EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY AND ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT, 1978 – 1980*

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In addition to the bloodstained battle in Lebanon, the closing years of the 1970s also saw the Israelis at loggerheads with the Palestinians on the diplomatic "battlefield." While the Israeli representatives continued to refuse any idea of negotiation with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), arguing that it was a terrorist group whose main aim was to destroy Israel; the PLO representatives struggled to assure world leaders that they were ready to accept a diplomatic settlement of the conflict based on mutual compromise. The hopes that the American president Jimmy Carter had given to the Palestinians at the beginning of his office were not fulfilled. Carter's 1977 idea of a "Palestinian homeland" had not been realized. In contrast, the occupation of Palestinian territory and the construction of new illegal Israeli settlements intensified. Therefore, Yāsir ᶜArafāt, the PLO chairman, needed to search for international support elsewhere.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Gaza Strip, West Bank, the Socialist International, UN

The signing of two framework agreements between Egypt and Israel, known as the Camp David Accords, in September 1978, filled the Arab world with outrage and indignation. The first agreement, entitled "A Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel"[1] was condemned especially by Arab states. The second agreement, entitled "A Framework for Peace in the Middle

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[1] A copy of the original is available at the website of the Egyptian ministry of foreign affairs [online][cit. 24 November 2019]. Available from https://www.mfa.gov.eg/Lists/Treaties/Attachments/2279/Framework_en.pdf.

East"[2] angered the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as it discussed the conflict related to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without the presence of the PLO. In fact, not all Arab states and not all Palestinians had opposed the peace initiative commenced by the Egyptian president Anwar as-Sādāt's 1977 official visit to Israel. At the time it had seemed that the international political climate had been favourable for such an initiative. The United Nations and the Western European states had been calling for the settlement of the conflict related to the occupied territories with the involvement of the Palestinians. Jimmy Carter's administration had openly declared that they had been willing to take appropriate measures so as to bring peace to the Middle East—even by including the Palestinians in the negotiations. The new Egyptian policy had even been publicly supported by some members of the Arab League, particularly by Jordan, Oman, Sudan and Morocco.[3]

Nevertheless, the results of the negotiations proved to be far from what was expected. The agreements did not mention the participation of the PLO in the negotiations; what they discussed was only the participation of the Palestinians living in occupied territories. Moreover, the agreements did not discuss the Palestinian state, only the partial autonomy of the Palestinians. In fact, at the 1974 summit in Rabat the Arab League, including Egypt, had recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Egyptian president's signature on the "Framework Agreement for Peace in the Middle East" was considered a betrayal of the Palestinians. The PLO chairman was most disappointed as until the very last moment he had hoped that the Egyptian delegation would manage to include at least a reference of the PLO in the agreement. Yāsir ʿArafāt declared to the *Guardian* newspaper that as-Sādāt's signature on Camp David Accords deeply offended the Palestinian people and he argued that what the agreement ensured in reality was the new slavery of the Palestinians.[4] ʿArafāt did not think that the agreement provided Palestinians with the guarantee that they would be able to rule the Palestinian territories by themselves.

Consequently, the PLO had to react to this diplomatic failure by searching for a new way to fulfil its aims. The PLO representatives were aware of the fact that they needed to build new diplomatic ties so as to gain worldwide support for their

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[2] A copy of the original is available at the website of the UN [online] [cit. 24 November 2019]. Available from https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/EG%20 IL_780917_Framework%20for%20peace%20in%20the%20MiddleEast%20agreed%20 at%20Camp%20David.pdf.

[3] SORBY, K., SORBY, K. Jr. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics (1971 – 1990)], p. 175.

[4] KAPELIOUK, A. *Arafat*, p. 170.

aims. They had already achieved support from the people of developing (Third World) countries with whom they shared a similar post-colonial and revolutionary experience in their fight for independence and freedom. Most of them were members of the Non-Aligned Movement. In spite of the fact that this movement brought together nearly one hundred states at the time, their economic and political influence was significantly lower than the impact of the Eastern Bloc (with the major influence of the Soviet Union) and its influence was far behind that of the Western Bloc. In 1974 the Third World countries supported Yāsir ᶜArafāt's call for reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would pave the way for the creation of a new state of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. From then on the Palestinians could rely on the Non-Aligned Movement in the UN where the PLO only had observer status.

Logically, the Western states' policy, which gave Israel almost unconditional support, was gradually pushing the PLO and the Palestinian resistance towards the Eastern Bloc sphere. In the 1960s, the states of the Eastern Bloc continued to support the PLO not only in the area of diplomacy but also by providing them with weapons and training their fighters. In the aftermath of the Camp David Accords, there came a shift in the relations between the PLO and the Eastern Bloc. From October 29 to November 1, Yāsir ᶜArafāt headed an official PLO delegation in Moscow. The final communiqué recognized the PLO as "the *sole* legitimate representative of the Palestinian people". At the onset of 1979, the official PLO documents began to demonstrate close relationships with the Soviet Union. In January 1979, at its fourteenth session held in Damascus, the Palestinian National Council adopted a resolution stressing "the importance of an alliance with the socialist countries, primarily with the USSR, as this alliance [was] naturally necessary in the context of the confrontation of the American-Zionist conspiracy against the Palestinian cause."[5] As far as the then public opinion in the Eastern Bloc is concerned, the sympathies/antipathies towards the Palestinian resistance could not be measured as the Bloc comprised closed political systems with massive propaganda.

Until the mid-1970s, the Western world favoured Israel on the diplomatic level as the country's massive propaganda succeeded in persuading western leaders and public opinion that Israel was a permanent target of "bloodthirsty" Arabs supported by the undemocratic Eastern Bloc. In this bipolar world the majority of the western public viewed all local conflicts in the context of the Cold War. Western sympathies towards Israel peaked after the six-day war in June 1967. Israel's victory over the Arabs was presented as the victory of David over Goliath despite the fact that this image was far from the reality.

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[5] DANNREUTHER, R. *The Soviet Union and the PLO*, p. 105.

After the October (Yom Kippur or Ramaḍān) War in 1973 and wide media coverage of Yāsir ᶜArafāt's "fight for Palestine" including his UN speech, Western public opinion began to shift in favour of the Palestinian side. The PLO chairman was quite aware of the fact that he needed to gain the support of Western countries if he wanted the PLO to be accepted and the Palestinian issue to be solved. Despite some suggestions of criticism, the United States finally displayed their full support of Israel while American public opinion also favoured the Israeli side. However, Western European leaders gradually showed more and more sympathy towards the Palestinians.

ᶜArafāt's official visits to the Eastern Bloc countries and his meetings with their highest representatives began to take place on a regular basis. Like the Third World countries, the Eastern Bloc considered the PLO and Yāsir ᶜArafāt the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Nevertheless, the PLO still lacked the support of the economically and politically strongest world economies – Western Europe and especially the United States. Even though some of the highest political representatives of Western countries would unofficially express their support and sympathies towards the Palestinian resistance, they would still refrain from maintaining official contacts with the PLO. The meetings with the PLO representatives were usually held by ambassadors or ministers of foreign affairs, not the highest political representatives. In other words, the political moves of Western European leaders would always reflect the US foreign policy that conditioned its diplomatic contact with the PLO on the organization's acceptance of Israel's right to exist and the PLO's refraining from the use of terror. It was Yāsir ᶜArafāt who through his media performances, moderate steps and proposals gradually helped to shift European public opinion in favour of the Palestinians. Thus he slowly but surely succeeded in paving his way towards some of the highest representatives of European countries.

One of the first European politicians who began to notice ᶜArafāt's call for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was Bruno Kreisky, the Austrian Chancellor from 1970 to 1983. Kreisky was also an influential member of the Socialist International—a world organization aligning social-democratic and labour parties. In the 1970s, it brought together parties from 56 countries worldwide. As in the 1970s many of these parties were in the government in their respective countries, it was a highly influential organization with consultative status in the United Nations. In the mid-1970s, long before the Camp David Accords, it also assisted Israeli-Egyptian negotiations as the representatives of these two Middle East countries participated in sessions of the Socialist International. Nevertheless, the peace agreement whose foundations had been laid in Camp David and that had been signed in Washington in March 1979 was a huge disappointment for Bruno Kreisky. Though the Austrian Chancellor praised the normalization of Israeli-Egyptian relations, he criticized the fact that

the agreement contained no reference to the Palestinian state nor did it refer to the PLO as a partner in future negotiations.[6] Therefore, Kreisky endeavoured to bring a complex peace to the Middle East by himself. Simultaneously, his objective was to help the PLO to become an accepted and full partner in the negotiations with Israel and the West.

Bruno Kreisky was an important Austrian politician of Jewish origin who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the 1960s, subsequently becoming the Austrian Chancellor in 1970. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, he sought to establish relations with the Third World countries and as Chancellor he further developed these relations while focusing mostly on Asian and Arab countries. From the ideological perspective, Kreisky saw these relations in the light of spreading social democracy to developing countries. He was also personally involved in the Middle East conflict.[7] In his memoirs, he names three reasons that made him actively involved in Middle East politics, especially in the question of Palestine. First, Kreisky would always speak against forcible eviction because he himself had been forced to escape from Austria in 1938 due to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Though he settled in Sweden, where he spent a pleasant time, he was always homesick. Sympathy with others eventually turned him to become a convinced ideological socialist. The second reason was associated with his belief that Israel was destined to exist as a "crusader state" in permanent conflict with its neighbours unless it agreed on a peaceful settlement with them. Kreisky strongly believed that Israel could only survive in a peaceful environment. Third, he was convinced that Europe needed to be on friendly terms with Arab countries owning to the Arab fossil fuels used in Europe. According to Kreisky, the key to a successful Middle East politics was the normalization of European and Israeli relations with Arab countries. The Israeli Labour Party was a member of the Socialist International at the time. Kreisky remembers that every time he tried to discuss the Palestinian question with the party's chairwoman, Golda Meir, she reacted by saying that they were no Palestinians – that they were only Arabs.

Kreisky was deeply impressed by his first official visit to Egypt in March 1964, when he met the Egyptian president Jamāl ᶜAbdannāṣir and his minister of foreign affairs Maḥmūd Fawzī. These meetings buried all his prejudice about Arab militarism and antisemitism. He was also taken aback by the strong will of the Palestinian refugees to possess a Palestinian passport one day that would serve as a formal confirmation of Palestinian statehood. When, upon his arrival in

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[6] VIVEKANANDAN, B. *Global Visions of Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt: International Peace and Security, Co-operation, and Development*, p. 136.

[7] HOLL, O. The Foreign Policy of the Kreisky Era. In BISCHOF, G., PELINKA, A. (ed.). *The Kreisky Era in Austria*, p. 43.

Vienna, Kreisky held a meeting with the Israeli ambassador in Austria, Michael Simon, he was bewildered by the latter's ironic remarks about Kreisky's naivety. Simon maintained that the official visit to Egypt by the Austrian minister of foreign affairs could be considered an act of hostility towards Israel. In his memoirs, Kreisky also stresses that in the 1960s it was very difficult to launch any discussion about Arab countries within the Socialist International. The Socialist International did not include any Arab parties at the time and its members were often biased due to one-sided information, provided to them especially by Golda Meir, who chaired the most powerful political party in Israel from 1948 – the party that was therefore considered the most successful member of the Socialist International. Kreisky, holding the post of minister of foreign affairs, had a far more objective view of the Middle East than the other members of the Socialist International. In the aftermath of his visit to Egypt, he suggested that the Socialist International create an investigating committee which would visit the Arab world so as to examine the real situation, the facts and the political atmosphere in Arab countries. Nevertheless, the Israeli Labour Party would always oppose such a proposal and the other parties would follow suit. A change came after the Yom Kippur War as the intervention of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf brought about a dramatic rise in the price of oil which had a significant impact on European economies. There were eight Western European governments led by social-democratic parties at the time which quickly expressed their interest in negotiations with the Arab countries of the Middle East. Golda Meir criticized her colleagues in the Socialist International, making a remark that they had become frightened by Arab oil.[8] Nevertheless, the members of the Socialist International finally authorized the creation of an investigating committee to the Middle East.

The investigating committee led by Bruno Kreisky visited the Middle East in March 1974, February 1975, and March 1976.[9] During the first journey, the committee visited Israel, Syria and Egypt, and, for the first time in his life, Kreisky met Yāsir ʿArafāt on March 11, 1974 at the personal request of the Egyptian president Anwar as-Sādāt, who was on friendly terms with the Austrian Chancellor. Kreisky and ʿArafāt discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of the PLO and Yāsir ʿArafāt introduced to Kreisky his plan to create a common Palestinian state that would be presented to the UN General

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[8] BERG, M. P. (ed.). *The Struggle for a Democratic Austria: Bruno Kreisky on Peace and Social Justice*, pp. 444 – 462.

[9] HOLL, O. The Foreign Policy of the Kreisky Era. In BISCHOF, G., PELINKA, A. (ed.). *The Kreisky Era in Austria*, p. 44.

Assembly in November that year.[10] In 1977 Bruno Kreisky summarized his knowledge from these three journeys to the Middle East for the members of the Socialist International.[11] The committee concluded that it was necessary to strengthen cooperation with Arab countries, to confirm the PLO as a full partner in the negotiations and to support the creation of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.[12] From the mid-1970s, Bruno Kreisky began to express a more pronounced criticism of Israel, its policy towards the Arab states and the Palestinians respectively. His Jewish origin prevented his critics from accusing him of antisemitism. Kreisky's goal was to bring peace to the Middle East. As the Chancellor of a relatively small European country, he was aware of his limited influence on world events; therefore for fulfilling his goals he used the Socialist International, whose members gradually moved to his side. His closest ally in the organization was the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Willy Brandt – generally considered "the friend of Israel". Even though Brandt, the Socialist International chairman from 1976, shared Kreisky's view of the situation in the Middle East, he did not comment on it as sharply and as frequently as the Austrian Chancellor. Thus the Socialist International that had previously been considered a pro-Israeli association, gradually and under the influence of Bruno Kreisky began to be more and more critical towards Israel. Some would even consider it pro-Arab at the time. An American, Carl Gershman, who participated in the negotiations of the Socialist International as the leader of the social democrats in the United States, wrote in 1979 that Brandt and Kreisky were trying to "refashion democratic socialism into an international movement aligned with anti-Western revolutionary movements in the Third World".[13] At this time, the Israeli Labour Party would gradually become isolated within the Socialist International. Kreisky's proposals, such as his idea to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people by Western powers, damaged his relations with Israel as well as with the American government and the Congress.[14] In contrast, his initiative was positively welcomed by Arab countries.

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[10] BERG, M. P. (ed.). *The Struggle for a Democratic Austria: Bruno Kreisky on Peace and Social Justice*, p. 462.

[11] MURAVCHIK, J. *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned against Israel*, p. 93.

[12] HOLL, O. The Foreign Policy of the Kreisky Era. In BISCHOF, G., PELINKA, A. (ed.). *The Kreisky Era in Austria*, p. 44.

[13] MURAVCHIK, J. *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned against Israel*, p. 94.

[14] HOLL, O. The Foreign Policy of the Kreisky Era. In BISCHOF, G., PELINKA, A. (ed.). *The Kreisky Era in Austria*, p. 44.

Even though Bruno Kreisky had been calling for the international recognition of the PLO from the mid-1970s, the crucial step in his endeavours was made only after the signature of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in Washington, March 1979. In the aftermath of the Camp David Accords, Kreisky invited the PLO chairman Yāsir ᶜArafāt to Vienna. The negotiations took place from July 6 to July 8, 1979. Despite the fact that the Austrian side stressed that it was not an official meeting between the PLO chairman and the Austrian Chancellor, the Israeli representatives were not willing to fall for these statements, as Bruno Kreisky personally welcomed Yāsir ᶜArafāt at Vienna airport in the same way as official visits were usually welcomed. Formally, Bruno Kreisky met with the Palestinian leader as the vice-chairman of the Socialist International, as demonstrated by the presence of the organization's chairman, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Willy Brandt in the negotiations.[15] After three days of lengthy talks between the foremost representatives of the Socialist International and Yāsir ᶜArafāt, a communiqué was issued on the Sunday and officially presented at a press conference. The communiqué expressed "extreme concern" over Israel's "settlement activities in the occupied territories" stressing that "the Palestinian issue is the central problem of the Middle East conflict and unless it is equitably and satisfactorily solved neither peace nor global settlement can be achieved". The declaration also touched on the ongoing conflict in Lebanon as it expressed concern over "the outbreak of the new military activities in the Middle East and over the tragic situation in Lebanon". Referring to Lebanon, Yāsir ᶜArafāt expressed a more pronounced criticism at the press conference as he condemned the use of Israel's American-made fighter planes against the Palestinians in Lebanon. Simultaneously, the PLO chairman criticized the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty signed in March that year as he was convinced that it destroyed any chance of multilateral peace negotiations.[16] Later, Bruno Kreisky admitted that the Vienna meeting had been preceded by a series of talks with Yāsir ᶜArafāt, which had laid the foundations for their close relationship. During one of these meetings Yāsir ᶜArafāt had declared that he was ready either to have direct talks with Israel or to negotiate with Israeli representatives via mediators.[17]

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[15] The New York Times, 8 July 1979, p. 9. *Arafat Vienna Visit Stirs Israeli Anger* [online] [cit. 4 July 2021]. Available from https://www.nytimes.com/1979/07/08/archives/arafat-vienna-visit-stirs-israeli-anger-government-leader-in.html.

[16] The New York Times, 9 July 1979, p. 1. *Express Concern Over Israeli Settlements* [online] [cit. 4 July 2021]. Available from https://www.nytimes.com/1979/07/09/archives/kreisky-and-brandt-ending-talks-with-arafat-question-israeli-acts.html.

[17] BERG, M. P. (ed.). *The Struggle for a Democratic Austria: Bruno Kreisky on Peace and Social Justice*, p. 464.

Israel did not approve of the Vienna meeting. Bruno Kreisky was severely criticized and despite his origin he was accused of antisemitism. In its diplomatic reaction, Israel withdrew its ambassador to Austria for consultation. The Austrian Chancellor was also denounced by Shimon Peres, the chairman of the Israeli Labour Party, which was a member of the Socialist International. The Israeli representatives argued that in Austria the PLO chairman had been treated with all the honours usually given to the representatives of friendly countries, including an official welcome at the airport and a banquet organized in Arafat's honor. According to Israel, the Austrian Chancellor had hosted a mere terrorist in his country − as was demonstrated by the fact that Yāsir ᶜArafāt had arrived in Vienna dressed in military uniform (camouflage), coming directly from Bulgaria where he supposedly had been on an inspection to one of the PLO's training camps.[18] Bruno Kreisky rejected the criticism by pointing out the peaceful intentions of the participants of the talks and simultaneously accusing Israel of an attempt to sabotage this meeting. To quote Kreisky: "Our three-cornered discussion, which was followed by a Press Conference, led to a first rapprochement between PLO and the Socialist International. The Israelis did everything possible to sabotage it".[19] Nor was Willy Brandt excluded from Israeli criticism.

Nevertheless, the meeting of Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt with Yāsir ᶜArafāt eventually legitimized both the PLO and the Palestinian resistance movement. Not only were Kreisky and Brandt important political figures in their home countries, they also exerted a great deal of influence within the then popular and influential Socialist International. At the time many left-wing and social-democratic parties that were a part of the organization were either the leading political parties in their home countries or they belonged to the strongest political bodies in their respective states. As a natural consequence, other important political representatives of Western European countries followed Kreisky and Brandt's example, eventually establishing relations with the PLO. In consequence, Western European policy towards Israel began to change and the overall view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began to be viewed from a different perspective. Previously, the policies of European democratic states had usually reflected US policy: any diplomatic contact with the PLO had been conditioned by the PLO's willingness to recognize the right of Israel to exist and to refrain from the use of terror. Bruno Kreisky argued that this position taken by Western European countries was the consequence of insufficient information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through his meeting with the PLO chairman Yāsir

[18] MURAVCHIK, J. *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned against Israel*, p. 94.
[19] VIVEKANANDAN, B. *Global Visions of Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt: International Peace and Security, Co-operation, and Development*, p. 136.

ᶜArafāt, Kreisky legitimized the PLO with the aim of demonstrating a subjective, one-sided perception of the Palestinian question by Western powers.[20] Both Kreisky and Brandt struggled to show that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be seen only in black and white and that it was high time that Europe also looked at Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. During ᶜArafāt's visit to Austria Kreisky openly criticized Israel, arguing that blind loyalty towards Israel had its roots in the period of Nazism and was a relic from the past. He stressed that Israel had been tolerated for decisions that for other nations had not been tolerated, e.g. its treatment of the Palestinians, settlement policy, etc.[21] During his talks with Yāsir ᶜArafāt, he declared that the PLO would accept a solution of the Palestinian problem which would not include the idea of destroying Israel. Eventually, Kreisky became a convinced defender of a two-state solution that would be possible on two conditions: Palestinians needed to recognize the right of Israel to exist while Israel had to recognize the legitimate national rights of the Palestinians. To achieve all of this, the PLO needed to acquire legitimacy and reliability on the international level; otherwise it would not be able to participate in the peace negotiations in the Middle East as an equal partner of Israel or other countries. Therefore, the PLO's legitimacy turned into the primary goal of the Austrian Chancellor.

In October 1979 in New York, Kreisky made a further step towards strengthening the diplomatic and negotiating position of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. In the course of the 34th session of the UN General Assembly, he made a speech in which he stated that Austria was ready to recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians. Simultaneously, he asked other countries to follow Austria's example. In his UN address, Kreisky argued that the PLO was already recognized as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians by all Arab states as well as by the group of non-aligned countries. Moreover, a representative of the PLO also had his place in the Assembly. Therefore, all UN countries also needed to advocate for the PLO as the sole representative of Palestinian people.[22] In March 1980, Kreisky turned his words into reality when, in the name of the Austrian federal government, he formally recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It was an exceptional situation that brought about a lot of international controversies because a representative

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[20] MURAVCHIK, J. *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned against Israel*, p. 85.

[21] RÁCZ, J. *Palestína včera a dnes* [Palestine Yesterday and Today], p. 227.

[22] The official transcription of Bruno Kreisky's address in the UN General Assembly, New York, October 29, 1979 is available from http://undocs.org/en/A/34/PV.49 [cit. 5 March 2021].

organization, which was not a state, was granted a diplomatic status. Later, the Austrian side made clear that they recognized the right of the Palestinians to an independent state but for the time being the Palestinians were represented by the PLO.[23] Nevertheless, even this limited diplomatic status enabled the PLO to negotiate with the international organizations based in Vienna.

The declarations and political steps taken by Bruno Kreisky clearly persuaded some other Western European leaders to change their attitudes towards the Palestinians. In the course of one year, from July 1979 to June 1980, either Yāsir ᶜArafāt or some other high representative of the PLO leadership visited Spain, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, and Greece. In the meetings with the government representatives of these countries, the PLO representatives obtained additional expressions of support.[24] These meetings extended PLO legitimacy beyond the Third World countries and the Eastern Bloc.

At the outset of 1980 it was clear that the Israeli-Egyptian separate peace agreement did not reduce Israeli-Palestinian tension. It was more and more obvious that the Middle East negotiations led by the United States brought satisfaction neither between Israelis and Palestinians, nor between Israel and other countries in the region. At the time, Jimmy Carter was fully immersed in his presidential campaign, which was prioritized before peace negotiations. Discontinuing the talks about Palestinian autonomy deeply worried democratic states of Western Europe, which perceived the lack of serious progress in the peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians as a threat. Some European leaders openly criticized the Camp David Accords as they left the Palestinian question unresolved. Therefore, they wanted to take over the peace initiative from the Americans.

Under the influence of the Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky and the Socialist International chairman Willy Brandt, many European governments began to establish contacts with the PLO. Some countries enabled the PLO to open information agencies in their capitals; others even granted the PLO diplomatic status. Yāsir ᶜArafāt and other PLO representatives were repeatedly officially invited by high political representatives in Western Europe who in the aftermath of these meetings openly criticized Israel, unlike the US representatives involved in Middle East politics. European leaders were convinced that solving the Palestinian question without the presence of the PLO was to go down a blind alley.

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[23] HOLL, O. The Foreign Policy of the Kreisky Era. In BISCHOF, G., PELINKA, A. (ed.). *The Kreisky Era in Austria*, p. 44.
[24] TESSLER, M. A. *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, p. 535.

In this atmosphere, the members of the European Community[25] decided to take on the role of the one solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict instead of the United States. In the UN Security Council, they planned to propose a resolution which would combine the basic principles of Resolution 242 with the provisions about the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, conditioned by the presence of the PLO in peace negotiations. As Israel opposed the wording of the resolution from the very beginning, the United States warned the other members that they would use their right of veto.[26] Consequently the resolution, which was doomed to failure, was not even submitted to the UN Security Council. Instead, an official meeting of all nine members of the European Community took place.

The presidents, prime ministers, and ministers of foreign affairs of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Great Britain, France, Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain – that is the countries with traditional ties to the Middle East – participated in the summit. The aim of the gathering was to unify European policy in the region and to coordinate the future steps so as to balance European, American, and Soviet influence in the area. The meeting took place on June 12 – 13, 1980 in the city of Venice, Italy. There nine countries discussed three principal world problems of the time: the Middle East (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), Lebanon (the civil war), and Afghanistan (the Soviet intervention). A declaration was adopted for each area. The declaration about the Middle East, adopted on June 13 and entitled the Venice Declaration,[27] dealt solely with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338; and it repeated the two principles that had already been incorporated in the European attitude towards the Middle East for some years: the right to existence and security of all the states in the region (including Israel) and justice for all the peoples (including the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people). Furthermore, the declaration pointed out the need for a comprehensive solution of the Palestinian problem, including the issue of the refugees and the status of Jerusalem, concerning which the nine members rejected any idea of a unilateral initiative designed to change the status of the city. Moreover, the declaration

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[25] The European Communities – previously referred to as the European Economic Community – was a regional economic organization founded in 1957; in 1967 it was transformed into a supranational organization named the European Community and on November 1, 1993, it was incorporated within the European Union. In 1980, the Community had nine members: Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

[26] KHOURI, F. J. *The Arab Israeli Dilemma*, p. 420.

[27] The full text of the resolution is available from https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/mepp/docs/venice_declaration_1980_en.pdf [cit. 7 May 2021].

considered the Israeli settlements a serious obstacle to the peace process and it called for the inclusion of the PLO in the Middle East peace negotiations.

The Venice Declaration was the fourth document in a row dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict adopted by the European Community. It was preceded by the Schuman Document (1971), Brussels Declaration (1973), and London Declaration (1977). These documents clearly demonstrate the changing attitude of the European Community towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole and towards the Palestinians respectively. The Schuman Document[28] was adopted by the ministers of foreign affairs of the then six-member European Community on May 13, 1971. Based on the UN Security Council resolution 242, it discussed the consequences of the six-day war. The document outlined several principles: Israel was supposed to withdraw from occupied territories, Jerusalem was to be granted an international status, and demilitarized zones under the control of international forces were to be established. Though Palestinians were not specifically mentioned in the wording of the document, the text mentioned "Arab refugees", who were supposed to be given a choice of either returning to their homes or being indemnified.[29]

Two years later, in the aftermath of the October War and the subsequent oil crisis, the nine-member European Community of the time issued a second declaration on November 6, 1973, later officially known as the Brussels Declaration. The document demonstrated a significant shift in solving the situation in the Middle East as for the first time, the expression "Arab refugees" was replaced with the "Palestinians". The Schuman Document and the Brussels Declaration both called for the termination of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. However, the second text required a just peace settlement in the context of "the legitimate rights of the Palestinians" – the formulation usually used by Arab states.[30] While the Arabs expressed satisfaction with the declaration, its text was heavily criticized by Israel.

The third common declaration of the European Community expressed in the document known as the London Declaration signified another shift in the European attitude towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The document was adopted by the member states of the European Community on June 30, 1977. The expression "Palestinians" used in the Brussels Declaration was replaced with the expression "the Palestinian people" with a "national identity" and "homeland" –

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[28] Named after the French minister of foreign affairs, Maurice Schuman.

[29] KHADER, B. Europe and the Arab-Israeli conflict: an Arab perspective. In ALLEN, D., PIJPERS, A. (ed.). *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 133.

[30] KAYA, T. O. *The Middle East Peace Process and the EU: Foreign Policy and Security Strategy in International Politics*, p. 68.

new factors that needed to be considered in the negotiations.[31] The declaration was obviously trying to search for a balanced compromise. Arab states were supposed to respect the right of Israel to exist within secure and recognized boundaries. In return, Israel needed to recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The security of the boundaries was to be granted by international forces. To conclude, the attitudes of European states belonging to the European Community were gradually changing in favour of the Palestinian people.

The Israeli reaction towards the declarations was predictably dismissive. After the adoption of the Brussels Declaration, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Abba Eban accused the European states of appeasing the Arab world so as to avoid an oil embargo, as the declaration had been adopted shortly after the Yom Kippur War and the use of the "oil weapon". Eban referred to the text of the declaration as "oil for Europe" not "peace in the Middle East"[32] Israel also criticized the London Declaration by resolutely dismissing the idea of creating a Palestinian homeland and the idea of putting the Palestinian problem at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The strongest reaction of Israel came after the Declaration of Venice as in the text the European Community pointed out that "the Palestinian people, which is conscious of existing as such, must be placed in a position […], to exercise fully its right to self-determination". Moreover, the Declaration of Venice explicitly, or almost explicitly, suggested the official recognition of the PLO. To quote the text: "These principles apply to all the parties concerned, and thus to the Palestinian people, and to the PLO, which will have to be associated with the negotiations." In reaction to the Declaration of Venice, the Israeli government led by Menachem Begin issued a statement on June 15, 1980. In the text, the PLO was referred to as an Arab S. S. Furthermore, the guarantees that the European powers wanted to offer to Israel through the use of international forces were compared to the guarantees given to Czechoslovakia in 1938, before the Munich Agreement. Finally, the states that had signed the declaration were accused of disrupting the right of the Israeli people to settle in the Holy Land.[33]

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[31] The copy of the original document is available from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20785/london_june_1977__eng_.pdf [cit. 2 April 2021].

[32] KHADER, B. *Europe and the Arab-Israeli conflict: an Arab perspective*. In ALLEN, D., PIJPERS, A. (ed.). *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 135.

[33] The full text of the reaction of the Israeli government is available from https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook4/pages/100%20resolution%20of%20the%20heads%20of%20government%20and%20mini.aspx [cit. 2 April 2021].

In the ongoing propaganda war, the Israeli representatives maintained that the PLO was a terrorist organization aimed at destroying the state of Israel. In return, the PLO representatives insisted that they were ready for a political and consensual solution of the conflict. Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the PLO representatives were ready for a compromise with Israel as their calls for a consensual solution were often vague, ambiguous and conditioned by a number of different factors. PLO critics also pointed out that the statements of the leaders of the organization varied according to their recipients. Nevertheless, diplomatic opinion was more prone to favour the Palestinian side at the time, since it gave more credibility to the PLO's changing attitudes. In fact, the radical declarations of the leading representatives of the PLO were much rarer than in the past and if they appeared, they did so with the aim tof countering the extremist internal and external critics and to create room for manoeuvre. Nevertheless, Israel did not trust the moderate attitudes of the PLO, maintaining that the PLO just wanted to gradually destroy the state of Israel. In the first phase, the Palestinian state would just be limited to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Later, however, it would eventually try to control the whole territory of the former Palestinian mandate (contemporary Israel) – as was stated in the former charter of the PLO from 1968.[34] The changes that had been made to the charter during the leadership of Yāsir ᶜArafāt were not taken seriously by Israel. At the same time, European countries did not have the power to bring about any significant change in the conflict. In any case, the relations with the governments of European countries enabled Yāsir ᶜArafāt to rely on European support; they extended European knowledge of the Palestinian question; and last but not least they enhanced ᶜArafāt's image as well as the overall image of the PLO in the eyes of the world public.

One month after the Declaration of Venice, it became obvious that the political decisions and declarations of European countries, whether taken individually or collectively, had no effect on Israel's political behaviour. Despite the fact that the European Community fundamentally rejected any unilateral initiative related to changing the status of Jerusalem, on July 30, 1980, the Israeli parliament Knesset adopted the Basic Law which named Jerusalem (complete and united) the capital of Israel.[35] In fact, it was the formal annexation of East (Arab) Jerusalem. The adoption of this law was interpreted as a violation of the UN Security Council resolution 181 about the partition of Palestine from 1947. The reaction of Arab

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[34] TESSLER, M. A. *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, p. 536–537.
[35] The exact wording of the law is available on the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs [online] [cit. 3 April 2021] http://www.israel.org/MFA/ForeignPolicy/ MFADocuments/Yearbook4/Pages/113%20Basic%20Law-%20Jerusalem-%20Knesset %20Resolution-%2030%20J.aspx.

states, Palestinians, and world powers was very strong. Criticism of this act was voiced from various sides and it prompted the UN Security Council to adopt resolution 478 on August 20, 1980, which referred to Israel as the "occupying power" and declared the Basic Law adopted by Knesset "null and void".[36] The United States did not support Israel by vetoing the resolution. Fourteen members voted for the resolution, none was against, while the United States abstained from the vote.

Israeli politicians were aware of the fact that internationally they could rely on the support of the US superpower. The United States sometimes criticized Israel's political decision, sometimes even voting for an anti-Israeli resolution in the UN Security Council, but they never took any significant steps against Israel. The invisible protective wings of the United States enabled Israel to take substantial steps against the Palestinians living in the occupied territories. The Israeli government at the time was led by Menachem Begin[37] and his right-wing bloc Likud, supported by other nationalist and religious groups from the right of the Israeli political spectrum. Notwithstanding the political power of the PLO, regardless of the type of political solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict suggested by other countries and international organizations, the Israeli government and its supporters were convinced that the future of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would predominantly reflect their own ideological vision. They were aware of the fact that at the time, they were at the centre of an intensive campaign that was to change the political, economic, and demographic character of Gaza and the West Bank and to make their vision a reality.

The US presidential election played into their (Israeli) hands. The Arabs believed that Jimmy Carter's re-election would enable him to feel more confident and resistant to various domestic pressures. In consequence, he could exert his influence on Israel more effectively, especially regarding the question of Palestine. Nevertheless, the election polls were not very favourable to Carter, known for his critical views of Israel. In November 1980, Carter was clearly defeated by the Republican Ronald Reagan whose major point in his foreign policy programme was the fight against international communism and the Soviet

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[36] The copy of the resolution is available on the website of the UN Security Council. [online] [cit. 3 April 2021]. Available from http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/478.

[37] Menachem Begin – an Israeli politician. He was born in Brest-Litovsk (Russian Empire at the time) in 1913. In 1942 he came to Palestine where he became a member and later the leader of the Zionist militant group Irgun, a group notorious for its violent attacks on Arab and British targets. British officials even announced a reward for his capture. In the aftermath of the creation of Israel, Begin transformed Irgun into a political party Herut. Later, he joined up with other right-wing parties, eventually creating the Likud which won the election in 1977 and Begin became the Israeli prime minister.

Union as its main representative. The key personalities for foreign policy in Reagan's Cabinet included Alexander M. Haig (the Secretary of State), Richard Allen (the United States National Security Advisor), and Caspar W. Weinberger (the Secretary of Defense).[38] They did not interpret the Arab-Israeli conflict as an isolated conflict but as an integral part of the East-West competition. The crucial problem in the Middle East was the Soviet threat in the economically essential Persian Gulf, plagued by the Iran-Iraq war that had broken out in September 1980; not the Arab-Israeli conflict which was considered by the Americans a partial problem. Nevertheless, Reagan's government considered Israel the most important US ally against the Soviets in the Middle East.

While Ronald Reagan's election campaign was welcomed by Israel, it disappointed the Palestinians. In the course of his election battle, Reagan called himself a friend of Israel's. In some cases, his declarations were in conflict with US official political discourse. As an example, he once dismissed the idea of negotiating with the PLO even if the PLO recognized the right of Israel to exist. Reagan also declared that the Israeli settlements on Palestinian territories were not illegal.[39] As opposed to these statements, on March 1, 1980 the United Stated voted for the UN Security Council resolution 465 that condemned the Israeli settlements, called them illegal, and referred to them as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.[40] Israel and its lobby protested so loudly against this vote that Jimmy Carter had to publicly declare that the vote had been a mistake caused by a communication breakdown. Carter's election consultants warned Carter against taking similar steps and making similar statements in the days to follow; otherwise he would have to face influential Jewish American and pro-Israeli groups. In spite of the warning, in the case of Resolution 478 about the annexation of Jerusalem, discussed in August 1980, the United States neither voted for the resolution, nor did they use their right of the veto. Therefore, Ronald Reagan used this vote to criticize his election competitor and he officially supported Israel, which was traditionally favoured by Republican voters. The ongoing US election campaign and the election polls favouring Reagan prompted the Israelis to pursue their uncompromising politics. In the aftermath of the election, Reagan did not waver from his pro-Israeli attitudes, maintaining that the Israeli settlements on occupied territories were not illegal and referring to the PLO as a group of violent fighters.[41] The politics of the new US administration enabled Israel to take harsh

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[38] QUANDT, W. B. *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, p. 247.

[39] KHOURI, F. J. *The Arab Israeli Dilemma*, p. 420.

[40] The copy of the resolution is available on the website of the UN Security Council: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/465 [cit. 3 April 2021].

[41] KHOURI, F. J. *The Arab Israeli Dilemma*, p. 422.

measures against the Palestinians living in the occupied territories and to ignore all proposals made by the PLO, international organizations and Western European countries for settling the conflict. In conclusion, European diplomacy did not have the power and capacity to limit the actions of the Israeli government, nor could it bring Israel to the negotiating table.

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