

## Abstract

The signing of the Declaration of Principles in the garden of the White House in Washington paradoxically led the Arab region in general and the Palestinians and the Israelis in particular into a new era of conflict called "peace process". Not only the Palestinians and the Israelis care or are concerned about the new stage, but other players as well. This study focuses on Europe, more precisely Western Europe, which simultaneously with the "peace process" entered a new era of integration within the European Union. Many looked at the European Union as a new power which would or could affect the course of events in the Arab region as a whole.

It is well known that Europe has always been affected by the course of events in the wider Arab and the smaller Mediterranean region, but especially by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, it has always tried to achieve or maintain stability in the region. In the last decade of the twentieth century it was trying hard to maintain peace to reach a comprehensive settlement between the conflict parties.

The topic of this thesis is the role of the European Union toward the region as a whole and toward the Palestinians and the Israelis as central actors in the region in the period between 1994 and 2000, i.e. between the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the collapse of the Oslo process during the Camp David II conference in summer 2000.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the aims and the objectives of the EU in the Mediterranean. After the collapse of dual polarity the European Union looks at regional relations as a major issue. Also, it emphasizes above all the political fields of economy and approaches it in a cooperative way.

The region dealt with in this thesis is the Mediterranean basin. Its southern and eastern areas could well be considered a threat to Europe. This perception of a possible threat is the starting-point of this study when it tries to



shed light on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as one of the factors that cause instability in the region. The European Union has its own aims and objectives to be achieved through its efforts towards the Mediterranean basin, and it looks at any conflict as a threat to regional stability, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict in general and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular. Also, the EU starts from the conviction, that any conflict should and could be solved through a political settlement and through cooperation.

This first chapter leads directly to the major question dealt with in chapter two: What are the particular characteristics of the European role toward the "peace process"? The European Union from the very beginning of the peace process supported the two parties, i.e. the PLO and the State of Israel. It made many investments in Israel, while it also supported hundreds of NGOs in the Palestinian territories, in addition to paying again and again the entire salaries to the employees of the Palestinian Authority. Both these chapters are based on the liberal respectively neo-liberal theory.

These two chapters clearly showed that the EU did not respectively could not play the political role required to be played in order to achieve its objectives. This became most obvious with the Palestinian uprising (Al-Aqsa Intifada) which started on September 28, 2000. Many reasons and different factors do explain this development which ran counter to the plans and expectations of the EU.

From here, the central question of chapter three arises: What are the limitations of the European role in the "peace process" 1994-2000? What are the factors that impeded the EU from playing an active role to push forward the conflict - parties to reach a settlement? Is this related to internal or to external constraints or to both? Chapter three tries to answer these questions based on the realist respectively neo-realist school.

The European Union came to the region in order to play an economic role through its financial aid and its investments in Israel and in the Palestinian territories. The Europeans thought that this economic role would lead directly to democracy and peace by improving the standards of livings which in turn

would help in maintaining security. In addition, they thought that prosperity would help the two sides to recognize each other and accept each others' positions with an open mind. However, as this study showed improving standards of living and providing security might help conflict partners to advance towards peace, but they cannot be the major motor towards ending the conflict. In a conflict like the one between the Arabs and Palestinians on the one side and Israel on the other side, the political and military power and its distribution do play the major role in bringing about peace or war in the region. So, the Europeans "failed" to achieve peace in the period between 1994-2000.

The EU power is in principle an economic power. At the same time, it is not the major economic power which can use this power to achieve peace. It is rather the only remaining Superpower which supports Israel in all fields and on all levels, including the field of economy.