

## THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S APPROACH TO THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION ON EU-ISRAEL RELATIONS

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### Abstract

European countries tried to overcome the heavy damage caused by World War II with the integration movement that started with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. The ECSC, which was established primarily for the purpose of establishing an economic union, began to become a political power in addition to being an economic power. The EU, which has managed to have a strong structure in the field of politics and security by implementing a common foreign and security policy, has institutionalized itself on the way to becoming an effective actor in international problems and global politics after the Cold War. The Middle East, which became the source of new elements of instability after the Cold War (terrorism, regional conflicts, failed states and organized crime, etc.), has attracted special attention from the EU due to reasons such as the existence of Muslim ghettos. The EU, which has achieved partial success in negotiations and resolution between the parties with the positive steps it has taken towards the Palestinian issue, has sometimes been the target of harsh reactions from the Israeli government and the Jewish diaspora with the policies it has implemented. The EU, which has found the opportunity to prove itself on the path to becoming a global power, has faced the reality of further strengthening its institutional identity. This article examines the need for the EU to work towards this goal in terms of the role it has undertaken towards a resolution between Israel and Palestine under the auspices of the US.

**Keywords:** Palestine Conflict, EU, Israel, Palestine, EU-Israel Relations

### Avrupa Birliğinin Filistin Sorununa Yaklaşımının AB-İsrail İlişkilerine Etkisi

### Öz

Avrupa Devletleri, II. Dünya Savaşı'nın neden olduğu ağır tahrifatı, 1951 yılında Avrupa Kömür ve Çelik Topluluğu ile başlayan bütünlleşme hareketi ile aşmaya çalışmıştır. Temelde ekonomik bir birlilikler saglama amacıyla kurulan AKÇT, ekonomik bir güç olmanın yanında zamanla siyasi bir güç olmaya başlamıştır. Ortak bir dış politika ve güvenlik politikasını hayatı geçirerek, siyaset ve güvenlik alanında güçlü bir yapıya sahip olmayı başaran AB, Soğuk Savaş sonrası uluslararası sorunlar üzerinde ve küresel politikada etkili bir aktör olma

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yolunda kurumsallaşma yoluna gitmiştir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası yeni istikrarsızlık unsurlarının (terörizm, bölgesel çatışmalar, başarısız devletler ve örgütlü suçlar vs.) kaynağı haline gelen Orta Doğu, Müslüman gettoların bulunması gibi nedenlerle AB'nin özel ilgisini çekmiştir. Filistin sorununa yönelik attığı olumlu adımlarla taraflar arasında görüşmeler ve çözüme yönelik kısmı başarılı elde edebilen AB, uyguladığı politikalarla bazen İsrail hükümetinin ve Yahudi diasporasının sert tepkilerine hedef olmaktadır. Küresel güç olma yolunda kendisini ispatlama fırsatı bulan AB, kurumsal kimliğini daha da güçlendirmesi gereği ile yüzleşmiştir. Bu makalede A.B.D.'nin himayesindeki İsrail ile Filistin arasında çözüme yönelik üstlendiği rol bakımından AB'nin bu amacına yönelik çalışması gerekliliği konusu incelenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Filistin Sorunu, AB, İsrail, Filistin, AB-İsrail İlişkileri.*

## 1. Introduction

The European Union, which was established with the aim of establishing peace throughout Europe and economic cooperation among European countries, has placed the principles and ideals resulting from common experiences, namely, ensuring lasting peace, social welfare, solidarity, freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, market economy and freedom of enterprise, at the basis of the integration movement (ABGS, 2013).

The European Union wants to protect the experiences it has gained over the years and the principles and ideals it has developed. The European Union, which wants to eliminate all kinds of threats to these principles and ideals, also sees the Middle East as the source of new instability elements that emerged after the Cold War (terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failed states and organized crime, etc.). The existence of Muslim ghettos in its member countries, the continuing migration from former colonies to Europe, energy needs and economic relations, and reasons such as ensuring its own security force the European Union to establish relations with Middle Eastern countries (Efegil 2008).

Israel, which has become an outpost of the USA in the Middle East, especially since the Nixon administration, with American military aid, and its success in the war fields against "radical" Arab regimes and the policies it has implemented in the Palestinian territories have given Israel a special place in the Middle East problem. (Kasım, 2014, p. 121) The political instability elements originating from the Middle East, such as terrorism, regional conflicts and organized crimes that emerged after the Cold War, are also making their impact felt in Europe, as well as the EU's inability to break free from dependency on Arabs and Iran in the field of energy, are increasing the EU's interest in the Middle East. The EU, which is aware that maintaining economic stability is possible through the continuous and cheap provision

of energy through safe means, is forced to take sides in establishing stable relations in the Middle East that are free from conflicts. The Palestinian issue, which has not been resolved for years in the Middle East, maintains its importance and its determining role in relations towards the Middle East.

This study examines the impact of the Palestinian issue on relations between the European Union and Israel. First, the development of the EU's security and defense policies is discussed. In the second section, the status of the Palestinian issue is examined. In the third section, the EU's approach to the Palestinian issue is examined and finally, the impact of the Palestinian issue on EU-Israel relations is discussed.

## **2.1. Security and Defense Policies of the European Union**

Although the integration movement that started in Europe with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 seems to be an economic union, the member states aim to have a strong structure in the field of politics and security by implementing a common foreign and security policy, in addition to having economic power in the world conjuncture (Söylemiş, 2007, p:39).

With the end of the Cold War, the European Union, which began to act independently of the United States, tried to become a global power and wanted to play an active role in the security of Europe, and as a result, the "Common Foreign and Security Policy" (CFSP) was established as the second pillar of the three-pillar structure introduced by the Maastricht Treaty. Realizing that achieving the goal of being a dominant actor that speaks with a single voice and is effective on international issues and in global politics would be possible by establishing an effective and consistent European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the EU began to form the institutional structure of the European Security and Defense Policy in the late 1990s (Efe, 2007, p.p.127-128).

## **2.2. EU Security and Defense Policies During the Cold War**

Following the successful establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), in the early 1950s, member states focused on integration in the fields of foreign, security and defense policies, and came up with the idea of establishing a European Defense Community (ECC). The plan, known as the "Pleven Plan," proposed the establishment of a "European Defense Minister" to be appointed by the participating states and responsible for the soldiers, equipment and armament that the EC member states would provide to the common "European Army"; a "European Army" whose expenses would be covered by the common budget and "dependent on the political institutions of a united Europe for the common defense of Europe." The aim was to establish a permanent peace between Western European states that was independent of the USA and that Germany could also join, and to play an active role as a third power in the bipolar world against the Soviet Union. The mission of

the AST was determined as integrating the defense forces of the member states and ensuring the security of the member states against any attack on them. The European Defence Community (EDC), which was accepted by the Benelux States and German parliaments, was not accepted by the French Parliament on 28 August 1954, which brought the proposal to the agenda, due to the reaction to Germany's rearmament and the provisions included in the EDC Treaty regarding the EDC -NATO connection.(Efe, 2010,p. 37) Despite the rejection of the EDC, the arming of West Germany was realized with the intervention of the USA and the amendment of the Brussels Treaty in 1954 (Tuğtan, 2011, p. 254). The European Union, which wants to display its economic success in the field of defense and security, has begun to want to become a third power by breaking away from the two opposing alliances it was caught between during the Cold War. The main reason for this desire was that it felt the need to establish a common and independent defense and security policy since the 1980s (Tuğtan, 2011, p. 256).

### **3. EU Security and Defense Policies After the Cold War**

With the rapid disintegration of the USSR during the Gorbachev era, which was unable to resist the liberal market-dominated economies of the US and the EU and lost its political influence, major changes began to take place in Eastern Europe. The unification of Germany with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the separation of Croatia and Slovenia from Yugoslavia in 1991 were the harbingers of the innovations and problems that rapid change would bring in Europe. The fact that Germany did not consult other EU member states when it declared that it would recognize the independence of Croatia and Slovenia showed that the Common Foreign and Security Policy envisaged in Maastricht could not be established. (Tuğtan, 2011, p. 257) The European Union, which has failed to develop a common foreign and security policy, has remained under the influence of NATO and therefore the United States in the first decade after the Cold War. The European Union, which has tried to produce its own security policies since the Maastricht Treaty came into force, was inadequate in intervening in the Bosnian War in 1995 and the Kosovo War in 1999, and the conflicts were only brought to an end with NATO intervention (Tuğtan, 2011, p. 258).

#### **3.1. EU Security and Defense Policies After 1999**

At the Cologne Summit in June 1999, the European Union, which indicated that it would fully fulfil its role in the international arena and was willing to take the necessary steps to provide the military capabilities and methods of its member states to ensure this, also emphasised that it aimed to contribute more to the maintenance of international peace and security in line with the UN Charter. The institutional framework of the European Security and Defense Policy was drawn with the Cologne Summit. While the development of the EU's crisis management capacity was seen as an action accepted within the framework of the Common Foreign and

Security Policy, it was also accepted as a part of the process of shaping the common defense policy, which emerged in accordance with Article 17 of the EU Treaty (Güç, 2008, pp. 33-35).

While the institutional framework of the European Security and Defense Policy was drawn at the Cologne Summit in June 1999, the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 determined the details of the functioning of the institutional mechanism aimed at enabling the EU to make decisions on its own and to intervene in international crises independently of NATO. The institutional structuring of the European Union's security and defense policy was completed at the Nice Summit held on 7-9 December 2000 (Demirdögen, 2002, pp. 70-71). At the Laken Summit held in December 2001, it was stated that the European Security and Defence Policy was operational and that the decisions taken and the work initiated at previous summits were being continued as foreseen. At the Seville Summit held in June 2002, the European Council announced that it intended to make the European Union's operational capability in the Balkans, the closest geographical region to itself, in order to strengthen the EU's role in the fight against terrorism and to increase the impact of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the ESDP, within this framework. The Thessaloniki Summit added the prevention of conflicts, the spread of justice, and the preservation of stability and peace to the priorities of the European Union. In December 2003, it was envisaged to create a "European Union Security Strategy" and it was decided to start work on the establishment of a "Defense Agency" in 2004. The most important result of the Brussels Summit held in December 2003 was the adoption of the European Security Strategy. It was also stated that the military ESDP mission to be established in Bosnia and Herzegovina was ready. It was stated that the military capabilities would be used in accordance with the Berlin Plus arrangements (Güç, 2008, pp. 42-46).

### **3.2. Current Status of European Security and Defence Policy**

It grouped the threats perceived by the European Union from the international system to its existence and interests under five main headings, as adopted by the European Council on 12 December 2003. These are;

- Terrorism,
- Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction,
- Regional conflicts,
- Failed states
- Organized crimes.

The European Union aims to develop all its capabilities against these threats, from conflict prevention to crisis management and peacekeeping, and thus to support its common foreign policy with an effective security and defence policy (Tuğtan, 2011, pp. 262-263).

### **3.3. The Emergence of the Palestinian Question**

Zionism, which emerged in the 1800s, offered Jews the opportunity to form a political movement and return to Jerusalem. Zionism was a product of the modern world and transformed the religious perception of Palestine in the diaspora into a secular and political ideology. Over time, Jews who acted in line with Zionism began to move away from seeing the diaspora as a place where God's punishment would be served, and began to believe that the diaspora should be abandoned as soon as possible and settled in Palestine, where a modern nation-state could be established (Hershco, 2014). Jewish immigration to Palestine, one of the top priorities of the Zionist movement, continued in a planned and uninterrupted manner under the management of Zionist organizations through many legal and illegal means, even though it faced restrictions first from the Ottoman Empire and then from the British Mandate Administration after World War I (Balci, 2015, pp. 101-102). While approximately 110,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine through illegal immigration from 1933 to 1948, 700,000 Jews immigrated to Israel immediately after its establishment, and between 1948 and 1951, Israel's population doubled (Ulutaş, 2012, p. 18). The Arabs, who lacked a common leader and policy, launched an attack on the newly established state one day after Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948. Before declaring its independence, Israel gained significant power against the Arab States with the modern weapons it acquired from Czechoslovakia and France and the armed forces it created. Occupying the Galilee and the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem corridor, Israel captured 80 percent of Palestinian land at the end of the war, and nearly 800,000 Palestinians living there became refugees (Ulutaş, 2012, p. 20). The declaration of Israel as an enemy by other states in the region, the occupation of Palestinian lands and the migration of 800,000 Palestinians to neighboring countries have led to the Palestinian issue becoming a security problem for third states as well.

With the rise of the Arab nationalist Nasser to power in Egypt, which controlled the Gaza Strip, policies towards Israel in the region became harsher. Believing that Egypt needed to be weakened before it posed a threat to Israel, Israeli politicians agreed with the British and French governments to reorganize the borders of the region. Following the agreement, the Suez War, which broke out with Israel's sudden attack on October 29, 1956, ended with a ceasefire declared on November 7, with the intervention of the US and Russia (Balci, 2015, pp. 108-109). With the 1967 "victory", Israel expanded its territory fourfold. With Gaza and the entire Sinai Peninsula in Israeli hands, Israel reached the Suez Canal and, having taken Sharm el-Sheikh in the south, it gained control of the Straits of Tiran. The Gaza region in the north-east of Sinai also fell into Israeli hands.

After long discussions and debates to reconcile the American views supporting Israel and the Soviet views supporting the Arabs, the Security Council finally adopted resolution 242 on November 22, 1967. The resolution called for Israel to withdraw

from the territories it had occupied in the last war. The next part of the resolution called for the recognition and respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the region, and the right of every state to live “in peace”, “free from threat or use of force”, and “within secure and recognized borders” (Balci, 2015, pp. 110-111).

Palestinians, who were first forced into the position of refugees after 1948, began to be subjected to indifference and even oppression in the countries to which they dispersed after 1967. The majority of Palestinian refugees living in Europe went to European countries in the 1960s (Gökçinár, 2009, p. 84). The oppression that Palestinians faced both in their homeland and in the countries they sought asylum in was a triggering factor in the formation of resistance movements. After this date, the resistance of Palestinian groups would grow rapidly. The European Union's encounter with the issue of Palestine and Palestinian refugees also coincided with these dates.

#### **4. The European Union's Approach to the Palestinian Question**

Diplomatic relations between the EEC (European Union, formerly the European Economic Community) and Israel, which first began in 1959, have been conducted in an ambiguous manner due to economic, commercial, scientific and cultural cooperation on the one hand, and deep political and large-scale security disagreements on the other. Israel-EU relations are generally shaped by security and defense cooperation as well as economics, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a major sticking point in this relationship (Akselsen, 2003).

The European Union tried to implement its policies throughout the Cold War in a manner that complemented the U.S. Middle East policies. The European Union, which did not side with Israel in the face of the Palestinian issue, also did not side with the Palestinian Arabs. The European Union, which first seriously expressed its reaction to Israel's excesses in the European Political Cooperation meeting declaration in November 1967, declared that it supported the United Nations' 1967 resolution number 242 on the subject (TASAM, 2005). The oil embargo launched by the Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1973 in response to the US support for the Israeli Army turned the world markets upside down, as well as the European Union markets. On August 15, 1973, the European Union made a statement emphasizing the need to return the lands occupied by Israel and to sit down at the table for peace agreements as soon as possible. The oil crisis that shook the European economy played an active role in the emergence of this decision. The negative impact of the unrest in the Middle East on its own economy allowed the EC to better understand the situation (TASAM, 2005). The European Union, which was not effective against the policies of the USSR and the USA during the Cold War, started to be more effective in foreign policy after the 1990s. It developed various discourses and policies towards the Palestinian issue. However, it could not produce sufficient policies against the

USA, which started to have a single voice in the region. The European Union, which prioritized its own interests and tried to develop independent policies from the USA after the 1990s, started to develop more effective and independent policies in the 2000s. The European Union, which hosts more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees and stateless people, has begun to determine the direction of its independent policies towards the region. On May 15, 2003, a report was presented to the European Parliament by the Norwegian member of the Socialist Group, Olav Akselsen, assessing the situation of Palestinian refugees. The EU authorities called on the Palestinian and Israeli sides to establish a flexible and realistic dialogue, and presented some recommendations and solutions. While the decision was taken to examine the issues regarding the legal status of Palestinian refugees in the member states of this European Council and to take concrete initiatives regarding their fundamental legal rights, the Israeli side was advised to; Investigate human rights violations in all cases, including during military operations, and prosecute their perpetrators; In order to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law; Remove bureaucratic obstacles for the delivery of humanitarian goods and allow international humanitarian aid organizations; Not use refugees for political purposes and show more flexibility regarding refugees. It called on the Palestinian Authority to take steps to avoid using refugees as a tool for political action and to show greater flexibility on the refugee issue, encouraging a durable solution, including compensation, for the refugee population (Akselsen, 2003).

The Palestinian issue, which is an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its commitment to its core values such as democracy, human rights and good governance, and its stance as a soft/civilian power against violent initiatives and measures, has enabled the EU to take steps to set the CFSP principles on a certain course in the international arena and to give it a certain stance.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become an issue that threatens the development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership process, causing the EU to face threats such as terrorism, organized crime, and migration from the region with heavy financial expenditures. The solution to this problem, which also has negative effects in terms of threats to projects such as the European Neighborhood Policy, is of strategic importance for the EU. The fact that this problem will hinder projects such as democratization, liberalization, regional economic cooperation, the establishment of a free trade zone, and regional security cooperation makes the EU want a solution to the instabilities in the Middle East (Mercan, 2008, p. 106).

- The European Union wants a solution to the Palestinian issue and lists the priorities that need to be done as follows.
- It wants the problems and violations to be meticulously concluded in accordance with international and European law. It wants Israel to adapt its current policies and practices regarding settlements and Palestinian property to the law,

- End the blockade of Gaza, prevent efforts to provide a collective punishment logic and isolation from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip,
- The emergence of a Palestinian state in order to increase the effectiveness of EU aid,
- Review democracy support programs to maximize the sustainability and impact of current aid policies, develop a more comprehensive policy against human rights and democracy within the understanding of conflict,
- Provide security on the Lebanon-Israel border and in the most sensitive regions, including Jerusalem, and develop measures to prevent possible crises,
- Support and assistance to constructive regional initiatives regarding the conflict, most importantly in the case of the Arab Peace Initiative, with effective international and regional initiatives and resources that play a proactive role (Aymat, 2012).

## **5. The Impact of the Palestinian Issue on EU-Israel Relations**

Israel-EU relations, which have a multidimensional and sometimes tense historical past, continue to be intense in areas such as trade, science, culture and sports (Gerstenfeld, 2005). The Venice Declaration emphasized the need for Palestinians to self-determine and the inclusion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in negotiations. The EU, which stated that all states in the region should live in peace and security and touched on Israel's right to life, did not refrain from criticizing Israel's settlement policies (Dinan, 2005, p. 202). The EU, which was unable to be effective against US policies, was also unable to develop decisive policies at the Madrid Conference, which was held to initiate a peace process with Arab countries including Israel, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, which were supported by the US and the USSR. However, it made a clear commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state with the Berlin Declaration published in 1999 (Keskin, 2010, p. 122). This declaration was the target of very harsh reactions from Israel.

The EU signed the European Mediterranean Partnership Agreement with Israel on November 20, 1995, within the framework of its Mediterranean policy. About a year after the agreement with Israel, it signed a trade and cooperation agreement with the Palestinian Authority on January 24, 1997. It is also understood from the agreements signed by the EU with Palestine and Israel that the EU is pursuing a balanced policy regarding the Palestine-Israel issue and is trying to create room for maneuver. In addition, the EU has also spent the most resources to solve the issue (Gökçinár, 2009, pp.141-142).

Since the 1990s, the EU has based its relations with Israel on the construction of the Middle East peace process. The EU has decided to start negotiations for a new trade agreement with Israel only when the Israeli government accepts the principles

of peace negotiations with Palestine. In this way, the EU has linked the course of its political and economic relations with Israel and the benefits it will provide to it to the Middle East peace process ( Mercan, 2008, pp.113-114). While the EU initiated diplomatic initiatives and lobbying activities to have Arab countries lift the economic boycott of Israel in 1991, it has never accepted Israel's rule over the occupied territories. The EU opposed Israel's unilateral actions such as annexation and seizure of East Jerusalem and helped to secure a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine in 2001.

. The EU, which mediated the withdrawal of Israeli forces from a part of the West Bank, took an initiative in 1998 to emphasize human rights and began publishing reports twice a year monitoring Israel's treatment of Palestinian prisoners, border closures, attempts to destroy Palestinian homes, and human rights violations. With all these initiatives, the EU both reinforced its status as an arbiter between the parties and made the nature of Israeli actions open to the scrutiny and appreciation of the international community (Mercan, 2008, pp. 114-115).

The policies of the European Union towards Palestine are often a source of discomfort and criticism on the Israeli side. In his article "Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?", published in 2005 by Manfred Gerstenfeld, in which he assessed Israel-EU relations, he claimed that Israel was struggling to survive in a hostile environment by confronting Arab terrorism, that it had to defend itself against this asymmetric war in many ways, and that despite all this, it had managed to preserve its democratic character. Gerstenfeld claimed that the EU failed to understand Israel's security concerns (Gerstenfeld, 2005). Gertenfeld's criticism of the EU is not limited to the EU's failure to understand security concerns. Gertenfeld states that the EU's inability to free itself from its excessive dependence on oil from Arab countries and Iran has led it to frequently take approaches that are detrimental to its relations with Israel (Gerstenfeld, 2005). In other words, he accuses the EU of taking a pragmatic approach to the issue that ignores Israel's national interests.

## **Conclusion**

European countries tried to overcome the heavy damage caused by World War II with the integration movement that started with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. The ECSC, which was established primarily for the purpose of establishing an economic union, began to become a political power in addition to being an economic power. The EU, which has managed to have a strong structure in the field of politics and security by implementing a common foreign and security policy, has institutionalized itself on the way to becoming an effective actor in international problems and global politics after the Cold War. The Middle East, which became the source of new elements of instability after the Cold War (terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failed states and organized crime, etc.), has attracted special attention from the EU due to reasons such as the exis-

tence of Muslim ghettos, the continuing migration from former colonies to Europe, the need for energy and economic relations. In addition to the elements of political instability originating from the Middle East, the EU, which cannot escape its dependence on the Arabs and Iran in the field of energy, has had to take a close interest in the Middle East. Israel, which has the full support of the U.S., has an uncompromising attitude towards the Palestinian issue, which is a key issue in the Middle East, and its humanitarian crimes, human rights violations and practices that destroy democratic values, implemented for security reasons, have drawn the reaction of the European Union. The EU, which has taken an active role in resolving the issue after the Cold War, has failed in its efforts to have the Israeli and Palestinian sides hold talks and achieve a solution in this way. The EU, which has achieved partial success in negotiations and resolution between the parties with the positive steps it has taken towards the Palestinian issue, has occasionally been the target of harsh reactions from the Israeli government and the Jewish diaspora with the policies it has implemented. The EU, which has had the opportunity to prove itself on the path to becoming a global power, has come to terms with the fact that it has further strengthened its institutional identity. The EU needs to work harder towards this goal in terms of the role it has undertaken towards a resolution between Israel and Palestine, which is under the auspices of the US.

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