

Introductory remarks by Uri Rosenthal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, at the panel ‘Is Israel losing Europe?’ at the 11th Annual Herzliya Conference, Israel, 8 February 2011

Thank you Mr. Joffe, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

- Is Israel losing Europe? Let me stick to the question. The answer for the short term is: no. The answer for the longer term is: no. For your consolation: no country in the European Union is denying Israel’s right to exist, legitimacy and what have you. No country is denying Israel’s right to exist. It’s right to live. And no country ever will deny this right.
- Next point. I cannot accept, let me say that emphatically and simultaneously, what is going on in some international fora, where there is indeed a creeping tendency to condone the delegitimization of Israel. Sometimes it looks as if we’ve grown used to a profusion of resolutions that attack Israel in a one-sided fashion. I will keep urging my colleagues in the EU to also voice their objections to that trend. It’s important that we stand united in telling the world that delegitimization is not acceptable to us. The Dutch government doesn’t cherish Israel bashing. And Israel bashing shouldn’t be acceptable to anyone.
- But views may differ on *how* the EU, Europe, should relate to Israel. Should our relations be seen first and foremost in the context of the Middle-East Peace Process? Or should the EU regard Israel just as any other country it associates with, for instance through European Neighbourhood Policy?
- Let me say that when it is about Neighbourhood Policy, relations between the EU and Israel should, for the greater part, develop on their own account. Progress in the peace process should not dictate, continuously and absolutely, the depths of our relations. So strict conditionality between the Middle-East Peace Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy is not in order. But when we make steps in the peace process it will help also on the European end.

- The EU should invest in its relations with Israel. First and foremost, this is a matter of simple and straightforward principle. Israel is a democracy. It is based on the rule of law. Israel is the only country in the region, I repeat, in the region, that can truly say so. The EU was built on the same values. We share these values, together. These values are values in depth. They are not just something superficial; they are really the bottom line of what the EU stands for. And I would also say, I suppose, the bottom line of what Israel is standing for, here in the region. And of course, when you have values in common, Europe and Israel, friendship should come naturally.
- Now this is not to say that the EU, that the Netherlands, can and should never be critical of what Israel is doing, or forgetting to do. Not to be on a critical mode when it is needed, is not what I understand by friendship. If anything, good friends should be able to speak their minds. And to speak up. And to say it to the other.
 - For instance, Europe, the Netherlands should be able to argue with you, Israel, that Israel, too, needs to be forthcoming, more forthcoming, in the peace process.
 - Israel should understand why we think that the settlements are not legal and, importantly, why the settlements are not conducive to the peace process and that they are indeed, when it comes down to it, an impediment to peace.
 - We should also be able to show you our strong conviction about the compatibility between Israel's security on the one hand, and a viable Palestinian state based on the pre-June 1967 borders.
 - We should also be clear about the possibilities for a capital, which is claimed by two states; a status for the capital to be negotiated.
- We should feel free to convey these convictions to our Israeli counterparts. And as friends, we should trust that our words will also be heard and taken seriously. I am not talking about delegitimization. I am not talking about Israel bashing here.
- I believe that we can express our concerns and criticism more effectively by engaging in closer relations with Israel than by keeping Israel at distance. In that sense, good

relations, intense relations, are not just a matter of principle; they are also instrumental in moving contested issues forward.

- It's my opinion, it's the Dutch government's opinion, that isolating Israel, some people are even talking about cornering Israel, will not do to move the peace process forward. Closer relations do help. They will better enable us to address the more contentious issues. At the same time, reality has it that those promoting closer relations should see something in return for the efforts to help out the Israeli position. If there is nothing happening, when there is nothing coming, when there is not an open ear, they themselves will become increasingly isolated within the European Union and, not to forget, the United Nations. Those proponents, the even-handed approach, which entails a strong condemnation of Israel bashing, will become lone voices that can easily be shouted down. That would not be in the Israeli interest.
- Looking at the EU, the European Neighbourhood Policy gives us a framework to discuss topics of concern to both the European side and Israel. We shouldn't dispose of the good opportunities the ENP suggests.
- This leads me to make a more general remark about this ENP policy. With the unfolding of events in the Arab world, from Tunisia through Egypt and to other countries, we should all consider how to make the best possible use of neighbourhood policy to promote economic growth, democracy and the rule of law in the region. The EU and its Mediterranean neighbours share a common responsibility for stability, peaceful development and dignity for all. Based, I repeat, on the promotion of economic growth, democracy and the rule of law. And to say it very quickly but very incisively, also commenting on the remarks made by Minister Shalom, the developments in the Arab world will have two paths. One is the way to free and fair elections. But the other, equally important, is the road to the rule of law and human rights. Free and fair elections will never be a sufficient condition for a democratic and stable regime.
- As you know, the Dutch government is strongly in favour of intensifying its relations with Israel. Both bilaterally and within the framework of the EU. The Netherlands

looks forward to reinforcing the EU's relations with Israel. Not just politically, but also economically and in technology and in research & development. It's a pity that the last Association Council was postponed, if not cancelled. I look forward to the next one, two weeks from now and I trust that we will be able to make some concrete steps forward.

- The EU should equally invest in relations with the Palestinian Authority. Not only in relations with Israel but also with the Palestinian Authority. We are talking about an even-handed approach. This is not a zero-sum game but a variable sum game, where one side's gain is not immediately the other side's loss.
- As far as the EU's role in the peace process is concerned, I believe that our efforts should be supportive of the leading role of the United States in trying to get parties back to the negotiating table. But, the EU, by itself, does have substance to offer in this process. In this sense we are indeed your direct neighbours. If only for vicinity reasons, we have a direct interest in the region's future. Which is an extra incentive to invest in it.
- To conclude. World War II is by now - a very harsh observation - for many youngsters and generations, it's changing, World War II, from memory to history. That's one, talking about Europe and Israel. Second, Israel has turned, in the last decade, it's focus from Europe, in many ways, to the United States and American-style public policy and public affairs. Which do not always fall on fertile ground in Europe.
- But to come up with my final conclusion on how Israel and Europe relate to each other. Is Israel losing Europe? No, Israel is not losing Europe. On the other hand: yes, Israel will have to do its part to show that we are walking a two-way street.

Thank you.