



News from the Nations

Europe has to curb online extremists

Brussels should act against websites that carry anti-Semitic propaganda and "hate language", a European minister said recently as he warned of an increase in racism aimed at Israel across the European Union. Denis MacShane used a speech at the conference to call for united action to prevent a return to what he described as "the oldest and dirtiest politics known in history. If Microsoft can close its chatrooms to protect children, what can Europe do to close down the anti-Semitic and anti-Islam hate language on the Internet". He continued: "The rise of anti-Semitism as an organising force in the new politics of the far Right in politics is now a major issue that needs to be addressed". He cited examples of a rise in anti-Semitism in France and Germany. He said 290 anti-Semitic attacks had been recorded in Paris alone in the first three months of 2003.

OUTBURST FROM GREEK COMPOSER

Greek composer and cultural icon Mikis Theodorakis added his contribution to the anti-Semitic quotes rising in parts of the world by characterising the Jews as the root of the world's evils. "We, the Greeks, did not turn aggressive like them because we have more history. Today it is possible to say that this small nation [Israel] is the root of evil. It is full of self-importance and evil stubbornness". Israel's Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling on Greek leaders and cultural figures to distance themselves from the remarks.

Israel 'main threat to peace'

Embarrassed European Union representatives have disowned a controversial opinion poll it commissioned in fifteen member states that placed Israel number one among nations threatening world peace. President Prodi said the poll result would not influence EU policy. The president of the European Jewish Congress has urged EU leaders to issue a formal condemnation of anti-Semitism and to demonstrate concretely that Jew-hatred will be rooted out in the "new Europe".

Root canal treatment

Operation Root Canal was carried out at Rafah in the Gaza Strip at the end of October last, when soldiers searched for tunnels used to smuggle weapons from Egypt. The operation involved Givati troops accompanied by armoured personnel carriers, armoured bulldozers and Israeli air force helicopter support. Senior Israeli defence force officers reiterated that the operation was launched because of the failure of the Palestinian Authority to stop the weapons smuggling, and would continue until all the tunnels were found and destroyed. Since the beginning of last year the IDF has demolished over thirty tunnels in the area.

Israeli forces pull out of Jenin

Israeli forces withdrew recently from the West Bank city of Jenin, but few Palestinians were optimistic about peace, amid fears of unilateral Israeli action, which could lead to a truncated Palestinian entity in the next few months. Israeli troops dismantled roadblocks and pulled back tanks in place since August around Jenin, which is cut off by a barrier Israel is constructing in the West Bank. The decision to withdraw was taken without security coordination, said Ramadan al Batta, governor of Jenin. Israel still retains overall military control, and its forces are ready to re-enter if the security assessment changes.

America's displeasure with Israel

Almost \$300 million is to be deducted from Washington's pledge of \$9 billion in loan guarantees to Israel as the Bush Administration begins to show growing dissatisfaction at Jerusalem's policies on the peace process. The US deduction of \$289 million from the loan guarantees is an approximation of annual Israeli spending on the settlements. In what was being seen as a further sign of US displeasure with Israeli policy, Secretary of State Colin Powell was reported as "likely" to meet Yasir Rabbo and Yossi Beilin, authors of the Geneva Accord. Mr Sharon and other government ministers have voiced strong objections to the initiative.

THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

The notion of a binational state is anathema to almost all Israelis, but, as it gets increasingly debated in international circles, is Prime Minister Sharon about to take practical steps to counter it? Daniel Levy, son of Tony Blair's Middle East envoy Lord Levy, played a crucial role in negotiating an Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative that divided Israelis recently. The deal was denounced by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as "not helpful" and by far-right Tourism Minister Benny Elon as "collaboration". Mr Levy, a thirty-five-year-old Cambridge graduate who settled in Israel twelve years ago, drafted the fifty-page 'Geneva Accord' in hundreds of hours of clause-by-clause bargaining over eighteen months with Raith al-Omri, an adviser to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Premier who resigned last year over differences with Yasser Arafat. A Downing Street spokesman denied a Palestinian newspaper report that Mr Blair had encouraged the initiative. Mr Levy confirmed that he had discussed it informally with his father, who angered Israel over his recent visit to the Middle East. The exercise was masterminded by two ex-ministers, Yossi Beilin on the Israeli side and Yasir Abed Rabbo on the Palestinian. They each recruited more than a dozen politicians, security experts, mapmakers and academics to assist them. The plan sets out a comprehensive, two-state solution to the conflict, which was welcomed, but not endorsed in detail, by Mr Arafat.

The main points of the Geneva Accord

- The Palestinians will concede the right of return. A limited number will be allowed to settle in Israel, but this will not be defined as realisation of the right of return.
- The Palestinians will recognise Israel as the state of the Jewish people.
- Israel will withdraw to the 1967 borders, except for certain territorial exchanges.
- Jerusalem will be divided, with Arab neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem becoming part of the Palestinian state. Jewish neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, as well as the West Bank suburbs of Givat Ze'ev, Ma'ale Adumim and the historic part of Gush Etzion—but not Efrat—will be part of Israel.
- The Temple Mount will be Palestinian, but an international force will ensure freedom of access for visitors of all faiths. However, Jewish prayer will not be permitted on the Mount, nor will archaeological digs. The Western Wall will remain under Jewish sovereignty.
- The settlements of Ariel, Efrat and Har Homa will be part of the Palestinian state. In addition, Israel will transfer parts of the Negev, adjacent to Gaza, to the Palestinians in exchange for the parts of the West Bank it will receive.
- The Palestinians will pledge to prevent terror and incitement and disarm all militias. Their state will be demilitarised, and border crossings will be supervised by an international, but not Israeli, force.
- It will replace all UN resolutions and previous agreements.

Israeli reaction to the Geneva Accord

- *Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert*: "Who authorised them to renounce Jerusalem and the heart of the Jewish ethos since time immemorial, the Temple Mount?"
- *Former Labour Prime Minister Ehud Barak*: A "delusional" peace plan that would harm the interests of the state.
- *Labour party's acting chairman, Shimon Peres, a former mentor of Dr Beilin*: "If in fact the Palestinians renounce the right of return and will recognise Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people, there is nothing wrong with this, and it can be the basis for negotiations".
- *Negotiator of the plan Daniel Levy, who has worked on peace projects with Dr Beilin since 1994*: "Trying to restore some hope to the Palestinian street is a far greater service to Israel's security than the things we see Sharon's government doing day in, day out, which only increase the desire for revenge and the capacity for hate".

PALESTINIAN REACTION

Fatah officials Hatem Kader and Muhammad Hourani, who played a major role in the behind-the-scenes talks that resulted in the Geneva Accord, decided to boycott a signing ceremony in Geneva. Kader told the Jerusalem Post that he decided not to go, after Yasser Arafat and the Fatah Central Council refused to endorse the agreement, not wanting to be like Jerusalem academic Nusseibeh, who was attacked because of his peace initiative with former Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon. According to Kader, "There is confusion and crisis inside Fatah. Some Fatah leaders are exploiting the agreement to incite against us and organise street protests". He claimed that for the Palestinians the main goal of the Accord is to create schism inside Israel and undermine the government of Ariel Sharon.