

**Interview to
EU Special Representative for the Middle East peace process, Marc OTTE
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The European Union's Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process: Dr. Fayyad's plan to build the states' institutions will succeed if accompanied by a political process that prevents Israel's intervention

Jerusalem- from Mohammad Shaker Abdullah- the European Union's Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process, Marc Otte, stated that Europeans did not exert any pressure on the Palestinian Authority during the presentation of Goldstone report to the International Human Rights Council in Geneva. He believes that Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's plan has its own acceptable logic provided that it is associated with a political process that prevents Israel from intervening to harm it. He demanded opening Gaza crossings and allowing construction materials to enter for reconstructing what has been destroyed by Israel's war on Gaza. The European Representative expressed his satisfaction with the progress in Palestinian Police performance and called upon the Palestinian people to keep hope, promising to maintain European support to the American role towards re-launching a credible and transparent peace process.

Find hereafter the full text of the interview:

Q- We have noted that your visit program was full of activities and interviews, what is the main goal of this visit?

A- I am here in the region on a permanent basis, except for a few visits back to Europe. On one hand, the current visit comes to continue follow-up on events after the tri-lateral summit held in New York, and following the American special envoy, Senator George Mitchell's trip. On the other hand, the visit aims at knowing the opinion of the Palestinian street on the course of events. For this, I have met many people from different sectors of the society: businessmen, police affiliates, within the framework of European partnership with the Palestinian government to build the state's institutions according to Dr. Salam Fayyad's plan.

Q- Many dangerous events have occurred since we last met you, including the issue of Goldstone report about war crimes in Gaza. What is the European stand on this report, and why did they chose to go against presenting it to the United Nations?

A- First of all, Europeans belong to many states, and the European Union is not part of the Human Rights Council, there are only a number of European countries that are members in the Council. The position taken by these countries was that the mandate given to Goldstone committee is imbalanced, so they adopted a different stand...

Q- What do you mean by imbalanced?

A- The reason is that the mandate focused on the behaviour of one party in the war, for this, we have a different situation now, because the recommendations did not take into consideration opinions of both parties. We were somewhat surprised by the Palestinian Authority's call, nevertheless, we respect the decision making process.

Q- Was the Palestinian Authority subject to European pressures when it agreed to postpone the voting?

A- No, there weren't European pressures of any kind. If there were pressures, then they came from other sides, and any pressure exerted was to support the Authority. Anyways, the process is still running in the United Nations that will accept the voting whether there was a majority or a minority. There is a case that is causing confusion to all of us, but it is also related to the relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and dialogue on all levels.

Q- What is your impression after seeing progress in the performance of the Palestinian Police?

A- As you must have noticed in my statements in Bethlehem and Jericho, I have a positive impression about the way the performance of the Palestinian Police has improved, and the political commitment of Dr. Fayyad's government to bring this mission to success. We are very pleased about the prevailing appropriate atmosphere, especially that polls have shown that the Palestinian society feels that the Police are serving it more than before.

Q- Are you monitoring what has been said about violations of human rights by some Palestinian security officers?

A- Yes, we do not only monitor, but we are working on preventing them. Part of the training is related to giving lectures on human rights. I have attended a lecture in one of the classrooms in Bethlehem where one of the French police experts explained laws organizing the use of arms and batons, and how to deal with protesters. We feel, at least, in relation to the civil police, and I am not talking about other apparatuses, because we are not committed to supporting them in this aspect, part of the respect the Police have from society is a result of police respect to these laws.

Q- Do you coordinate with General Dayton?

A- Of course. Some European countries play a role in Dayton's team. We coordinate with this team and we don't have any contradiction or difference between us.

Q- What about European support to the Palestinian Authority during this year and next year?

A- I don't memorize numbers, but generally speaking, most of our support goes to projects. There is support to the Palestinian Authority budget for salaries, this is one aspect. The other is that we continue to transfer funds for special purposes like helping poor families in Gaza in relation to food and shelter, and we continue to pay the bill of fuel for the electricity station and we support the UNRWA education program.

Q- What is the European stand on the continued closure of Gaza crossings, and Israel banning the entry of building materials necessary for reconstruction?

A- Gaza closure and denying entry to construction materials is morally unacceptable and is a failure. I was in Gaza last week, there were large quantities of cement in Gaza, but the only people who do not get it are the ones who most need it. For this, ban on construction materials is not acceptable and I have explained that to the Israelis and told them that this is also not in their interest. Our position is clear, especially that winter is coming, and people can not live in tents in the cold and under the rain.

Q- What about intensifying settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem especially by Netanyahu government?

A- We consider settlements in both East Jerusalem and the West Bank illegitimate and we do not differentiate between them in this regard. All settlements are illegitimate as President Abbas said in his speech at the United Nations recently.

Q- Is the European Union exerting any pressures in Israel to stop settlements?

A- We have never refrained from expressing our position on this.

Q- What about Netanyahu's positions against the peace process?

A- We are currently focusing on finding a momentum in which the United States and Mitchell can assist us to re-launch the peace process. The positions of Netanyahu and President Abbas are their own business, and the minute they sit together to negotiate, we assume that their positions now are not their final offer. But first they will have to sit together and compare their positions. We want them to actively interact with us so as to find a dynamic that results in true decisions. We want the decisions not the process itself

Q- Do you believe it is possible to implement Dr. Fayyad's plan to establish a Palestinian state in two years?

A- Yes, but with the condition of having a political process. I believe to a large extent that there is a strong political will but we can not fully implement it, because, at the end, we will find that Israel will intervene despite the exerted efforts. I know the logical basis for Prime Minister Fayyad, but this logic should be integrated with a peace process.

Q- We have heard the Quartet Representative, Tony Blair, saying that the Jewish settlements should be uprooted from the Palestinian territories, but we have not heard a European party giving similar statements?

A- Our point of view is that this depends on the decisions that will be taken, because this relies on the physical existence of the Palestinian state and the land on which it will be established. Then, those settlers who live on that land will have to decide whether they would like to live under Palestinian law or they would like to move to another place. Whoever wants to live in the Palestinian National Authority territories has to take permission from the Palestinian Authority. It is not necessary to uproot settlements, since some of them may enter under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, and others may be swapped in a peace agreement. It is important that the political process is launched so as to specify the lands on which the Palestinian state will be established and so that people know who lives here and who lives there.

Q- There are more than half a million settlers living in the occupied Palestinian territories. They found a de facto settlers state.

A- I know that this is the biggest threat to the two states solution. We have to take some decisions in this regard for two reasons: the first is whether there will be peace or not, and the second, whether the settlers will by subject or consider themselves above the law. This is related to the Israeli government and may fall back on it. If the Israeli government allows a portion of its people to act against the law, this will harm it.

Q- The existence of settlements contradicts with the international law that bans the transfer of citizens of the occupying state to the occupied territories?

A- Settlements are unacceptable. It has happened after previous wars but it is internationally unacceptable. We want negotiations, and their results must be clear.

Q-For more than 60 years, the Palestinians remained the weaker party while Israel acted as it wishes, and the international community remains idle. Why don't the international community and the Europeans pressure Israel to stop its practices against the Palestinian people?

A- I totally agree with you, and I believe it is wrong to weaken any one party during negotiations, which will push it towards carrying out other tactics to defend its interests. For peace, and for the interest of Israel, we should strengthen the Palestinian position during negotiations. We must not weaken Palestinians, especially in the issue of settlements. What happened in New York was not helpful, and Israel has no interest in having a weak partner, or else the strong party will appear in some other place. Did you listen to Khaled Masha'l's speech in Damascus lately?

Q-Mitchell did not achieve any progress in his tour in the region and talks outside the region?

A- We have to demand Senator Mitchell to continue his efforts despite all this.

Q- Palestinians were disappointed not only by Mitchell's mission, but also by President Obama's efforts, who they see incapable of forcing Israel to freeze settlements?

A- Despite all this, we must not lose hope. There is a recovering Palestinian economy, and I have seen businessmen and bankers, and solidity in the Palestinian will in the leadership and the people. There must be a democratic process to set the direction. Unifying Palestinian positions is not our mission but rather that of the Palestinians themselves.

Q- What would you like to say to Al-Quds readers and the Palestinian people in general?

A- What I am saying is do not lose hope. Give support to your government because it is doing good things. We will work with you in a positive and transparent way, and we will not prefer one party of you over another. I am determined to improve the situation first, and also work with our American friends to re-launch a credible peace process, which is the only way to move forward. The only danger is the occurrence of more bloodshed, which will make things more difficult for both sides.

Q- A final question: will European governments enforce any arrest warrants that the International Criminal Court may issue against Israeli officials due to Goldstone report?

A- This is a hypothetical question that I won't answer. First because I don't know, and second because it is a premature question.
