

Conference summary

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs on March 22nd 1987, PASSIA hosted an *International Conference on Europe and the Middle East* in Ramallah on Saturday November 10th in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Jerusalem.

After keynote speeches by Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad and Marc Otte, the European Union Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, the conference was divided into three sessions. The first panel, chaired by PASSIA's chairman Dr Mahdi Abdel Hadi and entitled *Europe's Role in the Middle East*, consisted of the PA's former Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Nasser Al-Qudwa, PLO Central Council member Dr Nabil Sha'ath and Dr Jorge Torres-Pereira, the Portuguese Head of Mission in Ramallah, and they addressed the Palestinian, Arab and EU perspectives on the topic, respectively.

The second panel, entitled *EU-Middle East Relations: Dimensions and challenges*, was chaired by Dr Claire Spencer, Head of the Middle East Programme at Chatham House, London. Dr Khaled Hroub, Director of the Cambridge Arab Media Project, spoke on "How to deal with the Challenges of Islamism and Political Reform," Dr Charles Kupchan, the Europe Director at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, addressed "Security – Threats, Agendas and Policies," and John Kjaer, Head of the European Commission Representative Office in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, spoke on "The Economic Dimension of European-Middle Eastern Relations."

The third panel, hosted by the FES's Resident Representative Knut Dethlefsen, was entitled *Europe and the Middle East – Policy Imperatives for the Next Decade*. Dr Nabil Sha'ath addressed Europe's role in future Arab-Israeli negotiations while Dr Nadim Shehadeh of the Middle East Programme at Chatham House spoke on "Syria and the European Neighborhood Policy." Closing the session was a presentation on "Strategies for Democratization in the Middle East" by Dr Khalil Nakhleh, an independent development and academic consultant.

Many differing views and attitudes were expressed regarding the role of Europe and its 27 countries in changing the *status quo* affecting the land and people of Palestine, particularly considering the influence of the American agenda and its consistent defense of Israeli positions and actions at the expense of the political future of Palestine.