

## **Speech by the President of the European Parliament Josep Borrell Fontelles to the Knesset**

**Jerusalem, Monday, 27 June 2005**

(Translation to English from the website of the European Parliament\*)

Mr President,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Javerim Yekarim.

It is both a great honour and a great responsibility for me to address today your Assembly, the Knesset - the democratic body which represents all the citizens of Israel.

I am doing so in my dual capacity as President both of the European Parliament and of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly that has emerged from the Barcelona process.

My aim is to address you with respect and determination, but, above all, with a desire for sincerity grounded in friendship that arises from my own condition as a man of the Mediterranean and a convinced European.

This is not a strange land to me. 36 years ago, in 1969 when I had just graduated, I came to Israel to work on a Kibbutz - the one in Galon, following in the footsteps of other young Europeans attracted by that experience.

I certainly had no idea then that, years later, I would be addressing the Knesset as President of the European Parliament - a body which was then a parliamentary assembly very different in nature from today's Parliament elected by universal suffrage by all the citizens of Europe.

Since then, I have returned several times - as a minister, as a member of parliament, and simply as a citizen who, like yourselves, wishes to see this country finally at peace.

I also wish to greet you as a citizen of Spain and as a former secretary of state of the government which established diplomatic relations with Israel 20 years ago - even more so as President Katsav is at this moment on an official visit to my country. Mr Katsav has declared in Madrid that 'peace is within our grasp'. I too believe this is the case, and my wish is that the EU will be able to contribute to a fair and lasting peace.

My visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories takes place at a time abounding in both hopes and risks. We must therefore define our hopes before they are dashed by lack of vigilance, commitment and conviction.

The immediate future holds dates which will be crucial for Euro-Mediterranean relations as a whole, for peace in the Middle East and for relations between Europe and Israel.

Developing our ties

Firstly, I wish to refer to the relations between Europe and Israel, as I believe it is vital to develop our bilateral ties.

Our relations are marked by the memories of the Second World War and the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of mutual suspicion, with some Israelis reading certain European statements and policies as attacking the very idea of Israel.

It is important that we should meet more often. We may have our differences and discrepancies, but we need to dispel the misunderstandings as a matter of urgency.

Today, 60 years on from the liberation of Auschwitz, at whose moving commemoration ceremony I was present at the head of the EU's delegation, I wish to reaffirm Europe's commitment to, and its special responsibility for, the existence of Israel as a Jewish state and as a democracy living in security and peace with its neighbours.

If I had to summarise my message of today in just one idea, I would want it to be this: Europe and Israel need each other. Neither is conceivable without close ties between the two.

Europe is fully aware of this interdependence, and wishes to give it a constructive role, recognising its importance in full. The only way to overcome the many remaining difficulties is to walk towards the future together.

There are good reasons why you can trust more in Europe and Europe can exert greater credibility.

Firstly, Israel is, by reason of its population and its democratic political culture, a natural partner of Europe. We can see this in sport, where the European - and I do mean European - champion basketball team is Israeli, having beaten a Spanish team, or in cultural events like the Eurovision Song Contest.

Secondly, the EU is fully committed to promoting democratic values and good governance in this entire region. On this will depend the stability of the neighbourhood, as well as the cohesion of Europe's societies.

It would be unrealistic to claim that the Israel-Palestine conflict is confined to the Middle East alone and does not affect other countries.

Europe, in its diversity, includes among its citizens large Jewish and Muslim communities.

Europe is proud of that, and takes strength from it. However, we still need to expel the old demons to which we might feel tempted on both sides to surrender at times.

During the periods of crisis in the Middle East, we have discovered just how far physical frontiers are powerless in the face of the violence which has spread even to our school playgrounds and our public spaces.

The conflicts in the Middle East have revived sentiments in Europe's societies which we thought belonged to the past: xenophobia, with, in its wake, anti-Semitism, a phenomenon which we must always be on our guard against, but also Islamophobia, discrimination and fear of the other.

We have to fight these abuses together. The EU is firmly committed to doing so. The cohesion and stability of our European societies are inseparable from peace in the Middle East.

All of us wishing to contribute to the peace process have our personal reasons for so doing.

Thus, when Europe adopts clear positions regarding the policies of your government and those of the Palestinian Authority, it does so because the future of both is intimately bound up with our own, and because our own security depends crucially on peace in your neighbourhood.

For a shared vision of peace

I shall now recall two doctors and philosophers who lived in Spain during the same epoch: Averroes and Maimonides, one Jewish, the other Arabic, who flourished during a time of particular harmony between the three great Religions of the Book. Averroes, in his 'Treatise on Theology', describes the Mediterranean as a confluence of cultures, religions and societies, a 'knot' of civilisations endeavouring to live together and survive in time. His formulation is indeed timeless - valid for all times and places, and especially for our own time.

The Middle East is both crucible and metronome. Indisputably, Israel is a part of that region, upon which the destiny of the Mediterranean as whole depends.

The exchanges and interactions of past centuries, but also the political events and institutional developments of the last decade, have shown how far this sentiment of a shared identity is a crucial reality which we must all help to foster.

Meanwhile, Europe has been reunited.

The EU has now taken in ten Eastern European and Mediterranean countries which aspired to membership.

The underlying reason for this enterprise was, beyond doubt, the shared and recovered phenomenon of freedom. However, and above all, beyond the difficulties, we must also speak of a shared vision of the future and the desire to forge a common destiny in peace, stability and prosperity, in harmony with the fundamental values that lie at the heart of the Union.

This vision, and this political will, are by no means the exclusive property of the EU.

In this connection, the European Neighbourhood Policy opens up a new era for the sharing of the values I have just outlined. The action plan recently approved by the European Council and the Israeli government proposes that the EU-Israel relationship should move forward on the basis of the closest association possible.

The Mediterranean is the southern frontier of reunified Europe. However, it is not an impenetrable frontier: indeed, it is the reverse. Historically, the Mediterranean is a space of exchange, of trade, of interaction.

There is no reason why it should be any different today. It is clear, though, that we cannot get to know each other, understand each other or enrich each other mutually - in all senses of that word - unless there is a permanent climate of peace and trust.

It is up to us parliamentarians, above all, to encourage and accompany the ties that bind our peoples.

2005: the challenges we must assume and meet

Ten years on from the Barcelona agreements and Oslo II, this year is also a psychological threshold and a decisive moment for peace in the Middle East.

A new horizon is opening up: the presidential elections in the Palestinian territories, the first since the legislative elections of 1996, have taken place in a climate of full transparency, calm and respect for the institutions, as has been confirmed by, among others, the observers from the European Parliament.

We have all welcomed this encouraging display of democratic normalcy.

It is true that the Palestinian Authority has decided to postpone, for reasons falling within its competence and which I respect, the legislative elections that were scheduled for July.

However, the EU hopes that the Palestinian Authority will, as soon as possible, set a date for the legislative elections and that they will be conducted in a climate of democratic normalcy with the cooperation of all.

I therefore also solemnly call on you to ensure that the necessary measures are adopted for these elections to be held throughout the Palestinian territories.

In this connection, allow me to recall Parliament's position calling on the Council and Commission to prepare the observation of the July 2005 general elections with a view to supporting the plural and balanced access of all candidates to the media and finding formulas, in cooperation with the Israeli authorities, for overcoming the problems faced by the Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

I am convinced that the means of holding these elections can and must be agreed between the parties, in the interests of all.

2005 has also witnessed a clear signal on the part of Israel, which has announced, and is expected to implement this summer, its withdrawal from Gaza and from four of the West Bank settlements, and this I greatly welcome.

As President Katsav said yesterday, "this is one of the three historic decisions taken by the Israeli government in recent years. The first was the Oslo agreements; the second was accepting the Road Map, including recognition of an independent Palestinian state; and now the third is the plan to withdraw from Gaza'.

This is a courageous decision which must be implemented and built on. It is in the interests of all Israelis and Palestinians who aspire to a stable peace that the withdrawal should succeed.

This will depend on practical coordination between the two parties to ensure the withdrawal takes place in a peaceful and orderly fashion. It will also depend on the continuation of the efforts to build trust during the process and strengthen the partisans of peace, who remain in the majority in both communities and have already suffered far too much.

Despite all the problems - and they are, alas, still with us - it is essential that you should stand firm and continue in the direction that you have democratically decided.

I urge you to do so, and most sincerely wish that the actions of the peoples whom you represent will achieve, with the help of the Quartet and Special Representative James Wolfensohn, the desired outcome.

Here, I would like to make my own small contribution to the trust-building process.

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliament Assembly, of which I am President, is a new institution bringing together members of our two parliaments and of all the parliaments of the region.

In March in Cairo we had a first opportunity to show that parliamentarians can in some cases reach agreements on difficult issues and open up new possibilities for our governments.

I therefore ask you whether it would not be desirable, to help build trust among us all, in November and after the withdrawal from Gaza, for the Extraordinary Assembly which will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona process to be held in the Palestinian territories. This would of course be with Israel's full agreement and, possibly, with some of the meetings being held here in Israel. We could then analyse the post-withdrawal situation and help consolidate the new political climate for the subsequent steps.

Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and its return to the Palestinian Authority represents a historic step, taken in a world that is no longer that of ten years ago - a world exposed to new and deadly threats to its security.

We are grievously aware of this in my own country: if 11 September 2001 marked the beginning of an era, 11 March 2003, the date of the Madrid attacks, revealed that we are all potentially vulnerable.

However, if the withdrawal is truly to bear fruit, it will have to play a catalytic role, showing the sceptics that to move towards peace does not mean surrendering to terrorism.

As the EP has said in its resolution, a successful withdrawal from Gaza will be the first necessary step in a process which should then continue in the West Bank, in parallel to a moratorium on settlements and an end to the demolitions, the final objective being, as before, to give the Palestinians the means to create a state that will be democratic, independent, sustainable and viable.

This is the price Israel has to pay for its own security. Believe me, it will be worth being. The future will, as you know, reward you in abundance.

Let us not allow rising violence to undo our shared aspirations to peace, our desire to live together. Today more than ever it would be disastrous to disappoint your peoples and ours, especially the young generations.

I will now quote a song that will be familiar to all of you:

KOL AOLÁM CULÓ GUESHER TSAR MEÓD! VE A IKAR LO LEFÁJED KLAL  
'The whole world is a bridge - don't be afraid to cross it'.

Courage and determination

In our region there has been much talk lately of the importance of democratisation.

Democracy is the same for all, and does not tolerate exceptions. It is unthinkable without respect for human dignity, since it is human beings that form its motor and embody its laws and principles.

Please allow me to situate these basic considerations in the framework of today's reflections.

No-one questions a country's fundamental right to defend itself.

However, the best forms of defence are not always the ones we think: recent history abounds in examples confirming this.

Physical borders, like institutions, are lasting only when they are legitimate - that is, when they are accepted and respected.

Nor are security barriers always the best defence: the lasting peace between France and Germany is the result not of the Maginot Line but of the European Union.

Democracy cannot exist without respect for international law, which is itself impossible without trust.

Democracy excludes by its nature all non-consensual actions, and is inherently a call to dialogue.

This is the credo underlying all the EU's actions. We are fully aware of the problems that have to be overcome - psychological problems included - but we urge all parties to advance in resolute fashion towards the implementation of the Road Map on the basis of those same principles.

If I urge you to do this, we do of course also urge the Palestinians - as I shall say to them tomorrow - to take similar action in parallel, to ensure a common future for us all.

If the first half of the last century was dominated by Europe's survival in the wake of horror and destruction, the second half witnessed the survival of Israel in the face of a universally hostile Arab world, alongside the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination.

If you are willing to associate with those who recognise you, you will see that the terrorists and extremists who question your right to exist will end up isolated and marginalised by the impetus generated by peace.

As recent events in Lebanon have shown, courage and determination can transform things much faster than anyone would have thought.

Once you are on this road, in the wake of the historic decision to evacuate, for the first time, settlements in the occupied territories, you will find Europe walking by your side, as it has done throughout your country's history.

Since 1948, the entire European political class has expressed its views on the crises and peace processes in the Middle East. Everything, or almost everything, has been said to everyone, or almost everyone - and everywhere, or almost everywhere. My own aim for these three days is perfectly simple. I shall say the same things in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. I shall not say only what people might want to hear. I shall not say much, but what I say will in all cases be in line with European values. What I say will have to do with:

- the right to life;
- respect for the other;
- the right to recognised territory within secure and accepted borders, pursuant to international law;
- the power of dialogue;
- respect for the rule of law.

The order in which I discuss these things is of no great importance. Nonetheless, if all those five concepts embed themselves in our reflections and our memories, I am sure that in the end we can together forge a fair and lasting peace, in these territories which have been the cradle of our civilisation and our cultures.

Thank you very much.

Toda Raba

\* [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/president/Presidents\\_old/president\\_borrell/speeches/en/files/sp0045.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/president/Presidents_old/president_borrell/speeches/en/files/sp0045.htm)