Turkey and the European Union in Israeli-palestinian Peace-Building: Converging or Diverging Strategies?

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore whether and to what extent there is a convergence between the EU’s and Turkey’s peacebuilding efforts towards the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It argues that both actors’ peacebuilding practices converge towards the creation of a favourable environment for peacebuilding through conflict sensitive development initiatives. To that end, they have supported Palestinian socio-economic development, infrastructure, institution and capacity building through their financial and technical aid, which was designed for helping Palestinian side to build a politically and economically viable state. Moreover, both actors supported civil initiatives aiming to contribute to the rebuilding of confidence and understanding within and between the Israeli and the Palestinian societies. The EU through the ‘EU Peace-building Initiative’ has supported individual or common civil initiatives of peace-oriented NGOs in Israel and Palestine. Similarly, several Turkish civil initiatives were launched as a part of Turkey’s peacebuilding efforts, such as “Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation between Palestine, Israel and Turkey”. This initiative was launched by the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) as a tri-partite private sector dialogue mechanism among business associations from Turkey, Palestine and Israel. It has been part of TOBB’s broader initiative in the Middle East called ‘Industry for Peace (TOBB-BIS)’, which is designed to contribute to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through business enterprises.

Keywords: Turkey, European Union, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Peacebuilding, Convergence

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the foreign policy priorities of both the European Union (EU) and Turkey. Both actors strove to play an active role in the quest for a peaceful solution to the Conflict and remained committed to its pacific settlement. There are some converging and diverging motives behind both actors’ involvement as a third party in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. With regard to the EU, there are two main reasons for European involvement in the Conflict. The first one is geographical proximity of the region to Europe. Any social and political instability or insecurity, which may rise in the region, like the rise of radical Islamism and terrorism, has the potential to adversely affect EU’s internal social and political stability and security due to spill-over effect. The second reason is related to energy security. European states are largely dependent on Middle

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Eastern oil and natural gas and wanted to ensure a sustained flow of oil and natural gas at reasonable prices. Therefore, preservation of security, stability and peace in the Middle East is very crucial for EU Member States and the EU. That is why they have sought to be actively involved as a third party in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Turkey has two main motives for its involvement as a third party towards the resolution of the Conflict. The first one is a shared one with the EU, the geographical proximity of the region. Since Turkey is geographically very close to the region and has close cultural and religious ties with the region, any instability or insecurity rising in the region has the potential to adversely affect Turkey’s internal social and political stability and security due to spill-over effect. Secondly, Turkey has historical, cultural and social bonds with the Palestinian people, which make Turkish people highly sensitive about the Palestinians, and has longstanding political and economic relations with Israel. This urges Turkey to facilitate the resolution of the Conflict between two actors with whom it has close ties.

Both Turkey and the EU shared the view that resolution of the Conflict is the key to the security and stability in the Middle East. The Conflict is identified by EU officials as ‘mother of all conflicts in the Middle East’ (EU Official from General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, personal communication, October 26, 2009). It is considered as a single strategic threat to Middle Eastern security, with which the solution of other conflicts is bound up (EU Official from General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, personal communication, October 26, 2009). Similarly, former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu identified the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict as the core issue in the Middle East (“Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu”, 2012), and he also emphasized that “it is unrealistic to expect the establishment of peace in the region without bringing a solution to the Palestine issue” (“It is not an Option”, n.d.). Recently, President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan while speaking at a press conference with the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Mahmoud Abbas in 2017 stated that “the road to lasting peace and stability in the region is obvious: establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of 1967” (subasi94, 2017). In addition to that, both actors’ formula for a just and lasting peace in the Conflict converge on a two-state solution envisaging the establishment of an economically and politically viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live side by side in peace and security with the state of Israel. By taking into account the converging motives and peace formulas of two actors, this paper aims to discuss converging peacebuilding initiatives of two actors for resolving the Conflict by a two-state formula, including their
support for the Palestinian State-building Process, their support for the Palestinian socio-economic development and their support for pro-peace civil initiatives.

The Support of the EU and Turkey for the Palestinian State-building Process: Peace-building through State-building

Since both actors identified the establishment of a democratic, politically and economically viable and well-governed Palestinian state as the best guarantee for regional security and a precondition for the peaceful settlement of the dispute, they have helped build up the foundations of a future Palestinian state with a view to ensure the continuing existence of a viable negotiating partner for Israel in the peace negotiations. The continuing existence of Palestine as a viable negotiating partner for Israel would be the best guarantee for the viable peace process. Through their support to the Palestinian reform process both actors strove to facilitate the PA's preparation for permanent status negotiations with Israel, which would lead to the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. It was expected that this would not only make significant contribution to the Palestinian capacity building and institution building but also indirectly contribute to the security of Israel through creating a politically and economically viable Palestinian State and regional security through facilitating a viable peace process.

The EU gave priority to the promotion of democracy and good governance and supported the reform process of the PA towards the creation of a well-governed and democratic Palestinian State. In its efforts, the EU prioritized the establishment of an independent, impartial and fully functioning judiciary in line with international standards and strengthening of the separation of powers, strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights, establishment of transparent and accountable public finance system, holding of transparent general and local elections according to international standards, the drafting, ratifying and enactment of a democratic Constitution.

In 2001, the EU prepared a reform plan for the PA including ratifying and enacting a Palestinian constitution, the Basic Law and the Law on the Independence of the Judiciary, establishing a Constitutional Court and a High Judicial Council, abolishing State Security Courts, holding general elections, redistributing competences between the President and cabinet, ensuring transparency of public finances and restructuring municipalities, the civil service and security sector (Tocci, 2005, p. 15). The ‘100-day’ reform plan was endorsed by the President of the PA Yasser Arafat in June 2002.
With the adoption of the Plan, the PA began to implement the reform process, aiming at strengthening good governance and democracy. During 2002–2003, the Palestinian Constitution, Basic Law, was adopted, a Prime Ministerial post was established, the Cabinet was streamlined and reorganized, and a Law on the Independence of the Judiciary was passed. In order to improve the transparency of the PA’s finances and to take concerted action to tackle corruption within public institutions and to fight against fraud, all sources of the PA’s revenues were consolidated in a single treasury account under the Finance Ministry, closely monitored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The consolidation also ensured the full and effective responsibility of the Finance Ministry for transparently managing the PA’s payroll and ensured the maintenance of a public sector hiring freeze and strict expenditure limit for an austerity budget. Moreover, in order to enhance transparency in public finances, the president’s funds were taken under control through shifting its control from the presidency to the finance ministry (Tocci, 2007, pp. 110-111). In addition to creating and empowering the post of prime minister and shifting the control of the Palestinian finances and security from the Presidency to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Interior respectively, the EU also deployed election observation missions to observe the Palestinian Presidential elections of 2005 and Legislative elections of 2006 as part of its efforts to support the development of democratic institutions. Through these missions, the EU enabled the Palestinian society to hold free, fair and open elections to provide democratic legitimacy for the institutions on the road to statehood.

In parallel with administrative, judicial and financial reform process, a security sector reform process started in 2003. Within this context, the Palestinian National Security Council, which had the responsibility of supervising all of the Palestinian Security Services, was established in 2003. Moreover, in 2005, the Palestinian Security Services were reformed through the consolidation of three Palestinian security apparatuses (National Security, Interior, and Intelligence) under the Ministry of Interior, and through a facelift to the personnel service through the retirement of the Palestinian security officials, the training of forces and the recruitment of former militants.1 Within the context of security sector reform, the EU launched a civilian police mission EUPOL COPPS in 2005 in order to contribute to the establishment of sustainable and effective policing arrangements and well functioning criminal justice system under the Palestinian ownership in accordance with best international standards.

1 These reforms included the firing of top security chiefs, imposing an age limit on servicemen and forcing some 1000 ineffective members of the security forces to retire.
Within this context, firstly, the mission contributed to the capacity building of the Palestinian police through providing infrastructures, vehicles, computers, equipment and training. Secondly, it provided public order training to the Palestinian police in order to teach them how to act as a democratic and accountable police force while managing peaceful and hostile demonstrations. In public order training, the Palestinian police officers learned public order management techniques, including minimum use of force while arresting. In addition to equipping and training the Palestinian police, EUPOL COPPS coordinated and facilitated financial assistance, whether from EU countries or other international donors, to the Palestinian Civil Police. The Mission contributed to the PA’s efforts to create a modern, democratic, accountable and effective Palestinian police organization with a clearly identified role, operating within a sound legal framework, capable of delivering an effective and robust policing service, responsive to the needs of the society and able to manage effectively its human and physical resources.

In order to reform the Palestinian Criminal Justice System, the rule of law section of EUPOL COPPS was established alongside the advising section in October 2007. The rule of law section focused on advising, programme planning and project facilitation for the Palestinian Criminal Justice Sector. As part of EU’s aim to support to a comprehensive approach to creating security for the Palestinians, the EU decided to treat the Palestinian Criminal Justice Sector as a whole. Thus, they decided to expand the rule of law section with additional personnel in May 2008. The rule of law section worked for the development of a comprehensive strategy for the Palestinian Justice Sector in close coordination with the Palestinian partners and existing coordination mechanisms. It advised on and monitored the legal situation through the Palestinian Ministry of Justice, prosecutors’ offices and courts.

EUPOL COPPS not only makes a significant contribution to institution building and capacity building in the areas of Palestinian policing and criminal justice sector but also would contribute to the security of Israel by contributing to the creation of a viable Palestinian state both politically and in terms of internal security. By contributing to the process of turning Palestinian policing and criminal justice system into a viable, sound and effective system in the areas of prevention of and fight against crime, EUPOL COPPS makes a significant contribution to the elimination of one of the structural causes of the Conflict which are shortcomings in maintenance of law and order in Palestinian territories. The creation of a viable and high-capacity policing and criminal justice system for the maintenance of law and order in the Palestinian territories is also a significant step towards elimination of one of the most important structural obstacles before the settlement of the Conflict which is the prevalence of
radical Islamic terrorism among the Palestinian population. By consolidating the Palestinian civil police’s capacity in policing and fighting crime, EUPOL COPPS contributed to the reestablishment of law and order in the Palestinian territories. In this way, it contributed to an improvement in the safety and security of the Palestinian population and served the domestic agenda of the PA in reinforcing the rule of law. In addition to that by contributing to the creation of politically viable Palestinian State, it would contribute to the security of Israel. Moreover, it would also help building mutual confidence through changing the Israeli perception about the Palestinians and making them consider Palestinians as trustworthy negotiating partners by helping Palestinians to build a viable police, internal security forces and criminal justice system.

Beside security sector reform, the EU has also supported Judiciary Sector Reform in the Palestinian Territories through launching SEYADA Project – Empowering the Palestinian Judicial System. SEYADA was a two-phased plan aiming to contribute to the development and strengthening of Palestinian judicial system. It has been an important part of EU’s support to the Palestinian reform process towards the establishment of a democratic, politically viable and well-governed Palestinian State by supporting the PA in developing a more efficient, professional, transparent and modern justice system by strengthening judicial institutions. The first phase of the project (SEYADA I), which was implemented from December 2005 to May 2009, comprised establishment and strengthening of the Judicial Training Institute, provision of training for judges and public prosecutors, support for the institutional development of the justice institutions, provision of IT-equipment to improve electronic case management and support for the computerization of the Higher Courts. The first phase mainly focused on training judges and public prosecutors and on institutional and capacity building of Palestinian judiciary. The second phase of the project (SEYADA II), which was implemented from July 2009 to September 2012, comprised the development of the High Judicial Council, the Palestinian Judicial Institute, the Palestinian Bar Association, setting up of a legal aid system and strengthening of the constitutional review. While the first phase having €3.75 million budget focused on the development of the Palestinian judicial system, second phase having €4.4 million focused on the consolidation of it.

The EU Border Assistance Mission for Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah) was launched not only to make significant contribution to the Palestinian capacity building and institution building in border management but also to indirectly contribute to the security of Israel through creating an economically viable Palestinian State. Moreover, it was expected that it would make a significant contribution to the peace process by helping to
build mutual confidence between the Israelis and Palestinians. The mission was established upon the invitation of the two parties to the conflict, the Israeli government and the PA. It aimed to provide a third party presence at the Rafah Crossing Point between Gaza and Egypt in order to contribute to the opening of the Rafah Crossing Point and build up confidence between the Israeli government and the PA, in cooperation with the Community’s institution-building efforts. The mandate of the mission was to actively monitor, verify and evaluate the PA’s performance with regard to the implementation of the ‘Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing’ and to ensure the PA’s observance of all applicable rules and regulations concerning the Rafah crossing point and the terms of the ‘Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing’. In addition to the supervision of the implementation of the ‘Agreement on Movement and Access from and to Gaza’ between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the mandate of EUBAM Rafah also included contributing to building up the Palestinian capacity in all aspects of border management at Rafah through mentoring, and contributing to the liaison between the Palestinian, Israeli and Egyptian authorities in all aspects regarding the management of the Rafah Crossing Point.

In order to contribute to the Palestinian capacity building in all aspects of border management at Rafah, EUBAM Rafah tried to develop training programmes designed to meet the training needs in a variety of border management fields, and evaluation systems. In addition to actively monitoring and mentoring the PA’s border management at Rafah, it has also provided support to EU’s other ESDP mission in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), EUPOL COPPS in areas of auditing the Palestinian Civil Police and the preparation of training courses. In the area of auditing, EUBAM Rafah officers assisted EUPOL COPPS advisers to observe several Palestinian Civil Police districts, headquarters and police stations in the West Bank in order to identify training and support needs. In the area of training, EUBAM Rafah has produced Border Police and Customs input which EUBAM officers would deliver during a Public Order training course to be run by EUPOL COPPS at the Jericho Training Centre (EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah Crossing Point, 2009).

While operating, EUBAM Rafah has contributed to confidence building between parties. By striking a balance between Israeli security concerns and Palestinian demand for freedom of movement, EUBAM Rafah attempted to contribute to confidence building between conflicting parties in the long run. On that sense, it provided the Israelis with a sense of security against threats which would come through the Rafah Crossing Point, including possible weapons transfers and the uninhibited return of exiled extremist leaders and terrorists. As the Israelis perceived Rafah as a door of danger (Lazaroff,
2009), EUBAM Rafah provided them with some kind of border security. With regard to Palestinians, it provided the Palestinians with freedom of movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza Strip which would lead to a pickup in economy and trade in region and thus improve living conditions of the Palestinians and pave the way for the creation of an economically viable Palestinian State. Since the creation of an independent, economically and politically viable, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State was the best guarantee for the Israeli security, EUBAM Rafah’s contribution to the creation of an economically viable Palestinian State would indirectly contribute to the security of Israel. It was expected that economically viable Palestinian State, would change its rational calculations about a negotiated settlement and become less conflictary and more conciliatory towards the settlement of the conflict in the long run. Through EUBAM Rafah, the EU tried to create a favourable environment to fundamentally change incentive structures of the Palestinians towards the conflict. However, when Hamas took over Gaza forcefully on 13 June 2007, the Rafah Crossing Point was closed and the operations of EUBAM Rafah mission were temporarily suspended.

Turkey has also made significant contributions to the establishment of a democratic, politically viable and well-governed Palestinian State as part of its peace-building efforts. In addition to its personnel contribution to EUPOL COPPS, Turkey has also made its own contribution to the administrative and civil infrastructure capacity building of the Palestinian National Police through providing vehicles, equipment and training. Through cooperation between Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency Directorate (TİKA) and the Security General Directorate, over 1000 Palestinian police officers have been trained on over 100 different topics including training for motorcycle police teams, computer network and information security, building operations and rescuing hostages and anti-terrorism intelligence within the scope of the ‘International Police Training Cooperation Project’ in order to enable the Palestine Security Organization to respond to regional security issues in a coordinated and motivated approach (“10 Fully Equipped Motorcycles Were Given To The Palestine Police”, n.d.). Moreover, as a part of capacity building of the Palestinian police, TİKA provided modern vehicles including fully equipped motor vehicles for the establishment of a motorized security and escort force in order to equip Palestinian Police force with modern equipments (“10 Fully Equipped Motorcycles Were Given To The Palestine Police”, n.d.). As to other capacity-building and institution-building activities, Turkey has supported the political reform process, and Turkish experts have participated in the constitutional and administrative reform processes. Similarly, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a Young Palestinian
The Support of the EU and Turkey for the Palestinian Socio-economic Development: Peace-building through Development Aid

Both Turkey and the EU have been providing development and technical aid to the Palestinians with the conviction that the peace process cannot be successful unless it is complemented with an economic dimension. In this regard, they believe that the daily lives of the Palestinians have to be improved and a viable and sustainable socio-economic infrastructure of a future Palestinian state should be established. They believe that increasing Palestinian socio-economic development and the establishment of an economically viable Palestinian state would result in the elimination of one of the structural obstacles before the peaceful settlement of the conflict, Palestinian underdevelopment. It is widely acknowledged that the continuation of Palestinian underdevelopment has provided a breeding ground for insecurity and instability, by feeding discontent and political radicalism among the Palestinian population. Since there is an apparent correlation between economic deterioration, increasing poverty and unemployment and political radicalization, the increasing number of unemployed people in Palestine – where young jobless people constitute the majority of the population – has provided a fertile ground for radical Islamic groups who take political advantage of the suffering, need and desperation of the Palestinians (Khatib, 2008, p. 173). In order to prevent this, both actors try to increase the socio-economic prosperity of Palestinian population through the creation of new employment opportunities and the development of Palestinian civilian infrastructure. By this way, it is expected that increasing socio-economic development and related increase in stability and hope would result in the establishment of a conducive environment for the Palestinians to engage with their Israeli neighbours in their peaceful negotiations towards a resolution in their conflict (Pace, 2007, p. 1046).

The EU has been the largest external donor of development and technical aid to the PA since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Although the exact amount of money the EU has spent is not accurately known, it is estimated that since the peace process started the EU, including the individual member states, has provided over €10 billion to the Palestinians (Persson, 2015, p. 130). The EU has supported Palestinian socio-economic development in the fields of infrastructure development and institution building, private sector development and East Jerusalem initiatives. The EU supported infrastructure projects in the Palestinian territories, including construction, development and rehabilitation of water, wastewater and sanitation networks, public buildings and roads, procurement and replacement of solid waste containers and vehicles. The EU also funded
important infrastructure projects like the rebuilding of Gaza seaport and airport.

The EU provided financial support to the Palestinian private sector, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which were in need of urgent financial assistance due to the devastating effect of the crisis that emerged after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada; to development projects in East Jerusalem like projects for development of social services, health services and education; to projects for the promotion and protection of human rights like projects for the abolition of death penalty, the promotion of women's and children’s rights and good governance and projects for the provision of rehabilitation to torture victims; and to numerous Palestinian NGOs and service institutions that had been assuming a number of functions in the areas of healthcare, education, housing, job creation, women's empowerment, human rights advocacy, legal aid, charity and welfare, all serving the needs and interests of the Palestinian people.

Turkey has contributed to the Palestinian development with 389 projects implemented through TİKA since 2005 (Boyraz, 2017). Turkey has provided development and technical aid in the fields of health, education, public finance, institution building, security, tourism, housing projects and agriculture with the purpose of contributing to raising the prosperity level and the struggle against poverty and thereby helping build up the foundations of an economically viable Palestinian state. In order to ensure more effective and on site coordination of Turkey’s development assistance, TİKA has opened a branch in Ramallah on 2 May 2005. The amount of aid provided to the Palestinians since then has gradually increased and according to 2015 data, it amounted $29.8 million (“Turkish Development Assistance Report 2015”, 2015, p. 19). This made the Palestinians the sixth largest recipient of the official development aid provided by Turkey through TİKA. Health and education have been the most important areas of focus, and they took the largest share of aid budget, %59.36 and %17.56 respectively (“TİKA Annual Report 2014”, 2014, p. 120). Aid provided by TİKA for social infrastructure building and services in the fields of education and health has been in the form of construction and renovation of schools and provision of material supply for schools like construction of West Bank AlKhalil (Hebron) Turkish Primary School, Nablus Turkish Girls Primary School, and computer laboratory establishment for Jerusalem Nizamiye High School; and the construction of hospitals like Gaza Palestine-Turkey Friendship Hospital and Tubas Turkish Friendship Hospital (“TİKA Annual Report 2013”, 2013, p. 136). Turkey also supported infrastructure projects in the Palestinian territories, including construction, development and rehabilitation of water, wastewater and sanitation networks like
construction of water reservoir and well for Gaza Jabalia Municipality ("TIKA Annual Report 2013", 2013, p. 136). Turkey has also provided financial and technical support to the administrative and civil infrastructure like helping administrative and civil infrastructure capacity building of the Palestinian National Police through providing vehicles, equipment and training. Another area of focus has been the support to production industry. Agricultural capacity building has been the most important component of support to production industry. Within the framework of agricultural capacity building, Turkey has provided farm animals such as sheep, ewes, ram, feedstuff and farm vehicles such as fully equipped tractors and 4x4 vehicles under the Gaza Livestock Husbandry Program, in order to alleviate the problems encountered in Gaza in relation to the agriculture field and support agricultural development ("TIKA Annual Report 2013", 2013, p. 138).

The Support of the EU and Turkey for the Pro-peace Civil Initiatives: Peace-building through Civil Initiatives

Both actors supported civil initiatives aiming to contribute to the rebuilding of confidence and understanding within and between the Israeli and the Palestinian societies. While the EU through the ‘EU Peace-building Initiative (EUPI) (formerly European Partnership for Peace Programme)’ has supported individual or common civil initiatives of peace-oriented NGOs in Israel and Palestine, Turkey has launched several civil initiatives as part of its peacemaking efforts.

The EU has provided financial support to individual or common civil initiatives of peace-oriented NGOs in Israel and Palestine by using the EUPI, which is designed to support and promote the conditions for a sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict through civil society projects and citizens’ positive engagement. The programme has two main objectives: promoting conditions for a negotiated settlement of the conflict via participatory civil engagement, and via enhanced mutual understanding, confidence and trust; and contributing to peacebuilding through joint work supporting socio-economic development in, and empowerment of, the most conflict-affected communities. The main objective of EU’s financial support to peace-oriented NGOs on both sides was to create favourable conditions for peace, stability and prosperity in the region by supporting pro-peace civil initiatives that combat violence and strengthen civil society, in particular with groups in both Israeli and the Palestinian societies that seek a solution for peace and dialogue across cultures (Douma, 2006, 454). In other words, the EU, through its support to the local and international civil society initiatives, which aim to strengthen peace and tolerance and reduce violence, aims to contribute to the rebuilding of confidence and understanding within
and between the Israeli and the Palestinian societies. It is expected that this would create conducive environment for the parties to transform their conflict behaviour from conflictual to conciliatory in the long run.

The EU within the framework of the EUPI supported civil society initiatives which are likely to have an impact on people’s everyday lives and welfare, including practical activities which would promote communication and understanding by demonstrating the advantages of working together for mutual benefit and tangible results. It is expected by the EU that the two societies who have experienced the advantages of working together for mutual benefit and tangible results, would change their rational calculations towards the continuation of the Conflict and become less conflict prone and more conciliatory towards the settlement of the conflict. The EU believed that keeping the avenues of dialogue open between Israeli and Palestinian societies through pro-peace civil initiatives, particularly during the periods in which high level political dialogue is absent, would strengthen mutual understanding and broaden the base of support for the peace process. It is also believed that this broadening pro-peace societal base in time would put pressure on political authorities on both sides to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the settlement of the Conflict. The EU has financially supported pro-peace civil initiatives within the framework of the EUPI, which are transboundary, are likely to have an impact on people’s everyday lives and welfare, have a potential to promote communication and understanding by demonstrating the advantages of working together for mutual benefit and tangible results and are in low-politics areas such as education, culture, trade, tourism, environment, sport, health, industry and technology, media, energy, etc., and are less controversial and provide more favourable conditions for cooperation.

Similar to EU’s support to individual or common civil initiatives of peace-oriented NGOs in Israel and Palestine, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) launched a tri-partite private sector dialogue mechanism among business associations from Turkey, Palestine and Israel, called Ankara Forum for the Economic Cooperation of Palestine, Turkey and Israel. This civil initiative has been part of TOBB’s broader initiative in the Middle East called ‘Industry for Peace (TOBB-BIS)’, which is designed to transfer Turkish model of Organized Industrial Zones (Turkish Industrial Park Model) to the Middle East as a model for Middle Eastern commercial and industrial development. Ankara Forum, which was composed of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture and the Manufacturer’s Association of Israel, was the first civil society initiative of the Middle East Peace Process. It was believed that
this civil initiative would have two major contributions to the ongoing peace process. First of all, it is expected that private sector dialogue would enhance mutual understanding, confidence and trust; and contribute to peacebuilding through providing the support of businessmen to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by means of concrete and applicable projects (Yıldız, 2005). As it was identified by Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu, President of TOBB, the real intention was “to contribute to the peace process by doing business” (“Turkish, Israeli and Palestinian Businessmen in Cooperation Initiative”, n.d.).

Secondly, it was expected that this initiative would eliminate one of the structural obstacles before the peaceful settlement of the conflict, Palestinian underdevelopment. The continuation of Palestinian underdevelopment has provided a breeding ground for insecurity and instability, by feeding discontent and political radicalism among the Palestinian population. Since there is an apparent correlation between economic deterioration, increasing poverty and unemployment and political radicalization, the growing unemployment in Palestine – where young jobless people constitute the majority of the population – has provided a fertile ground for radical Islamic groups who take political advantage of the suffering, need and desperation of the Palestinians. In order to prevent this, this initiative was designed to increase the socio-economic prosperity of Palestinian population through the creation of new employment opportunities through the revitalization of the Erez Industrial Estate in Gaza and turn it into a Palestinian Industrial Free Zone. It was expected that this revitalization would bring 50 companies and generate around 10000 jobs in a rather short amount of time. Successful implementation of this revitalization project and job creation in Gaza would substantially raise the expectations about economic well being in the region and would have positive spill-over effect on ongoing peace process (“Washington Declaration of the Ankara Forum”, 2007). By this way, it was expected that increasing socio-economic development and related increase in stability and hope would result in the establishment of a conducive environment for the Palestinians to engage with their Israeli neighbours in their peaceful negotiations towards a resolution in their conflict.

As it was identified in the Washington Declaration of the Ankara Forum, the revitalization project was intended to be a track two diplomacy which was designed to complement track one diplomatic effort. It was stated in the declaration that “political conflicts require political settlements; job creation in Gaza has the capacity to create a conducive environment for consensus building efforts. ... Any peace effort in the region requires serious political decisions. If positive expectations prevail, then such challenging political decisions can be made much more effectively. On the other hand, the
growing frustration in the region, if left to itself, will be a major obstacle for any effort towards peace” (“Washington Declaration of the Ankara Forum”, 2007). Thus, it was expected that the successful implementation of the project would lay the ground for a real progress in the political and diplomatic dimension of the peace process. However, when Hamas took over Gaza forcefully on 13 June 2007, the project was suspended and the project was moved to Tarqumia in the West Bank.

Conclusion

Despite their converging formulas for peace and peacebuilding strategies, there is no real cooperation between Turkey and the EU on the ground with the exception of Turkey’s contribution to EUPOL COPPS. They have carried out their peace-building efforts separately. Their peace-building efforts to date have largely been restricted to the areas of Palestinian state-building, development projects and civil society peace-building initiatives. They have supported Palestinian socio-economic development, infrastructure building and institution and capacity building through their financial and technical aid with a view to help Palestinians to build a politically and economically viable state. Moreover, while actors supported civil initiatives in the hope of helping the rebuilding of confidence and understanding within and between the Israeli and the Palestinian societies. These initiatives are good examples of conflict sensitive development, which are not only capacity-building, institution-building and development projects, but also embody conflict transformation mechanisms. Through these conflict sensitive development initiatives, both actors expect to have dual gains: structural and institutional improvements on the ground such as Palestinian socio-economic development, capacity-building and institution building as well as improvement in security and relations between the Israelis and Palestinians. It is expected that this will not only make significant contribution to the Palestinian socio-economic development and achievement of economical and political viability but also indirectly contribute to the security of Israel through helping the creation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State and regional security through facilitating a viable peace process.

References


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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sUqM8W4sCU.


