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**B**efore entering into the cracks of the issues about our policies regarding the transatlantic dialogue in the Mediterranean, I would like to point out, very briefly, our Israeli governmental position. First of all, I would like to point out the Israeli position *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian and then *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian arena.

To start, I would like to highlight that we, Israel, accept the two-state solution as a final status to settle the problem to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Secondly, Israel is ready right now to establish a political dialogue, to establish political negotiations with our Palestinian partners, and when I am speaking about partners, I am speaking about the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people.

Thirdly, Israel is ready to deal, to discuss, to tackle all the problems for the final status negotiation with the Palestinian, including Jerusalem, including settlements in all the territories, in the West Bank, and of course, the issue of the Palestinian refugees (those of 1948 and the offspring after 1948). This is the formal Israeli stand towards the Palestinian issue.

In this respect, I would like to mention something that has maybe been forgotten. Israel is not anymore in control, nor in a military conquest of the Gaza strip. We have already pulled out our forces, our settlements (the last one, from the Gaza strip area, four years ago) and, instead of flourishing this area of developing paradise of the Gaza strip, with the help of the international community, what happened was the *coup d'état* against the legitimate rule of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, the 12 June 2007, as well as the kicking out in a very cruel manner and the killing of many Fatah members in Gaza, taking control over Gaza.

Hence, the main obstacle to peace is not the Israeli side, as we are ready to resume negotiations right now. The main obstacle today is the split among the entity, among the Palestinian political system.

One of the major milestones in Israel-NATO relations has been the signing of the Individual Cooperating Programme (ICP), a platform for the promotion of cooperation in a wide variety of topics, including, first of all, the challenges facing in the Middle East, not only the State of Israel, but also NATO

Concerning the major areas of cooperation, Israel would like to increase coordination with NATO to face common challenges in the area regarding: the Iranian threat, terrorism and proliferation

There is also something to be taken into consideration: what is happening right now in Gaza is nothing but a frank line base of the radical Islamic fundamental groups in the area, first and foremost, lead by Iran; one of the most assertive supporter of Hamas in the Gaza strip area. Not to talk about missiles thrown from the Gaza strip area towards our civilians in the area. This has obliged Israel to evacuate more than half a million of citizens from this area.

Today, we, the Israelis, are ready and willing to negotiate to hopefully find a solution satisfying both parties. I would also like to add that today there is prosperity in the West Bank: just go to Ramallah. This is due to the cooperation between the Israeli side and the Palestinian Authority of Abu Mazen, and the help and assistance given to the Palestinian Authority by the international community.

In regards to the transatlantic dialogue, I would like to highlight our major observation concerning Israel policy towards the Members of NATO, towards dialogue. For this, it should be pointed out the achievements – basically in the last couple of years – and how the future policies must be in terms of integration or cooperation with NATO.

During the last couple of years we are witnessing a trend of increased cooperation with NATO members. As a matter of fact, this trend comes to be realistic on the big ground of the basic challenges facing the members of NATO in the Middle East. Here, it must be stressed both the efforts exerted by Iran to get nuclear capability during the last years, as well as what going on in the last couple of years in the Palestinian arena.

One of the major milestones in Israel-NATO relations has been the signing of the Individual Cooperating Programme (ICP), a platform for the promotion of cooperation in a wide variety of topics, including, first of all (and speaking in terms of strategic political dialogue) all the challenges facing in the Middle East, not only the State of Israel, but also NATO. That is combating terrorism, which is one of the basic challenges worldwide. In this framework, cooperation between NATO and Israel was developed in various spheres, such as: meeting of foreign ministers, ministers of defence, Israeli participation in NATO military exercises, and participation in active military exercise in the Mediterranean Sea.

Despite these areas of cooperation with NATO, Israel would like to see a more intensive bilateral dialogue and progress in their relations. Concerning the major areas of cooperation, Israel would like to increase coordination to face common challenges in the area. In this respect, we are thinking of a collective framework, which will deal with the core issues in the area: the Iranian threat, terrorism in the area (very essential, problematic and important) and the proliferation. For this, channels of strategic bilateral communication should be increased. They can serve eventually as a platform for the transferring of the Israeli positions and messages and to the widening of the relations for other countries. In addition, orientation to development connected to regional security should also be increased. Finally, as far as the military level is concerned, it should also be reinforced the promotion of relations and cooperation between Israel and NATO basically in scientific and military issues.

Moreover, from Israel point of view, NATO is a relevant strategic regional actor, with potential of defence, military and professional capabilities, which must take into consideration the threats steaming from our area, from the Middle East:

- First and foremost, it needs to be tackled one of the main characteristics of the Middle East and that is the lack of stability;
- Secondly, the strengthening of radical Islam phenomenon. There is not any single State in our area in the Middle East not having the problem of radical fundamental Islamic movements, which is a threat to the prevailing regimes (see Al Qaeda networks, the borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan, bomb attacks from Al Qaeda to Europeans and to the United States). Needless to say that I am speaking of coalitions: Hezbollah, etc.;
- Thirdly, terrorism. As aforementioned, this is one of the major problematic characteristics of the present situation in our area. This also includes potential threats for oil resources, Iran (and the possible threat not only to the State of Israel, but even to the European community and to NATO in general).

In order to sum up, from the Israeli point of view, the relations with NATO are of high importance. Cooperation with NATO can serve as a platform for the promotion of common response to regional threats and challenges. Mutual relations are still slow and limited and it is, of course, in expansion. For this purpose, the ICP signed between Israel and NATO can serve as a platform to the expansion of spheres of cooperation and, despite difficulties, there is a convergence of interests between Israel and NATO, which can form a basis and expand the range of cooperation between the parties in the future.

Cooperation with NATO can serve as a platform for the promotion of common response to regional threats and challenges