures" mainly by the abolishment of the arbitrary and humiliating characteristics of checkpoints. Furthermore, the awareness for shared interests should be heightened, and visits of Israelis to the West Bank and Gaza arranged.

4. "Decrease the potential for conflict" by creating a situation where all sides are aware that they have something to lose. The influence of radical movements on both sides should be reduced. One should live the life of the other for a short period of time to achieve mutual understanding.

5. “Increase EU involvement” especially with respect to the promotion of democracy and human rights protection. The EU should invest in both states and support peace education projects. In addition, the process of the European integration could be used as a model to reach mutual prosperity and security.

6. “Solve technical problems” by guaranteeing a safe passage from Gaza to the West Bank. An additional important element is creating an open border which contains protected border crossings.

Our Resolve...

We believe that peace is possible. Actually, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has already been resolved many times over, on paper. We need a new language to describe this senseless conflict. We believe that the Israeli and Palestinian people can and should trust each other, and this has been our experience in the few days we spent together here in Hofgeismar, in Germany. We have gone through an intense and painful process, a process that has brought us closer to each other's fears and dreams. Our resolve is to continue with this process, and to replicate it and take it as far as we can. Perhaps we are young and naïve, but we are the future, and here we have expressed our longing for peace, independence and security. And we declare our intention that we will not stop until we ensure that the future is better than the past.

Hereby we would like to thank everyone who made this conference possible, in particular:

AEGEE-Mainz/Wiesbaden for offering an excellent cultural and social programme for the Israeli and Palestinian participants (2nd – 6th of March 2003), and the **regional government of Hessen** for the financial support.

Mr Christian Berger, Mashrek and Israel Unit, EU Commission.

Mr Ingo Herbert, Deputy Head of Near East Division in the German Foreign Ministry.

Mrs Marie-Luise Buchwald, German-Israeli Society.

Mr Rainer Zimmer-Winkel, Publicist.

The Protestant Academy in Hofgeismar.

Palestinian Vision – in particular Jad Qadamani and Rami Nasser-Eddin - for their important contribution to the organization of the conference.

The Young Israeli Forum for Cooperation - in particular Dan Dubiner - for their continuous support during the organization of the entire conference.

Mrs Amit Leshem, the Jerusalem Van-Leer-Institute, for her kind advice and support.

Mr Ahmad Badawi who contributed very much to the success of the conference in so many ways.

And special thanks to **MK Collette Avital**, **MK Isaac Herzog**, **Mr. Ron Pundak** and **Mr. Yoram Dori** for their kind help regarding the mobility of the Palestinian participants.

Projects

In the following section we would like to present several project ideas that came up during the last part of the conference – trust building actions.

Opening the ERASMUS programme to students from Israel and the Palestinian Authority

Since the conference in Hamburg, where the following idea came up first, we are still working on promoting the entry of Israeli and Palestinian students into the European ERASMUS programme. Referring to the commission's declaration that "The EU's policy is based on partnership and cooperation, and not exclusion", we – the participants of the conference – believe that this is a good way for Europe to contribute to the prospective peace process and convey its values of humanity and peace to students from this crises-ridden area. Enabling a more real and tangible contact between the European society and the troubled Israeli and Palestinian societies would have positive impacts on Israeli and Palestinian support for European intervention in the area, and may pave the way for empowering people in the region to actively contribute to a peaceful settlement of the current conflict. This assumption is based on experiences made during the Hofgeismar-conference.

Conference in Copenhagen: 4th – 10th of August 2003:

The European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Perceptions and Future Possibilities - A conference for European, Israeli, Jordanian, Lebanese and Palestinian students -

After the successful outcome of the conferences in August 2002 in Hamburg/Germany and in February 2003 in Hofgeismar/Germany the third (but not last) in this series of conferences will take place in the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, from 4th to 10th of August 2003.

About 30-35 students from Europe, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories, as well as from Jordan and Egypt will encounter to talk about the following three issues:

- Refugees
- Engines of the Conflict: Security and Fear
- The Role of Mass Media and Education in the Conflict

By identifying the obstacles in each workshop, the participants will analyze the different perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the 'other'. Additionally, the conference aims at providing structures to generate concepts for new joint Palestinian-Israeli-European projects, and to evaluate and further developing the projects elaborated in former conferences.

Writing project

Where?

Basically as a part of the PIE website. - The choice of publishing it as hard copies depends on the availability of funds.

When?

Once a month for the online newsletter; once every three months for the paper version.

Who writes?

Mainly young people from Europe, Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Exceptions might be accepted taking into consideration the topic addressed and the nature of the contribution.

Who to address?

Mainly young European, Israeli and Palestinian people.

What to write?

It might be significant to let writings go in two simultaneous dimensions:

1. The first deals with issues directly related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g. the relationship with the 'other', self reflection, personal experiences as well as visions about the future).
2. The second deals with universal themes/concerns (e.g. globalization, environment, children abuse, women issues, the effect of technological transition on human relations). This would indeed open the space for seeing the better future when we (Israelis and Palestinians) are able to share these universal concerns rather than sharing the conflict.

It might also be good to choose a main theme for each issue. Parts of the newsletter's writings go under the theme, and the space is kept open for free writings.

WHY to write?

- To empower – inside ourselves and spread to others – the faith in the better future.
- To have the courage to look deep into what's happening, to spread the capability of doing something, instead of being just desperate.
- To throw light on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from our experienced perspective, and to stimulate people to take a role.

Jewish – Non Jewish European Encounter

One of the issues that was raised throughout the meetings was the Jewish – Non Jewish German/European relations in light of the Holocaust. Some participants had expressed their feelings that this issue has influenced their perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and increased mistrust amongst the parties to this conflict. The participants remarked that this perspective was never really dealt with in an emotional and psychological perspective. A number of proposals were made as to dealing with the issue separately, at a different context and within other frameworks.

Living the Life of the Other

The aim of the project is to expose Palestinian and Israeli students to the life of the other side, and thus try to overcome the separation between the two societies. During meetings of Palestinian and Israeli students, the clearest conclusion is that both sides have very little knowledge of the other. This refers to information about daily life of people, rather than knowledge about political positions or historical facts. The over-focus on these last two issues, on both sides, has led to a dehumanization of the other, as it has shifted the discussion from the lives of people to politics, history and talks of military character, seeing the other as “the enemy” rather than as a human being.

The project aims at bringing Israeli students to spend a period of time, ranging from days to weeks, living at the homes of Palestinian students and Palestinian students coming to live at homes of Israeli students. We hope that this direct exposure would enable creating a “human face” to the other side, and would promote an understanding one of the other. Hopefully, this exposure will enable the participants to confront stereotypes and prejudices, and understand the daily reality of the other.

During the visit, students will stay with a student from the “other side”. It is important that a program will be prepared for the visiting students, in order to prevent a “touristy / anthropological” approach, but rather one that would promote community involvement, and direct contact with the other’s society. Such a program could include lectures of academics and intellectuals, volunteering in schools or youth centres, volunteering in NGO’s.

At the moment, the main obstacle for such project to take place is the current military and political unrest, which has practically created a complete separation between the two sides. Thus, right now it is nearly impossible to hold such programs. Therefore we propose two options that could be realized in the mean time:

1. A similar project within Israel – living the life of the other in Palestinian villages in Israel and vice verse (this could also be useful as a pilot for the project).
2. Prepare all that is necessary for the project (tentative program, contacts, funds, potential student’s group etc.) and implementation of the project once possible.

European Study-Trip to Israel and the Palestinian Territories

In the last year a group of European, Israeli and Palestinian students organized together two conferences in Hamburg and Hofgeismar. The aim was to discuss the European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict with European, Israeli and Palestinian students. After these conferences – with more than 70 participants attending – the European organisers felt that it should be very constructive to visit both Israel and the Palestinian Territories in order to prepare a series of new and improved conferences. In our opinion it is very useful to meet the local people involved in their own region in order to get a better and deeper understanding of their background. Only then we can have a closer insight at the problems and obstacles, perceptions and emotions on both sides. By this, the European students enable themselves to have a closer look at the every-day life experiences of the Israelis and the Palestinians. Furthermore, personal contact with people who are actively involved in the Israeli and Palestinian societies will be arranged. A very important part of the visit will be the meetings of the Europeans, Israelis and Palestinians together. The focus will also be on the cultural and religious aspects, which should be discussed.

By this visit we expect to achieve a deeper and more detailed understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

PIE-Network-Project

Background:

It seems as if a lot of NGO-activities (also on student's level) are going on in the Palestinian Territories and in Israel. And yet, we are not aware of other NGOs with our three-legged-approach of Palestinian-Israeli-European Cooperation.

The idea of the PIE-Network-Project is:

1. To figure out (start research) which other NGOs/student organisations are active in the triangle of the Palestinian Territories, Israel and Europe.
2. To profit from each others' experience and start an exchange of know-how and experiences.
3. To start a closer cooperation with other student NGOs following the three-legged-approach of Palestinian-Israeli-European Cooperation.

Participants, Organizers & Facilitators



Abeer Kopty * Ahmad Badawi * Aline Rieder * Alon Simhayoff * Andreas Losch * Angela Koh * Christine Binzel * Dan Dubiner * Dima Abdellatif * Dusan Mihajilovic * Heike Kratt * Jad Qadamani * Jan-Sebastian van Lissum * Jasmin Dirinpur * Keren Segal * Merav Barlev * Muriel Kahane * Naiara Cabala * Noam Segal * Ofer Zalzburg * Olaf Gamal Deussen * Reem Wahdan * Sabina Catar * Saskia Eser * Stephanie Müssig * Szymon Lewandowski * Tamara Alawi * Tamara Asfour * Tobias Lenz * Tobias Lechtenfeld * Uriel Kashi * Zoé Nautre

PIE Project Team – Mission Statement

The “PIE Project Team” within the European student organization AEGEE aims to alleviate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by supporting and encouraging intercultural dialogue between Palestinians, Israelis and Europeans (hence “PIE”). The team is a result of an IPWG conference concerning the conflict in August 2002 in Hamburg, Germany, which concluded that student projects can alleviate the conflict primarily by supporting a direct dialogue between the parties of the conflict with a European presence. The project team thus includes students from all three parties. In order to achieve the above-mentioned aims, the main tasks of the project team are to organize future conferences and to co-ordinate other projects involving Palestinian, Israeli and European students resulting from such conferences or ongoing discussion between them.

PIE-Project Team of AEGEE (Palestinians-Israelis-Europeans)

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AEGEE – European Students’ Forum

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AEGEE (Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l’Europe) aims to promote the European idea amongst students. We achieve this by organising international events, which give young Europeans the chance to experience the diversity of European cultures in order to inspire them to actively build the European society of tomorrow.

AEGEE strives for the creation of a true common European identity beyond any national borders. We are achieving our aims through our main fields of action, which are Peace and Stability, Active Citizenship, Higher Education and Cultural Exchange.

AEGEE is a secular, non-profit association and not linked to any political party. With over 20.000 student members in 261 towns of Europe, we are the biggest interdisciplinary European student association.

