How will European-Israeli relations look in 2013?

ANALYSIS

BY BENJAMIN WEINTHAL

NEW YORK – There will be no shortage of rifts and sharp disagreements between Europe and Israel in 2013. While in 2011 the EU and Israel clashed over construction of settlements, outlawing Hezbollah with respect to the EU, Iran sanctions, and the Palestine Liberation Organization’s UN bid for statehood, with respect to Europe’s support of a Palestinian state at the UN and opposition to settlement construction, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has embraced a variation of former French president Jacques Chirac’s attitude toward the US. Chirac famously voiced his anti-Americanism, saying “I have one principle regarding foreign policy. I look at what the Americans are doing and I do the opposite. Then I am sure to be right.” Of course, Chirac’s hostility to the US, Italy, West and East European countries and member states will have to make the difficult decisions that have been awkwardly avoided in the past. (“I have one principle regarding foreign policy. I look at what the Americans are doing and I do the opposite. Then I am sure to be right.”)

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has done the opposite of what EU states want regarding Iran. His blunt comment last week, “What the UN says doesn’t interest me,” could apply to the Europeans, including Israel’s main EU partner, Germany, which abandoned him during his 2011 speech to the European Union General Assembly vote on the FLO upgrade to non-member status and salutary rejection to the UN’s (and the EU’s) permanent passing. Today in Jerusalem, World Bank and construction in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Tom Steiner, a senior associate at the Center for Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, wrote to The Jerusalem Post on Tuesday, “Europe’s near-obsession with the peace process and the settlement freeze has belied that it has nothing to offer in addressing the other, more pressing challenges. While I personally believe that the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict is urgent and important for Europe’s national security, the European fixation on settlements has not only failed to yield any beneficial outcomes, it has been counter-productive.”

Steiner noted, Europe’s blind spots consist of failing to confront the rise of an imperialistic Iran in the Middle East, and the threat of drugs and crime networks in Sinai and in post-Bastarh-Assad Syria. “As an observer, I actually believe in the European project and in anchoring it in the West and enhancing EU-Israel relations. One hopes that EU officials would acquire a more realistic, in-depth and broad understanding of the Middle East and the principal forces shaping the region,” said Steiner.

Mark Dubowitz, the executive director of the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told the Post that “2013 will be the year when the United States, Israel and Europe will be forced to decide if economic and diplomatic pressure are sufficient to stop Iran’s pursuit of atomic weapons. If European leaders want to avoid reaching the critical capability that will make an Iranian nuke inevitable, or ‘the military strikes that will’ be the only option to forestall this, they have to go far beyond the status quo.”

“Canada has set an example for Europe by designating Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, adding the Quds Force to its list of terrorist organizations, sanctoning the IRGC in its entirety, expelling all Iranian diplomats from Ottawa, and shuttering its own embassy in Tehran,” noted Dubowitz, an authority of international sanctions targeting Iran’s nuclear program and on human rights violations.

European and American officials, particularly Berlin, have shown no appetite to list Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity. US President George W. Bush sanctioned the IRGC as a terrorist entity in 2007. The IRGC is believed to control as much as 75 percent of Iran’s economy. Bilateral annual EU-Iran trade hovers around £15-25 billion euros. Powerful EU company interests combined with pro-business politicians have impeded any talk of sanctioning the IRGC. Dubowitz advocates: “The EU should adopt its own policy of recognizing that, unless Iran meets its international obligations to end its atomic weapons program by the beginning of March, it will designate the IRGC and Hezbollah as terrorist entities, declare Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, and significantly enhance EU sanctions and nonproliferation regimes by prohibiting all trade with Iran except for humanitarian goods.”

He continued, “The EU designation, and sanctioning, of the IRGC and Hezbollah as terrorist entities, declare Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, and significantly enhance EU sanctions and nonproliferation regimes by prohibiting all trade with Iran except for humanitarian goods.”

He thus far snubbed US President Barack Obama’s counterterrorism official John Brennan, and members of Congress and the Senate, who have urged the EU to include Hezbollah in its terror list. US and Israeli anti-terrorism intelligence officials believe the July suicide bombing of an Israeli tour bus in Bulgaria to Iran, as well as the屠杀 of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria and Israeli bus driver were murdered in the terror attack.

Somewhat surprisingly, the EU supported Israel’s Pillar of Defense war last month against Hamas rocket attacks on civilians in Israel. The EU’s response to Israel’s acts of self-defense is that Hamas could have been ‘snuff’ from the Cell Block Tango scene from the musical Chicago. They had bad intentions.

If another war breaks out between Hamas and Israel in 2013, the EU reactions might very well engender the same EU response.

With the exception of politicians, most European-Germany’s Green Party Claudia Roth, who advocates “negotiating with the terrorists,” or France’s ‘law and order’ Sarkozy, most mainstream European politicians seem to have internalized that Hamas is not a peace partner.

Though Europe remains mired in a massive financial crisis, the EU and member states will continue to fund NGOs that seek to undercut Israel’s democracy. Prof. Oded Goldstein, the head of NGO Monitor who teaches political science at Bar-Ilan University, wrote the Post, “European politicians have noticed the values that they preach, particularly with respect to transparency and accountability. The recent confirmed decision of the European Court of Justice, which allowed the EUraise sanctions and procedures relating to funding of political NGOs as ‘security concerns,’ and their ECF’s failure to hold a single session to hear oral arguments, highlights the gap between liberal values and the reality of European-impacted policy making.”

Steinberg said, “Europe, taken collectively, has a highly schizophrenic, inconsistent and dysfunctional relationship with Israel, and this needs to change fundamentally in 2013 to avoid damage on both sides. There are situations, such as during the recent Gaza conflict, in which government officials of one country fully understand the Israeli context and responses to deadly acts of terrorism, such as on admitting that Hezbollah, like Hamas, is an Iranian-backed terror group, can be seen as a parable and not to be taken seriously, the EU and member states will have to make the difficult decisions that have been awkwardly avoided in the past.”