



EU NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND THE RECOGNITION OF PALESTINE: “REALLY” BREAKING NEW GROUND OR “JUST” ADDING FURTHER SUPPORT?

Los parlamentos nacionales de la UE y el reconocimiento de Palestina: ¿innovando «de verdad» o «solo» prestando más apoyo?

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The European Union’s diplomacy has always given great importance and attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One key element in it is the question of the recognition of a Palestinian state. This article analyses this particular issue now that Sweden has recognized such a state, but it does so not only by looking at EU institutions and states: it also covers the reactions of three national parliaments: those of Spain, Italy and Greece. Thus, adding both to the literature on EU diplomacy and to that of parliamentary diplomacy, which is an emerging academic area of research.



Abstract

EU diplomacy; Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Palestine recognition; parliamentary diplomacy; Spanish Parliament; Italian Parliament; Greek Parliament

Diplomacia de la UE; conflicto palestino-israelí; reconocimiento palestino; diplomacia parlamentaria; parlamento español; parlamento italiano; parlamento griego



Key words

La diplomacia de la Unión Europea siempre ha prestado mucha atención al conflicto palestino-israelí. Uno de los elementos clave en ello es el reconocimiento de un estado palestino. Este artículo analiza este aspecto en particular ahora que Suecia ha reconocido tal estado, pero lo ha hecho no solo teniendo en cuenta a las instituciones y estados de la UE: también cubre las reacciones de tres parlamentos nacionales: los de España, Italia y Grecia. Por tanto, este artículo enriquece tanto a los estudios sobre la diplomacia de la UE como a los de la diplomacia parlamentaria, lo que es un área emergente en la investigación académica.



Resumen

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Fechas

1. Introduction

The question of the recognition of Palestine is one of the key issues in the long-standing Middle East conflict, dating back to, at least, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Since the beginning of Europe's foreign policy apparatus, the European Union's (EU)¹ member states and its institutions have tried to contribute to a peaceful solution to the conflict. Although there is no doubt that the USA and the Soviet Union (during the Cold War) have been the major actors, and since the end of bipolarity, the USA and other emerging (or re-)emerging ones like Turkey, Iran, and Russia.

The Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) admission to the UN as an observer in 1974 represents a key date regarding the question of Palestinian recognition, a vital, yet not unique, dimension in a possible solution to the conflict. The subsequent 1988 PLO unilateral declaration of independence further underlined the desire of the Palestinians to draw attention on the importance of international recognition. With the signing of the Oslo Accord, in 1993, and the exchange of letters of mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, yet another phase – initially full of optimism – was launched (the Middle East Peace Process/MEPP). Within this framework, the EU inaugurated the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership², a comprehensive regional policy entailing an explicit multilateral dimension, which also provides for a wider context to the search for a solution to the Palestinian issue.

Yet, the failure of the MEPP to date as well as the parties' reluctance to return to the negotiating table have further complicated the question of Palestinian recognition. By the same token, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the "Arab Spring" of 2011 have rendered the regional picture even more complex. The extreme violence in the conflict in Syria since March 2011 and the rise of Daesh in the last couple of years have further complicated the whole regional and international panorama.

The importance attached to the question of the recognition of Palestine as a state has gained pace recently: Palestine acquired UNESCO full membership in 2011 and non-member observer state status at the United Nations General Assembly in 2012. Thus, this question of recognition has gained a "sense of urgency", especially now that the EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, announced in November 2014 (when she started her new job) that she would like to see a Palestinian state "within the next five years" (Oliveira Martins, 2015). It is in this new context that, as far as EU member states are concerned, another interesting phenomenon over the question of the Palestinian recognition has taken place: several parliaments have taken a leading role. Even though EU executives continue to adopt a cautious stance on the issue, with the exception of Sweden (Persson, 2015), a number of them, as well as the European Parliament (EP), have shown an active record during the past years, approving resolutions urging their governments to take action towards Palestinian recognition. Up to date a dozen EU member states' national parliaments have adopted relevant resolutions: Sweden (October 2014), UK (October 2014), Spain (November 2014), Denmark (November 2014), Luxembourg (December 2014), Portugal (December 2014), France (*Assemblée Nationale*, December 2014; *Sénat*, December 2015), Ireland (both houses, December 2014), Belgium (February

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1 Prior to the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, the EU was the European Economic Communities. Its membership has also expanded from "Six" in 1952 to "Twenty-Eight" in 2013.

2 Transformed into the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008.

2015), Italy (February 2015), Greece (December 2015). Similar moves took place in the Foreign Policy Committee of the Slovenian Parliament in November 2014. Although all adopted resolutions call for Palestinian recognition, there were divergences whether Parliaments also want their governments to recognize Palestine statehood before or after the result of peace negotiations. Similarly, on 17 December 2014, the European Parliament watered down its initial proposal to recognize immediately Palestine and opted for recognition “in principle” of Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution, believing that “these should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks, which should be advanced” (EP Resolution, 2014)³.

The above leads to an important question in terms of what role do parliaments play in foreign policy. Indeed, in a now slowly emerging literature on parliamentary diplomacy, there is a debate over whether parliamentarians act as supporters of traditional state diplomacy or if, instead, they offer alternative proposals and initiatives. The analysis that follows aims at unraveling this question. The first section presents the wider context by discussing the EU’s general approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a specific reference to the question of the recognition of Palestine. The second section offers an overview on how EU member-states have dealt with the issue thus far. Section three first presents a general discussion on the role of parliaments in international affairs, through a brief review of what the existing literature on “parliamentary diplomacy”⁴ has identified as its key elements/components/characteristics. Afterwards, this section deals with EU parliamentary reactions towards Palestinian recognition. To do this, our analysis is based upon preliminary evidence from three national parliaments: the Spanish *Cortes*, the Italian *Parlamento* and the Greek *Vouli*. The basic reason for dealing with the parliaments of Spain, Italy and Greece stems from those countries’ willingness to encourage the genesis of a “Mediterranean axis” in order to promote peace and stability in the wider region – with a particular focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, even though Italy recognized Israel in 1949, Spain and Greece both had a strong pro-Arab foreign policy and refused diplomatic recognition to Israel for many years. As a result, notwithstanding the fact that Italy’s position towards the conflict has been considered as balanced since the beginning of the European integration process, Spain and Greece have only progressively adjusted their policies to a common European position towards the conflict.

The EU’s involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes back to the creation of Europe’s first foreign policy instrument (EPC)

2. The European Union’s diplomatic approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict⁵

As noted, the EU’s involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes back to the creation of Europe’s first foreign policy instrument (European Political Cooperation/ EPC). At that time, economic, political, security, social and moral reasons encourage European leaders to place the Israeli-Palestinian conflict high on the agenda of their common diplomatic endeavors. Europe’s fundamental concern was the stability of its south-eastern neighborhood. To this end, it engaged in the pursuit of a multi-faceted policy in order to actively contribute to the resolution of the conflict and the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

3 For detailed results of the vote, see Appendix, tables 1-3. On the EP and the Israeli-Palestinian issue, see Gianniu (2015).

4 For a review of the literature, see Stavridis & Jancic (2016).

5 This draws on Gianniu (2006).

Official declarations have always constituted the EU's most preferred foreign policy tool in this area. Yet, because of this practice, Europe has too often been criticized over its rhetoric rather than concrete engagements. Throughout the years, both exogenous and endogenous factors have generated intensive diplomatic activity, which, in turn, has found its expression in the wording of the statements published within the EPC/CFSP framework⁶.

As early as in May 1971, well before the 1973 October War and a few years after the Six Day War, the European Community foreign ministers agreed on the Schumann document, which reaffirmed the centrality of Security Council Resolution 242 as the basis for any future settlement of the conflict. The document was published a couple of months after the creation of the ECP (Allen et al 1982). Yet, the first official European position was the declaration published on 6 November 1973, a concrete response to the Yom Kippur War and, in particular, to the Arab oil producing countries' imposed embargo on exports towards the Old Continent (Dieckhoff, 1988, p. 265). More explicit than the May 1971 declaration, the 1973 document demanded compliance with Security Council (SC) Resolutions 242 and 338 and transformed the Palestinian issue from a refugee problem to an issue of high political relevance: as of then, Europe recognized the "legitimate rights" of the Palestinian people. Europe further elaborated its stance within the framework of the Euro-Arab dialogue. Already in 1977, the Nine had emphasized their opposition to the construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and to any unilateral initiative that could change the status of Jerusalem.⁷

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These stipulations appeared also in the statements made on behalf of the Nine in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) framework. Thus, the "right to express a national identity", asserted in September 1975, was concretized in a "territorial basis as part of a negotiated settlement", in September 1976. A few months later, in June 1977, during the London European Council, the Nine called upon a "homeland" for the Palestinian people and underlined the need to participate in the negotiations "in an appropriate manner". In September 1979, still within the UN framework, the Irish Presidency, speaking on behalf of the European Community, asked that the PLO recognized the Security Council Resolutions. It was the first time the PLO was mentioned in an official European declaration.

All of the above declaratory policy from the Europeans reached its climax during the Venice European Council, in June 1980, when EU leaders confirmed the basic principles of their approach vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Palestinian people's right to self-determination; the need to involve the PLO in the peace negotiations; the recognition of SC Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for any solution; the right to exist in security for all states in the region, including Israel; the refusal to accept any unilateral initiatives designed to change the status of Jerusalem; the belief that Israeli settlements are a serious obstacle to the peace process and are illegal under international law.

After the end of the Cold War and the failure of the international community, including Europe's absence of a coherent reaction, to avoid the 1st Gulf war in 1991, the EU position remained stagnant and unchanged until the first Oslo Accords, in September 1993. Far from proposing a European initiative, the Twelve were forced to politically and economically support the peace

6 The Common Foreign and Security (CFSP) is the successor to the EPC. On EU foreign policy, see Gegout (2010); Keukeleire & Delreux (2014).

7 See «Communiqué publié au terme de la deuxième session de la Commission générale du Dialogue euro-arabe» (1982, p. 108).

process that was taking place following the decisive intervention of US Secretary of State James Baker. Ever since, the reorientation of the European position resulted in the development of a “comprehensive approach” encompassing the entire Mediterranean region. A particular focus was placed upon EU financial assistance to the Palestinian people, while all statements published within the CFSP framework reproduced the traditional European position elaborated in Venice. Then, in 1999, during the Berlin European Council, in an attempt to prevent Yasser Arafat from unilaterally declaring the creation of a Palestinian state, the EU leaders declared their “readiness to consider the recognition of a Palestinian State in due course”. Since then, the European position has been further enhanced reflecting both the realities of the peace process and the level of the EU’s political commitment. In 2002, the EU explicitly advanced the two-state solution, as a guarantee to a just and durable peace between the parties (Barcelona Declaration) and in 2009, Jerusalem was recognized as the future capital of the two states.

3. State diplomacy: the EU member states and Palestinian recognition

The recognition of Palestine has always been a thorny political issue for EU countries. First and foremost, the inability of European leaders to formally recognize Palestine accentuates the fact that preference homogeneity constitutes an elusive EU foreign policy goal (Gianniou, 2006b; Musu, 2010; Yacobi & Newman, 2008; Persson, 2013; Bouris, 2014). Controversies among member states became evident as soon as the first common positions were published. For example, during the Euro-Arab dialogue, in the 1970s, European partners were divided over the PLO’s participation. France, supported by Ireland, Luxembourg and Italy, was more likely to accept a representative of the organization, contrary to Germany, the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands. In general, some member states have always been more favourable to the Palestinian cause than others, which were more sympathetic to Israel’s security concerns. This split rests upon traditional historical ties or moral sensitivities that states express towards Israelis and Palestinians. At times, divisions led to unilateral initiatives detrimental to the common European approach. For example, following the general trend in the international community, including European states, Italy recognized the State of Israel already in 1949, while Spain did so only in 1986; as to Greece, throughout the 1980s, it managed to shake the seemingly unified European position, since it was the only European Community/Union country that did not recognize de jure Israel. This contrasts to the fact that Spain recognized Israel on the day it acceded the EC in 1986. Greece eventually recognized Israel in 1990 and it is worth noting that parliamentary diplomacy played a role in it.⁸ In the meantime, it is worth noting that Greece had become the first EC country that recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people; upgraded the liaison and information office of the PLO to a formal diplomatic mission; supported the creation of a Palestinian state and the right of return of refugees and received Yasser Arafat in Athens, in December 1981, another first for an EC member.

Prior to EU accession, seven European countries had recognized the state of Palestine in 1988: Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. For the Central and East European states, this was a legacy of their past Soviet bloc “membership”, whereas for the two Mediterranean islands it had to do with their Non-Aligned Status. As noted,

After the end of the cold war and the diplomatic failure of Europe during the 1st Gulf war in 1991, the EU position remained stagnant and unchanged until the first Oslo Accords

8 See “A First in Greek-Israeli Relations: Greek Parliamentary Delegation to Visit Israel Next May” (1986).

in October 2014, Sweden became the “first” EU member state to formally recognize the state of Palestine hoping that its decision would facilitate the dormant peace process (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014). This recognition came two years after the upgrade of the status of Palestine in the UNGA. When Palestinian President, Mahmud Abbas, presented a bid for full UN membership on 23 September 2011 – which eventually failed – EU divergences came into full view, with Germany and Italy publicly opposing the bid, while Spain stated that it would vote in favour. When the Palestinians presented their second bid at the UNGA, in 2012, EU member states were entirely divided over the vote, splitting in three: 13 voted yes; 13 abstained, and one vote against (Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom abstained; Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Spain and Sweden voted yes and only the Czech Republic voted no)⁹. The EU was equally divided – and embarrassed – during the vote for Palestinian membership in UNESCO in October 2011 (Gianniou, 2016 forthcoming).

3.1. The Palestine recognition issue in Spain, Italy and Greece

3.1.1. Spain and the Palestinian question

Spain’s policy towards Israel and Palestine has a long historical baggage due to its Arabic and Jewish past.¹⁰ As far as more recent history goes, the Franco regime used the Arab states in its attempt to get out of its diplomatic isolation after World War II. Once Spain engaged in a democratic transition, pressure was put on Madrid to recognize the State of Israel, which it finally did when it joined the then EEC in early 1986. Thus, in the beginning, Spanish foreign policy was openly pro-Arab in general and pro-Palestinian in particular. Israel’s initial opposition to Spain’s joining the United Nations did not help, nor did the various wars in the Middle East. As for a more “progressive” foreign policy during the early years of the Transition (qualified as “Third Worldist” in many aspects) among the ranks of the UCD (centrist party) when in government, but also among the PSOE (socialist party) (Cuba, Nicaragua, PLO/Palestine, etc.) which was soon to become the hegemonic party in power in Spain, a pro-Palestinian foreign policy was clear to see over the years. Yet, Western pressure to recognize Israel became part and parcel of Spain’s Europeanization process, including its foreign, security and defense policy. Following visits by Spain’s King to the Middle East,¹¹ Madrid recognized Israel whilst insisting on its continuing support for a future recognition of a Palestinian state.

In late 1991, in the midst of wider diplomatic frenzy due to the optimism that prevailed at the time of the commencement of the MEPP, Spain hosted the first Peace Conference on the Middle East in Madrid. Spain continued its leading role with the celebration of the Barcelona conference that launched the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995 (also known as the “Barcelona Process”). This policy did not end when Felipe Gonzalez was replaced by José María Aznar as Spain’s President of the Council (Prime Minister). Indeed, more and more contacts between Spain and both Israel and the PLO continued unabated. It was in Madrid that the newly created Quartet (the USA, Russia, the UN, the EU) met in 2002 during the Spanish ostentation of the EU rotating Presidency. The Quartet issued a Declaration, that was followed a year later by its Road Map.

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⁹ See United Nations (2012).

¹⁰ What follows draws in part from Córdoba Hernández (2011).

¹¹ The King plays a constitutional role in foreign policy, especially, but not only, with Latin America.

This is not the place to discuss all these questions in detail, but suffice to add one more important – even though more symbolic than practical: that is the Alliance of Civilizations, launched in September 2004 by José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero as a reaction to the war in Iraq a year earlier in response to the claims made by Samuel Huntington about a “Clash of Civilizations”. In 2006, Madrid also committed troops to the strengthening of the existing UNIFIL (Lebanon) to confirm its newly-found engagement with both the Middle East and the Mediterranean (Irani, 2008).

3.1.2. Italy and Palestine

Italian foreign policy towards the Arab and Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been traditionally marked by an attempt to maintain, at least in principle, a moderate attitude of impartiality (*equidistanza*) and fair balance among the parties' interests (Romano, 2004). In other words, as Perfetti puts it, Italy has always aspired to be a “privileged exponent” of the Arab world and, at the same time, a “reliable friend” of Israel (Perfetti, 2011). In practice, however, this approach has not always been feasible, especially during times of high conflictuality, when Italian diplomacy has been forced to adopt, with changing fortunes, more and more elaborated (and ambivalent) solutions to safeguard its role and presence in the region. Hence, from time to time and according to changing circumstances, Italian foreign policy has de facto fluctuated between more pro-Arab (especially during the 1970s and 1980s) or pro-Israeli (with Berlusconi's governments in the 2000s) positions (Balfour & Cugusi, 2007; Pardo & Peters, 2010; Perfetti, 2011).

However, in spite of these unsteady (and sometimes unclear) positions, there is an objective that has been constantly and coherently pursued by Italian diplomacy over time. At least since the 1970s, indeed, Italy has been calling for and supporting the European involvement in the Arab-Israeli issue, in the framework of a broader “Mediterranean policy”, which, according to Italy, should represent one of the top European priorities and must not be neglected in favour of the “northern dimension” or enlargement problems (Silvestri, 1998; Musu, 2010).

Some of the most ambitious Italian diplomatic actions can be interpreted under this light. Thus, for instance, at the North Atlantic Council in Bonn on 30-31 May 1972, Italy formally advanced the proposal for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, on the basis of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) model, with a view of connecting, under a unified framework, Central European and Mediterranean security problems. In 1974, the Government formally authorised the presence of the PLO in Italy. The following Declaration adopted at the Venice European Council in June 1980, under the Italian presidency, was generally considered as a success for the Italian diplomacy. Finally, during the 1990s, Italy was among the main sponsors of the Barcelona Process that gave birth to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The rationale behind all these initiatives laid in Italy's ambition to play an indispensable role as a connecting country between the North (Europe) and the South (the Mediterranean), thus contributing to shape in a decisive way any political initiative concerning the Mediterranean and the Middle East (Perfetti, 2011).

The essential features of the Italian “official” diplomacy towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue, as described above, have to a certain extent spilled over in the more recent Italian *parliamentary* diplomacy efforts to recognise Palestine statehood.

3.1.3. Greece and the Palestinian question

Italian foreign policy towards the Arab and Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been traditionally marked by an attempt to maintain a moderate attitude of impartiality

Greece's foreign policy has always displayed sensitivity towards the Palestinian question. Pro-Arab official government positions in the post-World War II era were mostly related to the eagerness of the Greek executive to ensure Arab support in various international fora regarding the Cyprus issue. Cyprus has been – and still is – a primary cause of concern for the Greek diplomacy. During the 1970s, particularly after the 1974 Turkish invasion, the Cyprus issue has constituted one of the main policy triggers towards the Palestinian question (Athanasopoulou, 2010, p. 3). At the same time, like many other European states, Greece has reacted to the 1973 oil embargo by further enhancing ties with the Arab states. Gradually, several Greek politicians voiced their concerns over the “illegal occupation of foreign territories”, establishing a parallelism between Turkish and Israeli occupation (Bitsios, 1983, p. 152). Nevertheless, Greek support to the Palestinian question was not unconditional. Willing to maintain sound relations with its western allies, mainly the USA, Greece systematically abstained from endorsing UNGA Resolutions appealing for special status for the PLO. It did, however, open a PLO information office in Athens without, whatsoever, conferring diplomatic recognition.

In the 1980s, with the arrival to power of the PASOK (socialist party) government of Andreas Papandreou, Greece's pro-Arab stance was further enhanced. During his first days in office, he underlined before the *Vouli* (Hellenic Parliament) that his government supported “firmly the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the right [of Palestinians] to their own country and the right of return of all refugees” (“The Greek government's programme on foreign policy”, 1983-1984, p. 666). In December 1981, Greece became the first EC state to officially receive Arafat. The PLO office was, accordingly, given diplomatic status at the same level as the Israeli representation. Pro-Palestinian positions at the time were accompanied by harsh anti-Israeli rhetoric (Tziampiris, 2015, p. 48). Greece, in fact, managed to recognize *de jure* Israel as late as in 1990, making it the last of the European Community's 12 members to do so¹². Parallel to the upgraded relations with Israel to full ambassadorial level, Athens elevated the PLO information office to General Representation of Palestine (Konstantinou, 2010).

After Israel's official recognition, Greece's foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became more balanced. This was not only due to the changed international and regional environment after the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new challenges for the Greek diplomacy, but also due to Greece's gradual alignment to the official European position vis-à-vis the conflict. Again, the country's pro-Palestinian policy remained unchanged but was, to a greater extent, developed within the multilateral framework defined and pursued by the EU.

Greece's foreign policy has always displayed sensitivity towards the Palestinian question

4. Parliamentary diplomacy: EU parliaments and Palestinian recognition

4.1. The general context

Worldwide, little academic attention has been paid to this new international phenomenon: parliamentary diplomacy. This is due to a number of factors: democratization, regionalization and globalization to name a few (Stavridis, 2002; Eloriagga, 2004; Fiott, 2011). However, over the past few years, there appears to be an emerging literature which has identified two dimensions to it: a traditional approach that considers the international role of parliaments as a component

12 Previous efforts to recognize Israel in 1987 were unsuccessful, mainly due to the regional environment with the outbreak of the *Intifada*, which Greece did not support.

of a given polity's foreign policy with a particular emphasis on its role for democratic legitimacy and executive accountability – and by extension their relevance for legitimate governance in regional and global institutions (Costa, Dri & Stavridis, 2013; Jancic, 2015); and, a more recent approach that sees parliamentary diplomacy as an autonomous sphere of international affairs (Malamud & Stavridis, 2011), without of course claiming that the executives do not continue to be the main actors in international politics.¹³

But what is parliamentary diplomacy? There are several definitions for it and the most often quoted one is that of two Dutch practitioners: “[the] full range of international activities undertaken by parliamentarians in order to increase mutual understanding between countries, to assist each other in improving the control of governments and the representation of a people and to increase the democratic legitimacy of intergovernmental institutions” (Weisglas & De Boer, 2007, pp. 93-99).¹⁴ Even if parliamentary diplomacy continues to be a controversial concept, especially among “traditional” diplomats, the fact remains that there is more and more of it in practice. In particular, as David Beetham has pointed out: “Members of parliament [...] are politicians who hold political beliefs which may or may not coincide with their respective country's official position on any given issue. This allows parliamentarians a margin of flexibility that is denied to the diplomat” (Beetham, 2006, pp. 172-173).

Also, a constant “finding” in the emerging literature on the subject refers to the “moral” dimension that parliamentarians bring to foreign policy: “moral tribunes” is the usual shorthand for it. This dimension goes back to the origins of parliamentary diplomacy when the concept itself was initially used to describe the growing practice of “conference diplomacy” between governments with a view to finding peaceful settlements to international dispute (Stavridis & Jancic, 2016). This is how the first institutionalized form of parliamentary cooperation at the global level was actually set up: the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in 1889.¹⁵ Thus, also today, parliamentarians “tend to bring a moral dimension to international politics that transcends narrow definitions of the national interest, particularly in their principled support for democracy and human rights” (Beetham, 2006, pp. 172-173).¹⁶

The section that follows will shed light into the activities of three EU national parliaments (Spain, Italy and Greece) that led to the adoption of resolution supporting Palestinian recognition. After analysing each case separately, we will try to draw general conclusions on the importance of these particular examples of parliamentary diplomacy by assessing the relevance and impact of the adopted resolutions for the EU foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Little academic attention has been paid to a new international phenomenon: parliamentary diplomacy

13 For more details on this new phenomenon of parliamentary diplomacy, see Stavridis & Jancic (2016). On the changing nature of diplomacy per se, see Hocking (2011).

14 See also Stavridis (2002); Parliamentary Centre (2003); Eloriagga (2004); Fiott (2011).

15 On the IPU, see Zarjevski (1989).

16 See also Stavridis (2002); Šabič (2008).

4.2. Case-studies

4.2.1. The Spanish *Cortes*' resolution on Palestinian recognition

The Middle East conflict is one constant in foreign policy debates, questions and resolutions in the Spanish *Cortes*. As far as the specific question of Palestine recognition is concerned, over the past few years, it is important to note that such a proposal has enjoyed the support not only of the “hegemonic parties” (PSOE and PP /Partido Popular) but also that of “regional” parties from the Basque Country or Catalonia. This internal political game (in the name of the “right to self-determination”) between parties in favour of Spanish unity and those who favour regional independence is an important domestic characteristic that, out of the three cases under study here, is specific to Spain.

Yet, another factor affects debates over that issue in Spain, as it does in other countries: the overall international situation in the Middle East and more particularly Israeli-Palestinian relations (or lack of, including every two years recently direct military confrontation). Thus, in June 2011, the Leftist coalition (United Left plus left Catalan parties) withdrew its proposal for such a call to the Spanish government to recognize Palestine in order to achieve further consensus with all political parties at a later date, a consensus that was lacking mainly due to do with massive violence in the occupied territories.¹⁷ When conditions (relatively) improved and allowed for it, for instance in March 2012, a proposal by the PP parliamentary group, then in power after the November 2011 general elections, built on a previous proposal made by PSOE parliamentarians, and an agreement was reached in the *Cortes* Committee on Foreign Affairs on 7 March 2012.¹⁸

This was followed by Spain's vote in favour on 29 November 2012 of Palestine becoming non-member observer state at the UN GA. As PP Foreign Minister García-Margallo put it during a *Cortes* plenary in response to an oral question made by PSOE MP Elena Valenciano on 28 November 2012: “España votará mañana sí a la petición palestina por coherencia con nuestra historia y porque creemos que es la solución más adecuada para aproximarnos a la paz” (p. 14). Although he stressed that he would have preferred to do so as a result of progress on the ground and that the EU could be united on that issue.¹⁹

On 18 November 2014, during a Plenary debate to which not only did the Spanish Foreign minister intervene, but where Palestine's representative in Madrid and other Arab ambassadors were present in the gallery, a proposal presented by the PSOE in favour of a call for the recognition of a Palestine state obtained overwhelming support from across all the political spectrum in the *Cortes*: 319 votes in favour, 2 against and 1 abstention. It is important to note that during the debate that preceded the vote, all MPs insisted on the fact that they consider such a call as a clear message to Israel but without being anti-Israeli (the debate took place on the same day of a terrorist attack in Jerusalem that all speakers condemned at the start of their respective interventions). The vote was meant as the “best contribution that can be made to achieve peace” (MP Trinidad Jiménez, PSOE, p. 41), in a parliament that is “a friend of Israel” as the future award of the Spanish nationality to Sephardi origin individuals shows (MP Este-

The Middle East conflict is one constant in foreign policy debates, questions and resolutions in the Spanish Cortes

17 See Congreso de los Diputados (2011).

18 See Congreso de los Diputados (2012, March).

19 See Congreso de los Diputados (2012, November).

ban Bravo, Grupo Parlamentario Vasco, p. 45), and as a contribution to developing a common European voice on this issue, as a result of similar votes taken by other parliaments of the EU recently (all MPs who spoke during the plenary debate, Congreso de los Diputados, 2012, November 28, pp. 40-48).

Although this development might lead to the conclusion that the Spanish *Cortes* has played a leading role in this call for recognition, the reality is slightly different: the resolution had previously been agreed with the Spanish Foreign Minister (González, 2014). To a certain extent this reflects also the need to legitimize future foreign policy decisions not only vis-à-vis international actors, especially Israel of course, but it is also a means to show consensus at home: what foreign minister Gargallo called in the Parliament as further evidence that foreign policy is and must be “state policy” (Congreso de los Diputados, 2012, November 28, p. 48) and not linked to party political preferences. But it confirms that cross-party parliamentary support tends to be seen as necessary in democratic states.

4.2.2. The Italian *Parlamento* and the resolutions on Palestinian recognition

As far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, the Italian Parliament has traditionally exercised an informative and debating function vis-à-vis the Government, also establishing and consolidating over time bilateral relations with the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council.²⁰ Only rarely has it also strived to shape and orient Government foreign policy positions on this issue.²¹ In this sense, the debate and voting on the question of the recognition of Palestine represent a sound exception to this general trend.

On 27 February 2015, the Chamber of Deputies adopted two motions on the recognition of Palestinian statehood, out of the seven originally tabled. The two motions were both tabled by the coalition supporting the government, respectively by the centre-left Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*: motion “Speranza et al.” n. 1-745) and the centrist Popular Area (*Area Popolare*: motion “Alli et al.” n. 1-746).²² Unlike the Spanish and Greek cases, where the parliamentary recognition of Palestinian statehood was supported by (almost) all political groups, in Italy the vote was split along partisan lines.²³ The Democratic Party managed to gain a broad support for its motion, ranging from centrist (*Area Popolare*, *Democrazia Solidale - Centro Democratico* and *Scelta civica per l'Italia*) to leftist parties (*Sinistra Italiana-Sinistra ecologia libertà*). On the

The Italian Parliament has exercised an informative and debating function vis-à-vis the Government, also establishing bilateral relations with the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative

20 The bilateral relations between the Italian Parliament and the Knesset are formally regulated by a Cooperation Protocol signed on 6 October 2009 by the respective speakers Gianfranco Fini and Reuven Rivlin. No such formal protocol exists between the Italian and the Palestinian parliaments.

21 The Parliament, for instance, had no voice in determining Italy's position on the Palestinian bid for non-member observer state status at the United Nations General Assembly in 2012: see, in this regard, the complaints expressed by several MPs during the joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committees of both chambers of the Italian Parliament, held on 11 December 2012.

22 The other five rejected motions were tabled by opposition groups, namely Italian Left – Left Ecology Freedom (motion “Palazzotto et al.” n. 1-675), Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*, motion “Rizzo et al.” n. 1-625), Northern League (*Lega Nord*, motion “Pini et al.” n. 1-699), Forza Italia (motion “Brunetta and Capezone” n. 1-738), and Brothers of Italy – National Alliance (*Fratelli d'Italia - Alleanza nazionale*, motion “Rampelli et al.” n. 1-747).

23 This behaviour is also reflected in the voting at the EP, as showed in table 3 in the appendix. While Spanish and Greek MEPs overwhelmingly supported the resolution irrespective of their political affiliation (with the exception of the Greek GUE members), the votes of Italian MEPs were split along partisan lines.

contrary, the Popular Area's motion was voted for by the ruling majority, but did not receive support by the leftist component of the Democratic Party and the Mixed Group (*Gruppo Misto*), nor the group Italian Left – Left Ecology Freedom (*Sinistra Italiana-Sinistra ecologia libertà*). In both cases, centre-wing parties (*Forza Italia*, *Fratelli d'Italia - Alleanza nazionale* and *Lega Nord*) and the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 stelle*) either abstained or voted against (see table 4 in the appendix).

However the two motions partially contradict each other. The document proposed by the Democratic Party, indeed, urges the Government “to promote the recognition of Palestine as a democratic and sovereign state within the 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as its shared capital, taking fully into account the concerns and the legitimate interests of the State of Israel”. The document proposed by Popular Area, which appears to be more generally focused on the relaunch of the peace process, significantly waters down this position: even though the recognition of Palestinian statehood is not excluded as a long-term objective,²⁴ the motion openly asks the Government to subordinate this recognition to the achievement of an effective political agreement between Fatah and Hamas, as well as to direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Read as a whole, then, the message stemming from these two motions can be interpreted as follows: the Italian Parliament supports the recognition of Palestine statehood, but this recognition is conditioned upon the achievement of an agreement between Fatah and Hamas, and between the Israeli and the Palestinian parties.

The Italian Government, in turn, built on this ambivalence by declaring to endorse both the motions, so to clearly have a large room of manoeuvre in deciding when and how to officially recognise (and *if?*) Palestine statehood.²⁵ Nevertheless, if the objective of the Italian Parliament consisted in discontenting none of the parties, this goal was fully achieved. In the aftermath of the voting, indeed, both the Israeli and the Palestinian embassies in Rome praised the Italian Parliament, but exactly for opposite reasons. In a press release, the Israeli embassy declared that it welcomed “the choice of the Italian Parliament *not to recognise* [emphasis added] the Palestinian state”, and “to support the direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, based on the principle of two States, as the right way to achieve peace”²⁶. At the same time, the Palestinian embassy wrote an open letter to some MPs, reported by the press, where the Italian Parliament was thanked for having voted “in favour of the recognition of the State of Palestine, thus reaffirming the long-lasting and historical friendship between the two countries and the two peoples”²⁷.

If the objective of the Italian Parliament consisted in discontenting none of the parties, this goal was fully achieved

4.2.3. The Greek *Vouli*s resolution on Palestinian recognition²⁸

The Hellenic Parliament unanimously voted, on 22 December 2015, a resolution calling the Greek government to recognize a Palestinian state, becoming, thus, the latest EU national parliament to do so up to date. Already, from May 2015, there had been rumours about an eminent

24 On the contrary, only the (rejected) motions tabled by Forza Italia and the Northern League urged the Italian Government not to take any “unilateral actions” in favour of the recognition of Palestinian statehood.

25 See, in particular, the declaration made by Benedetto Della Vedova, Under-secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, during the debate on the recognition of Palestine statehood.

26 See Zarouk (2015).

27 Quoted in Belardelli (2015).

28 This part largely draws on a number of interviews conducted in Athens in February/March 2016.

resolution on Palestinian recognition, yet, SYRIZA's parliamentary group failed to bring the draft to the plenary on time. This was not because of internal frictions or disagreements about the resolution's content, but more because of time restraints related to the country's obligations vis-à-vis the bailout program and lack of coordination among members of the Parliament. At the same time, Prime Minister Tsipras was more inclined to see the resolution symbolically adopted during the programmed visit of PA President Mahmud Abbas in Athens, in late December 2015 (Sideris, 2015), thus facilitating further the Greek executive's aspirations on that matter. Within this framework, members of the *Vouli* raised a relevant question in May 2015. Answering their query, the Foreign Affairs ministry underlined that "Greece supports, constantly and consistently, the creation of an independent, sovereign, coherent, democratic Palestinian state, within the 1967 borders" (Hellenic Parliament, 2015). This was concomitant to Athens' official stance towards Palestinian recognition positively expressed during the 2011 UNESCO and the 2012 UNGA votes.

Two main reasons hide behind the Hellenic Parliament's resolution on Palestinian statehood. Firstly, the resolution relates to the affirmation and the solidification of Greece's ties with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and is based upon the country's longstanding support towards the Palestinian people. Secondly, by putting forward the resolution, the *Vouli* followed suit other EU national parliamentary bodies, as well as the European Parliament, which had already expressed their support to the creation of a Palestinian state through the adoption of relevant conclusions. The decision to present a resolution before the plenary was taken by the *Vouli's* President, N. Voutsis, echoing the government's policy priorities regarding the Palestinians. The Standing Committee on National Defense and Foreign Affairs, and especially its President, MP C. Douzinas, played a key role in the preparation of the draft text and the coordination efforts among the Parliament's different political groups. From the outset, the Presidency's goal, after taking into account all the texts that had been adopted thus far by other EU parliamentary bodies, was to produce a balanced text on the basis of the French, the UK, the Portuguese and the Swedish resolutions. This decision was in accordance both with SYRIZA's and the European Left's diachronic approach towards the question as well as with the official governmental position as expressed in May 2015. At the same time, the draft text would distance itself from the Spanish resolution, which was considered to be "too conservative" (Interview, March 2016). Presenting a just and equitable text seemed to be the most reasonable choice. Most of the European resolutions, including Sweden's decision to officially recognize the state of Palestine, were adopted during the second semester of 2014, in an entirely different regional context. At that time, after nine months of negotiations under US Secretary of State Kerry, talks between Israelis and Palestinians failed. Moreover, Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, during the summer of 2014, as well as ongoing Israeli settlement expansion, caused frustration in many European capitals. One year later, the momentum was lost. In this respect, the adoption of a text explicitly pro-Palestinian would, simply, not be relevant.

The draft text of the resolution was prepared by the Committee's Presidency. The Foreign Ministry's input was sought, to a certain degree, but, its role was purely advisory, leaving a large *marge de manoeuvre* to the Parliament.²⁹ From the start, the basic challenge evolved around the wording of the text as the Presidency had to (a) gain, prior to the vote in the plenary, the sup-

The Hellenic Parliament unanimously voted, on 22 December 2015, a resolution calling the Greek government to recognize a Palestinian state

29 For example, the MFA suggested that the text would read that a Palestinian state would be created "within the 1967 borders". The adopted resolution read "on the basis of the 1967 lines".

port of all political parties and (b) come up with a draft that would neither perturb Greece's enhanced relations with Israel nor alarm Palestinians. When the draft was discussed in the Standing Committee, the general perception from the political parties was that it constituted "from the beginning, a very balanced proposal" (Interview, March 2016). Concerns were raised, however, by the Communist Party, which wanted to add a sentence condemning Israeli settlement expansion.³⁰ Reaching out to the Diplomatic Representation of Palestine and to the Israeli Embassy, the Presidency informed that the Hellenic Parliament would vote upon a draft text on Palestinian recognition. Prior to the vote, the President of the Standing Committee on National Defense and Foreign Affairs met with the Israeli and the Palestinian ambassadors respectively, exchanging views on the content of the draft resolution. Palestinians wanted to add the definite article "the" before "Palestinian state"³¹. Israel, as a principle, objects to the resolutions voted on EU national parliaments regarding Palestinian recognition, deeming them unilateral steps that drive further away the Palestinian desire to come back to the negotiation table. To this respect, Israelis consider that Palestinian recognition should be conditional to the outcome of the peace negotiation process. At the same time, concerns were raised regarding the timing of the resolution as well as the gravity of the symbolic gesture to vote it in the presence of Abbas. Nevertheless, Israel considered the Greek resolution to be balanced and one of the most moderate texts adopted by EU national parliaments.

The resolution was, finally, adopted by the plenary unanimously, on 22 December 2015, in the presence of Palestinian President Abbas. Following the vote, in a highly symbolic gesture, Abbas addressed the house stating that the adoption of the resolution constituted a historical moment and a proof of the sound relations between the two peoples. Yet, Abbas delivered his speech at the Senate Hall of the Hellenic Parliament and not at the Plenary Hall, where only Heads of States have the right to address the house.

5. Conclusions

A superficial reading of how parliaments have acted in the last couple of years over the recognition of Palestine, starting with the Swedish *Riksdag*, may have led to the impression that parliamentarians have taken a leading role, paving the way for governments to follow suit. Although our research only limited itself to three case-studies, our preliminary conclusions appeared to be more nuanced. Indeed, in all cases, except Italy, it was the Government that looked for support among Parliament in order to promote a possible shift in its foreign policy stance.

But even though it stems from a truly parliamentary initiative, the "conditioned recognition" of Palestine by the Italian *Parlamento* does not pave the way for a new course in the Government's foreign policy, but basically reaffirms and supports some of its already consolidated trends and objectives, as described in section 3.1.2, including moderation, impartiality and fair balance.

The three case-studies also show that national parliaments do not fully make use of all the tools offered by parliamentary diplomacy, but that they instead tend to restrict their range of action to the most traditional way of asserting parliaments' role in international affairs: i.e., strengthening their oversight capacity vis-à-vis national governments' foreign policy. This contrasts with the

The three case-studies show that national parliaments do not fully make use of all the tools offered by parliamentary diplomacy

30 The adopted text "voices concern over the continuation of Israeli settlement activity".

31 The final text does not connect the recognition to the peace process and states that the Greek government should "recognize a Palestinian state".

EP's resolution on recognition of Palestine statehood where MEPs decided to launch a direct diplomatic initiative, called "Parliamentarians for Peace", aiming to bring together cross-party Members of European, Israeli and Palestinian Parliaments to help advance an agenda for peace and to complement EU diplomatic efforts. None of the considered national parliament has followed the EP path. Yet, all Parliaments motions/resolutions however share a common trait: an attempt to Europeanize the issues. In the case of Italy, the *Parlamento* urged the Italian Government "to promote in the EU a more determined action on the Middle East crisis, by restoring the special envoy for the peace process". However, no specific role for the Italian (or European) Parliament is clearly identified in this process. The Greek and Spanish texts specifically mentioned the resolution adopted by the EP as well as relevant resolutions adopted by other national EU parliaments.

It seems however also important to note that – as it might be expected – in cases of diplomatic stalemates, parliamentary bodies have taken a meaningful role in trying to unblock the situation. This is an important characteristic of parliamentary diplomacy as identified in the existing literature: the whirlwind of parliamentary "recognitions" of the Palestine state confirm such a claim. Whether parliamentary diplomacy succeeds or not does not in itself invalidate its possible utility as a new form of diplomacy. Indeed, "older" diplomacy has equally and consistently failed to solve this issue since at least the late 1940s-early 1950s, if not since the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which, next year, will be reaching its one century-old mark.

Finally, it is important to note that even if this study shows to a large extent the limits of parliamentary diplomacy, the fact remains that the international role of parliaments is now here to stay: its appearance, rise and consolidation will continue unabated. It is not a coincidence that executives look for its support, especially in thorny international issues as in the case of Palestine.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. EP resolution on recognition of Palestine statehood: votes by political groups³²

Political Groups	In favour	Against	Abstained	Did not vote
ALDE/ADLE	39	5	24	0
ECR	7	36	21	2
EFDD	17	20	7	0
EPP	164	16	14	16
Greens/EFA	48	0	2	0
GUE-NGL	42	0	5	1
NI	9	10	30	2
S&D	172	1	8	4
Tot.	498	88	111	25

Table 2. EP resolution on recognition of Palestine statehood: votes by member states

Political Groups	In favour	Against	Abstained	Did not vote
Austria	12	4	2	0
Belgium	18	0	2	0
Bulgaria	5	7	4	0
Croatia	10	0	1	0
Cyprus	6	0	0	0
Czech Republic	8	4	8	0
Denmark	6	6	1	0
Estonia	1	0	5	0
Finland	10	3	0	0
France	45	3	24	2
Germany	77	8	5	4
Greece	15	0	4	1
Hungary	15	0	4	1
Ireland	7	0	0	1
Italy	51	3	6	8
Latvia	5	2	0	1
Lithuania	6	0	3	0

32 *Legend.* ALDE/ADLE: Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group; EFDD: Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group; EPP: Group of the European People's Party; Greens/EFA: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; GUE-NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left; NI: Non-attached Members; S&D: Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

Luxembourg	6	0	0	0
Malta	5	0	0	1
Netherlands	18	8	0	0
Poland	27	9	13	1
Portugal	20	0	0	0
Romania	16	0	11	2
Slovakia	7	2	3	1
Slovenia	6	0	0	1
Spain	51	0	1	0
Sweden	13	4	2	0
United Kingdom	32	25	12	1
Tot.	498	88	111	25

Table 3. EP resolution on recognition of Palestine statehood: Greek, Italian and Spanish MEPs votes, by political groups

	Greek MEPs				Italian MEPs				Spanish MEPs				
ALDE/ADLE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	0	1	0
ECR	1	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EFDD	-	-	-	-	16	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
EPP	5	0	0	0	4	3	1	8	16	0	0	0	
Greens/EFA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0	0	0	0
GUE-NGL	2	0	4	0	3	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	
NI	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	-	-	-	-	
S&D	2	0	0	1	28	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	
Tot.	15	0	4	1	51	3	6	8	51	0	1	0	

Table 4. Motions adopted by the Italian Parliament on the recognition of Palestine statehood: voting records

	Motion "Speranza et al." n. 1-745			Motion "Alli et al." n. 1-746		
Area Popolare (NCD-UDC)	15	0	0	16	0	0
Democrazia Solidale - Centro Democratico	6	0	0	5	1	0
Forza Italia	0	27	0	0	0	27
Fratelli d'Italia - Alleanza nazionale	0	2	0	0	0	2
Gruppo Misto	19	1	3	2	10	11

Lega Nord	1	15	0	1	0	15
Movimento 5 stelle	0	0	54	0	54	0
Partito Democratico	227	0	2	203	0	9
Scelta civica per l'Italia	10	0	0	10	0	0
Sinistra Italiana-Sinistra ecologia libertà	22	0	0	0	19	0
Tot.	300	45	59	237	84	64