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EU Powerlessness

Conflicting Perceptions in Response to the War on Gaza

Prepared by



Dr. Adeeb Ziadeh
Assistant Professor of International Relations
Department of International Affairs/ College of
Arts and Sciences
Qatar University
abader@qu.edu.qa

Abstract

This article aimed to scrutinize the EU's cause of powerlessness in dealing with the confrontation, which erupted between the Israeli occupation and Gaza strip in May 2021. Due to the fact that the EU was one of the least actionist external big actors which affected the situation on ground during the war politically and diplomatically, this article tried to interpret this deficiency, as researchers have not tackled it so far. However, in serving this, forty-one EU parliamentary members' speeches (MEPs) have been critically and thoroughly analyzed. Using content analysis, alongside other tools extracted from the realist perspective combined with one of the constructivist theoretical angles, significantly enabled the researcher in analyzing the European politicians' discourses in this regard. It is significantly found that the revisiting EU failure in adequately tackling such an event is attributed to the biased convictions and subjective perceptions that most of the EU politicians hold about the Israeli-Palestinian cause. Conflictual diagnostic perceptions of the MEPs with regard to the exploded situation expressively shown the extent to which divisions amongst politicians have left the EU's diplomacy miserably paralyzed; a matter that confirmed the realists' perspective about the EU foreign policy as it is "nothing more than the combined effort of the member states' foreign policies". Undoubtedly, having unanimity, as a mechanism for foreign policy decision-making, contributed to putting extra burdens on the EU politicians, particularly in the dossier under investigation. Hence, light was shed on MEPs' perspectives regarding the roots of the confrontation, justice against peace, self-defense versus right of resistance and demonization of Hamas contrasted with humanitization of Israel.

Key words: Gaza strip, Hamas, Israeli Occupation, self-defense, right of resistance, European parliament, European Union, apartheid

Introductory background

The EU was one of the least actionist external big actors that affected the situation on ground during the Israeli war on Gaza in May 2021. In such an investigation, forty-one EU parliamentary members' speeches (EMPs), the total number of those participated in the special relevant debate conducted in Brussels on 18th May, have been critically analyzed throughout this

study to shed some light on the causal relationship of such EU powerlessness. Using methodology of content analysis in analyzing such official speeches to figure out who said what and why, enabled the investigator to diagnose the revisiting EU failure in dealing with the renewal bloody combats that exploded, on a large scale, four times between 2008 and 2021 in Palestine. The EU position in the last war has not been deeply investigated with referral to its politicians' hegemonic discourse in this regard. Taking into consideration the realist perspective in international relations, combined with a tool borrowed from constructivism, particularly perceptions, such EU negativity in the war will be in question.

Significantly, this article is based on a hypothesis to the effect that internalized perceptions, thoughts and beliefs in the European politicians' mindset about the two parties of the war considerably affected the EU powerlessness. However, powerlessness is meant to be placed here in a consequential context, not a causal framework, and means the absence of actionism where it could be applied, due to implicit and explicit reasons. While many studies digged into determinants of the EU foreign policy, this article chose another way and tried to find out the nature of the political discourse of a representative slice of European politicians serving in one of the EU three pillars, the European parliament, during the war. Consequently, the revisiting EU failure in tackling such an event is attributed to the biased convictions and subjective perceptions that most of the EU politicians hold. However, as far as unanimity is a condition for external political actions as agreed upon in the EU (*Treaty of Lisbon, 2007, art: 26 E*), powerlessness will accompany this entity for a long while and weaken its role in the international arena, especially in Palestine on which the EU's policies are divided.

The EU has crystalized a significant position towards the Arab- Israeli conflict in the aftermath of the evolution of its European Political Cooperation foreign policy instrument in 1970 onward. This came after the 1967 war in which Israel militarily occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. The European position founded on the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, in addition to other related UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions. Significantly, the then named European Community issued several statements, calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, and to restore the situation as it was on the eve of 1967 war. This progressive position culminated in 1980 when the EC issued its turning point step known as the Venice declaration, recognizing the right of the Palestinians for self-determination,

calling for a negotiated solution between all involved parties including the PLO (*Venice European Council Declaration, 1980*).

Although the EU position was encountered with anger and refusal by Israel and the USA, this perspective prevailed at the end when all parties came together, and put their signature on Oslo agreement in 1993 at the White House garden in Washington D.C. However, the unleashed peace process under the auspices of the USA politically, and the EU economically, passed through without reaching the independent Palestinian state, as according to Oslo agreement, should have been established since May 1999, the end of the interim period (*Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, 1994, art: 23*).

Ever since, neither the USA nor the EU could oblige the Israeli occupation to stop its violations of the international law, neglecting the agreements signed with PLO. However, Israel never stopped building settlements, Judaizing Jerusalem, demolishing Palestinians houses, confiscating their land and treating them inhumanly. Furthermore, it launched four wars on Gaza Strip, in addition to other rounds of confrontations in West Bank and Gaza alike (Goldstone, 2009).

Unpardonably, the EU as one of those early players in the Oslo peace process could not keep the latter's momentum alive, apart from the USA. It has not even activated any of its capabilities under its disposal against the well-known violators of international law. Despite dozens of international human rights reports published by European, American and even Israeli human rights' organizations, describing Israel as an apartheid state due to its discriminatory policies against Palestinians, Israel has been faced by nothing but meaningless words of condemnations. On the contrary, strategic relationships between Israel and the EU have been solidated over the last three decades more than ever.

After every failure in accommodating itself with international and human rights law that Israeli occupation falls in, the EU maintains the same rhythm in its reaction, treating the two parties of the equation inconsistently. This was obvious in every war between the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian factions in Gaza strip, who have always been blamed for their proscribed (terrorist actions). Incomprehensibly, while the right of Israel for self-defense has always been considered of its legitimate unnegotiable rights, the Palestinian right for resistance against the Israeli occupation, as enshrined in the UNGA resolutions, has never been recognized or taken into account.

(The UNGA) Reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle (UN. General Assembly (37th sess.: 1982–1983).

This negligence of the Palestinians' right for armed resistance, as above-mentioned, has been also applicable to the last confrontation between the two sides in May 2021, which lasted for 11 days, causing huge fatalities among innocent people and massive destruction in the Palestinian infrastructure. Although there were many voices heard blaming Israel for its destructive humiliating policies against Palestinians, the mainstream European rhetoric and discourse took side with the Israeli narrative, accusing Hamas for its part in the war. This was always the case in all similar Israeli- Palestinian clashes in 2008, 2012 and 2014.

Significantly, with the eruption of the last war in May 2021 the EU council could not agree on a joint action or even a mere declaration proposed to call for a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. As Hungary, benefited from the unanimity tool that is necessary for the EUFP actions, blocked that declaration which was suggested in an online meeting convened by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, the EU officials found twitter and other social media platforms as an alternative tools for expressing their individual opinions, leaving appallingly Gaza Strip under the Israeli horrific fire (Siebold & Emmott, 2021).

Fundamentally, while the EU is considered Israel's biggest trade partner (EU Trade Relations with Israel, n.d.), and the biggest supporting donor for Palestinians, it continued to prove its powerlessness in translating this advantage in achieving any kind of breakthrough in the stalemated peace process or during the war. This inability of acting properly and timely portrays the EU as an entity that does not learn lessons from history on the one hand, and does not improve its political mechanisms on the other, locking itself into a specific narrative that dominates its actions. However, the handcuffed EU foreign policy in this regard considered by realists as an imperative result due to the fact that it is "nothing more than the combined effort of the member states' foreign policies, with EU institutions only able to deliver common denominator-based policies" (Rieker & Giske, 2021). Thus, one state can restrict others' proposed actions in responding to significant events, making the whole entity, when summoned to act, powerless. In mourning its status, MEP Nicola Beer directed his talk to the EU saying,

“we are the institutions, we are politics, we are Europe, and we cannot remain powerless” (Beer, 2021). MEP Jordi Solé understands that the EU might not be “a diplomatic champion, but it certainly has tools to exert leverage, and help the parties move towards a fair and lasting settlement” (Sole, 2021). This powerlessness shows the extent to which the EU’s sway in this dossier is lost and marginalized.

While realists perceive the self-interest of all individual states as the main determinant of the EU decision makers’ actions, the constructivist approach looks at the EU from another perspective. Accordingly, “foreign policy decisions are often made under time and information constraints; involve value-tradeoffs and sunk costs; are influenced by perceptions and misperceptions, images and belief systems, emotions, and internal political and economic calculations; and are shaped by the personality of leaders, miscalculations, agendas, and interests” (Mintz & K., 2010, p169). Therefore, right perceptions and the way decision makers perceive conflicts lead, under certain circumstances, to right policies and vice versa. As a European project established in Palestine, Israel has been seen as a victimized state, and remarkably depicted, for a long time, as a pity target for the so-called Palestinian terrorism. Expressively, this reached its peak after the Hamas movement and other resistance Palestinian factions started to cause some pain for the Israelis from Gaza strip. As long as, the intentional law allows all sorts of resistance in response to military occupation and oppression, the EU pro-Israeli position has been attributed to the Europeans’ interests as perceived and sought by decision makers. As Adeeb Ziadeh labelled it, the West solved the historical Jewish question at the outset of the twentieth century in Palestine once and forever; however, it would not allow this dossier to be reopened again, or to end up, as a result of any existential threat, at the lap of Europe, as it had been before the establishment of Israel (Ziadeh, 2019, p181). Thus, perceptions of European speakers in the EU parliament, which are under analysis herein, reflect the extent to which the EU is incapable of acting in some controversial dossiers, like the one in light.

Roots of Confrontation; Far More Than Apparent Causes

It is commonly known that the confrontation between the Palestinians and the Israelis in May 2021 exploded after the dire clashes between the two parties over the Israeli policies. However, displacement of Palestinians from the long-lived Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, and

the Israeli attack on the worshippers at Al-Aqsa mosque in Ramadan were in the center of these policies. This Israeli violence, against the international law as perceived by plenty of international human rights organizations, the UN and the EU itself (Silva, 2021), has been the spark that ignited the huge fire, which nearly caused international crisis.

Whereas, it is true that the eviction of Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah and the attack on worshippers at Al-Aqsa mosque is the apparent reason, the actual reason has been the continuous Israeli ignorance of the Palestinians' rights in living in reasonable human circumstances rather than allowing them to exercise their political rights as enshrined in the international resolutions and agreements. Hence, the world witnessed 11 days of war, in which hundreds of Palestinians lost their lives, added to thousands of lives lost in three subsequent wars waged against Gaza, under the Israeli military strikes in 2008, 2012 and 2014, in addition to massive devastation in the infrastructure (McCarthy, 2021).

Despite the fact that roots of the war were acknowledged by many European speakers, Palestinians, who are solely perceived as launching rockets on Israel, were held responsible for starting it or at least equated with the occupation power itself. According to Augusto Silva,

Many of us have strong views on the proximate causes of this latest conflict. Indeed, the events in Jerusalem during the recent period of the Muslim holy days have been alarming. We were deeply concerned by the clashes at Haram al-Sharif/ Timple Mount. Again, let us be clear: in a city that is home to the three monotheistic religions, all sides must uphold and fully respect the status quo of the holy sites. Freedom of worship and peaceful freedom of assembly must be guaranteed (McCarthy, 2021).

Unequivocally, many MEPs pointed to the party in charge for starting this conflict, neglecting those equating between victims and aggressors. As MEPs Pedro Marques (2021), Jordi Solé (2021), and Andrea Cozzolino (2021) perceived it, the source of this new round of violence could be seen in the increasing number of demolitions, evictions and forced displacement of Palestinians, including in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood (Sant,2021). According to MEP Margrete Auken (2021), the fighting broke out again because of “the siege of Gaza, the brutal occupation of the West Bank, Israel's apartheid regime and the de facto annexation of Palestinian land through continued growth in the illegal settlements” (Auken, 2021).

The Israeli apartheid as described by Auken is a shared perception with other MEPs about the occupation. One of them is MEP Alfred Sant who believed that the Israeli policy, at the end, aims to enclose Palestinians in a Bantustan under Israeli domination, and this cannot be hidden or covered any more (Sant, 2021). The insufficient condemnations of the EU for the Israeli policies, which in reality, as MEP Andrea Cozzolino characterized it, equals negligence of violating the international law, played in favor of Netanyahu's governments; a matter which led to pushing millions of Palestinians to live in an apartheid regime that has produced the latest escalation of violence (Cozzolino, 2021).

The EU is always asked to assume its responsibility by taking a different, more productive and an effective approach to help in putting an end to the Israeli policies and apartheid. Effective mediation and “courageous diplomacy” (Zovko, 2021), according to MEP Manuel Pizarro who shared the same viewpoint with MEP Željana Zovko, should be fueled with energy to open channels of dialogue with all parties of the confrontation seeking a permanent solution (Pizarro, 2021). While Augusto Santos Silva, the speaker on behalf the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, called for change in light of the persistent cycle of violence, as he designated it, nothing but condemnations and advices are delivered (Silva, 2021). Instead, as MEP Maria Arena put it, the European Union must use everything in its power to stop the creeping violence of the occupation and apartheid on the Palestinian people, and this for a lasting peace for all (Arena, 2021). In such a way, MEP Idoia Villanueva Ruiz asked the EU to urgently move from declarations to deeds, not only to impose immediate cessation of bombing, but also to put an end to the apartheid and occupation. MEP Ruiz accused the EU for doing nothing but senseless meetings, asking this entity to act firmly and decisively and activate autonomy, independence or a simple strategy against other great powers; this strategy must be based on the fact that if peace is wanted to be achieved, justice has to be established (Ruiz, 2021).

Voices for Justice from within the EU Parliament

Building on MEP Ruiz’s idea, justice should be considerably pursued for the sake of sustainable peace. Justice, in MEP Chris MacManus’ point of view, could be reached when the EU recognizes, in a determined manner, that the conflict, which is taking place in Palestine, is not

between two powerful adversaries but “actually one military power crushing a nation making a stand for their rights, as a sovereign people, to control their own destiny” (MacManus, 2021). According to MEP Marc Botenga, what happened against Gaza was not a cycle of violence, as the EU Council ironically portrays the confrontation; it is an aggressive colonization. Israel is a colonizing state, which for decades, has illegally driving Palestinian out of their homes and “blithely violating a slew of United Nations’ resolutions” (Botenga, 2021). MEP Botenga reminded his MEPs colleagues and the EU Council that the colonization equation, if imposed on any people, the normal reaction would be resistance, and this was what seen in Palestine (Botenga, 2021). In MEP Alfred Sant words, ritual claims that those who resist the Israeli aggressions “are terrorists and anti-Semites no longer hold water” (Sant, 2021). Substantially, according to MEP Hilde Vautmans, as long as “a people is occupied, the resistance to it will continue; as long as a people is treated unequally and unfairly, the resistance will continue. Therefore, such mutual harassment, regardless who has bigger responsibility than the other, between parties will make peace considerably elusive (Vautmans, 2021).

However, exercising the condemnation game, adopting words based actions, and merely calling for ending violence by the EU Council are deceitful policies. The European attempt to show their concern by calling on parties to stop violence is an attempt to rewrite the basic facts of the conflict on ground. Considerably, by decontextualizing the situation between the two parties as if it is between two equal states, which have normal differences on some contested issues, the EU unreasonably contributes in prolonging the conflict. According to MEP Maria Arena, “we are facing an occupier, Israel, and an occupied, the Palestinian people; as international NGOs or even Israeli NGOs like B’Tselem or Yoshi Din have demonstrated, we are facing an apartheid regime” (Arena, 2021); a matter which necessitates a different engagement tactics in dealing with the conflict.

Undoubtedly, as MEP Idoia Villanueva Ruiz termed it, the oppressor remains the oppressor and so does the oppressed. Nevertheless, the reality should not be forgotten that fairness dictates not to equidistant between the two parties, between settlers and colonized. However, Israel is the occupying power, and it should take the lead in ending the root cause of this long lasting conflict for the sake of both peoples, according to Evin Incir. Otherwise, recognition of Palestine state is

the alternative that the EU can take, in response to negligence that Palestinians face, as Evin suggested (Incir, 2021). Unquestionably, every –couple- of -years’ war, or violence, in the EU language, have been built on “decades of international inaction, occupation, blockade, dispossession and human rights violations”; thus, naming things accurately or describing them precisely is highly important in reflecting the reality on ground (Ruiz, 2021).

Accordingly, the EU must stop its only functioning strong-word-policy, stand up for international law, and penalize the illegal settlers. However, the EU should prohibit the entry of their goods, which they produce in the occupied territories. State of Israel, according to MEP Chris, should be referred to the International Criminal Court for its aggressive crimes. If the EU once again stands by, “it buries the viability of a two-state solution and with it any prospect of a fair, peaceful and negotiated settlement” (MacManus, 2021). The EU, as MEP César Luena stresses, should act urgently and decisively to lay the foundations for a true peace process that can achieve a lasting resolution based on the two-state solution, before it becomes materially unfeasible due to the unilateral decisions taken on ground (Luena, 2021). In MEP Botenga’ viewpoint, the association agreement with Israel must be also cancelled because it is, in its reality, an association with apartheid, no less (Botenga, 2021). The EU should exercise the role of leadership and lead, not only comment on events; it is a powerful trading block that needs to activate every tool in its disposal to stop the Israeli destructive policies against Palestinians, including targeted sanctions and reevaluation of the Association agreement with Israel, as MEP Grace O’Sullivan called for (O’Sullivan, 2021) .

In the same context, MEP Andrea Cozzolino, wanted to appear more balanced and equidistantly, called for sanctions and pressure to be imposed on the two sides, Netanyahu and Hamas. He continued asking the EU to stand for human rights and put an end to nihilism; it should not limit itself to condemnations of actions from both sides, but to find a way forward based on the two-state solution; inaction as Andrea said, will expose the EU to unbearable hypocrisy (Cozzolino, 2021). By such inaction and silence, many European states, as MEP Grace O’Sullivan commented, give tacit approval to the unbalanced Israeli onslaughts against Palestinians (O’Sullivan, 2021). MEP Jordi Solé was very clear when he drew his colleagues’ attention to the fact that ceasefire was not enough, and if the situation left without permanent solution, the

instability would repeatedly come back. Expressively, the underlying problems represented in the injustice on the ground, that the international community does not sufficiently recognize, must be addressed once and for all (Solé, 2021).

This discourse significantly met by several speakers like MEP Tonino Picula, who called for a compromise (Picula, 2021), and MEP Michal Šimečka, who asserted that there is no shortcut solutions to peace and stability, such as Abraham Accords (Šimečka, 2021). These accords do not pave the way for permanent and just solution. In the same context, Augusto Santos Silva, speaking on behalf of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy called for looking beyond that round of fight, and “to restore the political horizon towards a negotiated two-state solution”, acknowledging that the status quo in Gaza is fundamentally unsustainable (Silva, 2021). However, when he calls upon the two parties for reestablishment of the peace process based on a negotiated two-state solution, what the EU has done to make this choice achievable. It kept funding the Palestinian Authority and recording the Israeli violations of international law without sufficient actions.

Other MEPs called the EU and the international community to step forward and assume their responsibilities in this regard without hesitation (Marques, 2021). MEP Alfred Sant directed his speech to the EU to be courageous and frankly and honestly say where responsibilities lie in such a conflict. He called Europe to “give up political sleepwalking, get out of the comfortable slipstream of the USA, start conversations with legitimate contacts, break the asymmetry between democracy and the rule of law on the one hand and Hamas terror on the other” (Sant, 2021). Instead, the EU should feel sick of being scandalized by massacres perpetrated by Israelis in a shameful negligence of the Palestinians as human beings, according to MEP Javier Nart.

Hence, solution, as termed by Nart, is not ceasefire until the next confrontation, but termination of a long occupation, and full recognition of Palestinians as human beings (Nart, 2021). This cry met by another one delivered by MEP Željana Zovko, who warned the EU from the history court that will question the absence of those so-called peacemakers and visionaries (Zovko, 2021). Israel will not be able to only rely on its military power. Unquestionably, “when Tel Aviv is within missiles’ range and the Iranians have amassed stockpiles of weapons on its borders”, it

should be worried if eternal peace for all has not been urgently reached, according to MEP Bernard Guetta (Guetta, 2021). In MEP Martina Michels words, rights of Palestinians and security of Israel are inextricably interrelated (Michels, 2021). If Palestinians do not have their rights, Israel will not enjoy either security or peace. Considerably, leaving the conflict ignited without resolution jeopardizes not only the Palestinians and Israelis, but also the Middle East security and stability, which are very necessary for preventing further migration waves towards Europe, according to MEP Kinga Gál (2021) Thus, dealing with the conflict in a shortsighted way will lead to more sophistications in the future; a matter that dictates a long-term solution that guarantees stability and security alongside Palestinian rights as internationally sustained.

Israel's Self Defense versus Palestinian's

Another aspect of support Israel always receives from the Europeans is justifying or understanding its aggressions under the umbrella of self-defense. As explained by MEP Charlie Weimers, Europeans support Israel against terrorists who seek its annihilation (Weimers, 2021). As Eradication of Israel is the other's target means that Israel does nothing against Palestinians but defending its mere existence; a matter that is enough for the Europeans to accept the Israeli aggressions in principle. In this context, the only thing catches the Europeans' eyes as usual is the proportionality of the violence that Israel executes in its attacks on Palestinians. Therefore, the EU has never condemned Israel's strikes frankly and clearly as strong as it does with Palestinians; when the matter comes to Israel, the generic formulas used in the EU's discourse, while a different frank language used against Hamas and other Palestinian factions based on condemnations, stigmatization and convictions.

This was very evident during the last confrontation between the two sides in May 2021. According to Augusto Santos Silva, representing the EU council and commission, Israel has "an unequivocal right of self-defense, defense of its territory and defense of its population" (Silva, 2021) but this should be proportionate and in compliance with international humanitarian law (Šimečka, 2021). Hence, Israel, in Silva shared point of view with MEP César Luena (2021), has the full right to protect its civilian population, though it is the occupation power. Nevertheless, what is the case regarding the Palestinian people, as Luena asked? Do they have the same right of protection and defense for themselves when they are subject to a colonial occupation? Silva

never mentioned their absolute right of resistance, which he definitely knows that it is part of the international law. MEP Alexandr Vondra believes that “Israel, our key democratic ally in the Middle East, must, like all sovereign states, defend its citizens from rocket attacks by Palestinian terrorists”, accusing those so called terrorists of being sponsored by Iran, and aiming to destroy the State of Israel (Vondra, 2021). Likewise, there is no mention of Palestinians as people, who also have every right to defend themselves in the face of the Israeli occupation.

Another MEP David McAllister, shares MEP Anna Bonfrisco her perspective, considering that “Israel has a right, and Israel has a duty to defend its citizens against terror attacks” (McAllister, 2021). It is true that he, or other speakers, like MEP Željana Zovko (2021), keeps reminding Israel of acting with restraint according to the international humanitarian law, but never saw the Palestinians in the same way. However, Palestinians, who face the Israeli occupation and defend themselves in this context, are not perceived other than terrorists without a duty or a right to fight for their freedom, and liberation of themselves from the last and the longest occupation in the modern history. MEP Michael Gahler directed his call to Hamas, asking it firstly to stop its rockets from its side, and then Israel would stop its attacks (Gahler, 2021), as if Hamas ironically is the occupying power that started that round of fight, and paradoxically as if Israel is the one who lives under the Hamas occupation. In his assertion of the Israeli self-defense right, MEP Hermann Tertsch condemned questioning Israel by politicians and media for its part in the battle. In his estimation, problems absurdly start when “Israel, as a democratic state, begins to defend itself and every right in the world for self-defense; it will always defend itself, and is being able to do so” (Tertsch, 2021). MEP Lukas Mandl considered questioning the Israeli strikes on Gaza Strip as doubting its mere existence, refusing to accept simply such a debate (Mandl, 2021). In this regard, Israel always receives full solidarity from European politicians and this, according to MEP Kinga Gál, should not be in doubt under any circumstances (Gál, 2021)

Supporting Israel, in Europeans’ perceptions, should not be merely lip service. MEP Jörg Meuthen, believes that unlike for many others, Israel should be shown unbreakable solidarity in its fight for its “inalienable right to exist”. Even if Israel left nothing for Palestinians but anger and despair as MEP Alfred Sant (2021) said, this solidarity, according to Meuthen, must be extended to Jewish people wherever they are in the world to protect their freedom of life,

especially in the holy land (Meuthen, 2021). In MEP Sergey Lagodinsky argument, Europeans had decades of their time to respect and maintain human rights, but at time of war, the EU “moral duty” is related to existence of Israel, which should not be subject to compromise or reservation (Lagodinsky, 2021).

Linking self-defense to anti-Semitism is another way of showing solidarity with Israel. Significantly, the confrontation has been placed in the anti-Semitism-self-defense context, stigmatizing Palestinians and their supporters in the world with this accusation. MEP Reinhard Bütikofer considered Israeli self-defense one of its core rights, condemning demonstrations that erupted throughout the world supporting Palestinians and chanting against the war (Bütikofer, 2021). However, MEP David McAllister, tried to link speech of hatred and anti-Semitism to the people who set to streets in the world, especially in Europe, against the war on Gaza, calling for punishment with full force of law for those involved in such rallies (McAllister, 2021). MEP Jérôme Rivière considered these pro-Palestinian demonstrations as anti-Zionist demonstrations with worrying aspects of clear anti-Semitism discourse, which are led by “Islam-leftisit” parties. However, due to the European tragic history of anti-Semitism, he called for “fighting with the greatest firmness and without any hesitation, ever” against such manifestations on European streets (Rivière, 2021).

Defaming pro-Palestinian demonstrations continued by many MEPs during the war on Gaza. MEP Michael Gahler depicted what Israel faces on streets of Europe as what the Jewish people faced by old Nazis, accusing people from Islamic background of reviving the speech of hatred without knowing its subsequent consequences (Gahler, 2021). Likewise, MEP Frédérique Ries called the EU for strengthening not only its discourse against allegations of anti-Semitic pro-Palestinian rallies, but also for consolidating its legislations against such on-streets-movements, internet networks and other hatred platforms (Ries, 2021).

Criticism of Israel on Europe’s streets arbitrarily equalized with anti-Jewish behaviors and actions. Peaceful demonstrations led by activists everywhere, as a message of protest against the Israeli crimes in Gaza and Jerusalem, illogically portrayed by MEP Jörg Meuthen as anti-Jewishness, and accordingly Israel is subject to terrorism because of such “hatred-motivated

peacefulness”. Having the public opinion throughout the world stood for Palestine during the war made it difficult for supporters of Israel to comprehend the shock, describing the pro-Palestinian stance as a coalition consisted of “left-wing, green and Islamic anti-Semitism that – packaged as criticism of Israel”, while it is, in reality, a terror against it (Meuthen, 2021).

This kind of discourse shared by many speakers like MEPs Željana Zovko (2021), Nicola Beer (2021), Sergey Lagodinsky (2021), and Reinhard Bütikofer (2021). They are clearly obsessed by anti-Semitism based condemnations of those doing nothing but chanting slogans for Palestine in light of the Israeli occupation’s aggressions. However, they consider those rallies rigorously intolerable, and in full contradiction with the reality of Israel in the European mindset as a democratic state, or in MEP Hermann Tertsch’s words, “a bulwark of democracy and all European democracies”, that is always under terrorist attacks (Tertsch, 2021). This matter, according to them makes Israel merits supporting not condemnations, especially at times of war. Mourning Europe for the changing public opinion regarding Palestine represented in what MEP Nicola Beer considered the biggest anti-Semitic rallies that took place in favor of the Palestinians’ cause; “these unprecedented scenes affect the unity of Europeans and coexistence amongst society” (Beer, 2021). Having them said so, anti-Semitism shall not be interposed in all pro Palestinians’ supportive activities, and freedom of expression must be respected as one the EU normative principles, regardless of the status of Israel in the European’s mindset.

Demonization of Hamas versus Humanitirization of Israel

In Europeans’ perceptions, Hamas and other Palestinian factions are merely perceived as rockets’ shooters without a legal cause of resistance or a right to fight. However, in almost all the speeches delivered in the EU parliament during the war on Gaza in May 2021, Hamas is portrayed as a terrorist organization, which stands behind all turbulence witnessed there. Accordingly, denunciations and condemnations always directed to the movement, which, in reality, does nothing, according to Palestinians, but reacting to the Israeli occupation that spares no effort in violating Geneva international treaties as many international human rights’ reports documented. Responsibilities of maintaining rights of the occupied Palestinians are legally and internationally laid on Israel as an occupying power. However, these responsibilities have not

ever been respected, or taken seriously by the Israeli occupation. Thus, having people standing for their rights according to the international law, should be, if not appraised, at least recognized by the EU, especially that the latter defines itself as a normative power driven by norms and values (Amnesty International, 2022).

Defaming Hamas is one of the MEPs constants. According to a big number of them, this armed movement perceived as indiscriminately kill civilians and does not care about its people since it hides behind inhabitants and makes of them human shields. It is significantly fueled and provided with arms, and financially supported by Iran which seeks Israel's eradication, according to MEPs speakers. Additionally, the education textbooks under its authority contain anti-Semitic subjects and incitement against Israel. In contrast, Israel is not a terrorist or apartheid state; it is a democratic state which share the same values of the Europeans. MEP Željana Zovko considered that "civilians in Israel are being exposed to indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas and other terrorist groups", whereas Israel has not been stigmatized with indiscriminate killing of civilians in Gaza (Zovko, 2021). Similarly, MEP Augusto Santos Silva was very firm when condemned the indiscriminate launching of Hamas's rockets whereas kept very cautious when talked about the Israeli airstrikes that targeted pure civilian goals (Silva, 2021).

Good-guy –bad-guy depiction is another way differently used when describing both sides by MEPs speakers. Good-guy, who finds himself obliged to violently defend his people, to unintentionally kill other side's civilians and even to coincidentally launch wars, always represented by the occupying power, while the bad-guy is paradoxically represented by Hamas which is supposed to be the seen as resistance movement under occupation. Hence, Israel, the good, tries its effort to avoid harming civilians and even "warns them ahead of its military strikes", according to MEP Carmen Avram. At the same time, Hamas and other Palestinian groups, in Avram's point of view, commit double war crimes when they kill the Israeli civilians, and use the Palestinian civilians as human shields (Avram, 2021). Likewise, MEP Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou who believes that Israel, the good-guy, "goes to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties on either side", while the bad-guy, Hamas, keeps firing on the Israeli civilians and use the Palestinian children as human shields. However, Hamas not only does this but also, according to her, stockpiles weapons in mosques and schools, "uses hospitals as strongholds and

kills mindlessly”. She enthusiastically recommended proclaiming Hamas, by the EU, as a global threat and utterly amoral (Asimakopoulou, 2021).

Hamas is the one who should be held responsible for the May-2021 confrontation in Europeans’ perceptions. As concluded by MEP Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou, the military conflict was a result of the Palestinian incitement, financed by the Iranians, and not a result of the Israeli aggressions. Anna failed to remember the Israeli eviction of Palestinians from Jerusalem, the attack on worshippers in Al-Aqsa mosque, and at top of that the illegal continuous occupation of Palestine for decades, in a stark violation of primary rudiments of international law. Unbelievably, the only thing she noticed was the Hamas’s thousands of rockets fired on Israel, while kept blind from watching the Israeli bloody attacks, and war crimes committed by it, as named by MEP Michael Lynk, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. Significantly, the latter accused Israel of imposing apartheid upon Palestine in a post-apartheid age, in addition to committing war crimes against Palestinians (OHCHR, 2022). However, Europeans in this regard ignored all human rights reports dedicated for accusing Israel of different kinds of violations of Palestinians’ rights. Instead, they recruited themselves in a demonization and vilification campaign concentrated on Hamas, the “bad guy”, accusing it of having a dedication to murder Jewish people and “raze Israel”, the “good-guy”, “the liberal democracy that is committed to the rule of law”, as portrayed by Asimakopoulou (2021).

Other speakers hold the same perception about the background of such a military fight. For example, MEP Jörg Meuthen expressed his deep shock because of the “rockets’ terror”, considering it huge aggression on the Israeli people (Meuthen, 2021), ignoring to reflect on the devastation witnessed in Gaza as a result of the Israeli weaponries. In the same way, MEP Charlie Weimers asked whether there is any democratic country tolerates thousands of rockets targeting its streets, allows calls of glorifying terrorism against its people, and accepts internationally recognized terrorist organization to attack its soil (Weimers, 2021). Charlie did not ask the same question about whether there is any occupied people for more than 70 years accept the occupation terrorism day and night, tolerate aggressions on children, women, pure civilian targets, and above all renunciation of their right for self- determination.

Commitment to democracy and civil and political rights make Europeans firm in supporting Israel against terrorism. According to MEP Pina Picierno, Europeanism and Atlanticism jointly necessitate steady assertion of an unequivocal commitment to democracy and rule of law, in addition to a clear response for peace and democracy against terrorism and hatred. Accordingly, “the Middle East is the geographical border of the West in which Israel is its democratic border” (Picierno, 2021). In response to this point, MEP Javier Nart asserted that nothing justifies the Israeli killing of Palestinian civilians and children, nothing excuses bombing an occupied city, and this is not an act of democracy; however, it is hypocrisy (Nart, 2021). Contrary to this perspective, MEP Lukas Mandl confirms that Israel stood with European democracies when terrorists attacked them, and as such, Europeans should stand with the democracy and rule of law-based Israel when terrorists attack it (Mandl, 2021).

Continuing in the same context of demonization of Hamas and humanization of Israel, MEP Antonio López-Istúriz White criticized those of the MEPs for what he described “hypocritical confusion” regarding the nature of the conflict, considering that the war is not between Israel and Palestine, but between a democratic state, and a terrorist organization, sponsored by the Iranian regime, and has taken the Palestinians in Gaza strip as hostages and human shields (White, 2021). Similarly, MEP Anna Bonfrisco, on behalf of the ID group, commended Israel for its capabilities to build “a mutual understanding and coexistence; it knows how to respect human dignity and freedoms, including religious freedom; Israel has an inclusive and pluralistic society; it is a champion of science and technology” (Bonfrisco, 2021).

On contrast, the other side is nothing but a terrorist organization who knows nothing but shooting rockets and causing deaths amongst civilians. In MEP Željana Zovko's standpoint, Hamas, the perpetrators of the conflict, invests in rockets while some people invests in vaccines against the pandemic which increasingly takes more human victims than wars, causing sorrow and fear (Zovko, 2021). MEP Carmen Avram joined his colleagues in attacking Hamas, stigmatizing it for being on the European terrorism blacklist; it cares about itself, power and keeping the Palestinians under its hold, causing devastation and deaths in Israel and Gaza. Avram asserted that Hamas's goal is to destroy Israel, not to liberate its land or defend its people, and to keep the Middle East in a constant state of chaos (Avram, 2021). He never came across

the Palestinian suffering because of the Israeli missiles targeting Gaza infrastructure, and causing deaths amongst innocent civilians. Blatantly, he did not only turned the reality upside down but also did not pay attention to all cries came out of Gaza when it was under attack, as if they are not human beings. Taking part in the demonization campaign against the Palestinian resistance, MEP Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou accused Hamas of, what she said, calling for genocide of Jews and murdering civilians, while she did not pay attention to international reports which condemned Israel of committing massacres and genocide against Palestinians in many occasions (Asimakopoulou, 2021).

Adoption of the Israeli narrative by some MEPs constituted a significant part in tolerating, if not justifying, its missile attacks on Palestinians. MEP Ilana Cicurel accused Hamas of trapping Israel by placing its command centers, weapon caches, and rockets shooters in mosques, schools and hospitals; a matter, which makes civilians susceptible to Israeli retaliation (Cicurel, 2021). Hence, Hamas is the one who kills Palestinian hope and peace, and not Israel, as MEP Frédérique Ries termed it (Ries, 2021). Significantly, “Iran and Hamas sponsor terrorism, hatred and resentment; they are enemies of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and human dignity”, as designated by MEP Anna Bonfrisco (2021). Whereas she portrayed Hamas in such a way, Israel has not received same criticism regardless who is right and who is wrong. This kind of denunciation was joined by MEP Augusto Santos Silva, who delivered his “unequivocal condemnation, without any ambiguity,” of the launching of rockets by the terrorist organization against the residents of Israel (Silva, 2021). This clarity and strength in conviction has not been the same when talking about the Israeli part in the war, which shows the double standard policy in its naked reality.

Incitement by some European speakers against Hamas never stopped. MEP Alexandr Vondra, called on the EU commission to stop financing Palestinian organizations that directly or indirectly end up in the service of Hamas (Vondra, 2021). This matter means, if applied, that all kinds of financial assistance would stop, because in a way or another it helps easing the humanitarian status in Gaza strip, which makes the rule of Hamas easier.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the MEPs were divided over the war which waged on Gaza in May 2021. However, after four wars in less than 15 years between Israeli occupation and Palestinian resistance factions, substantial sounds started to voice their convictions among European politicians. Significantly, vocabularies like Israeli apartheid, colonization, resistance, justice and the EU powerlessness started to echo under the dome of the European parliament, causing disturbance and anger to the opposite pro-Israelis' majority. Yet, nearly 46 of those speakers whose speeches were analyzed have something in common based on supporting Israel in the face of so-called terrorism with some reservations. On the other hand, using terminologies like anti-Semitism, terrorism, self-defense, democratic Israeli state, genocide of Jews, murdering civilians and Hamas rockets have shown the extent to which these conceptions are impeded in the mindset of Europeans.

Significantly, vocabularies and their derivatives that speakers used in their speeches were highly reflective and revealing. Israel had its name mentioned about 170 times during the debate, while Palestine used around 90 times; a matter that tells a lot about the real European concern regarding the war. At the same time, Hamas has been associated with terrorism about 40 times for each term, which also means a lot about how Europeans perceive Palestinian factions engaged in defending their people. Likewise, Hamas "rockets" stated more than 20 times, whereas Israeli "missiles" that left huge devastation and fatalities in Gaza Strip used only 3 times. On the same level, Israeli "self- defense" terminology used 28 times while Palestinian "resistance" cited only 5 times. Similarly, speakers referred to "Jews" 13 times and "anti-Semitism" 20 times while the word "Muslim" was only mentioned twice and in a materialistic context. Other terminologies were used in the same biased manner, confirming the preconceptions about the nature of the conflict and the determinants of the European discourse.

Accordingly, the EU powerlessness in its foreign policy towards the Palestinian- Israeli cause is a man-made choice and not a built-in factor. However, if the EU wanted to activate what it has in its hands in pressuring the Israeli government to stop the war on Gaza, or to end its illegal occupation, it would find many things to be done in this regard. Given the fact that the EU has easily deployed its capabilities in confronting Russia because of its war on Ukraine, by sanctions, means that it can do so in the case of the Israeli occupation. As far as Europeans are convinced

that sanctions on one case can work, then sanctions should also work on the other. Additionally, having the EU is divided over many aspects of the conflict that left the EUFP paralyzed and rhetorically driven, unanimity that is strictly necessary for external political actions will be unattainable. Hence, Divisions amongst MEPs about roots and manifestations of the war reflect the same level of differences amongst decision makers in the EU; a matter that interprets the lower level of influence that the EU could exert or the diplomacy it executed.

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