

Young Palestinians and Israelis face up in the EP A new approach to the Middle East peace process



Commitment to the future

As part of the European year of intercultural dialogue 2008, the EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering invited 21 young political leaders from Palestine, Israel and Europe to the EP for three days. The event has been financed by the Hallstein prize (20.000 euros), received by the President in November 2007 from the city of Frankfurt. "The money was used to bring young people together — something very worthwhile" he said.

At a press point held on Wednesday 28 May, President Pöttering and the young political leaders shared their feelings on the experience. Hussam Jubran, the representative of young Palestinians, said that in these three days spent in the EP he had gained a new perspective on the political life of the EU and its real commitment to the Middle East peace process. *"In our context we sometimes get frustrated and feel helpless and it is good to be able to talk in a new neutral context"*.

Fierce but fair discussions

Both Palestinian and Israeli young political leaders — represented by Hussam Jubran and Roy Shaposhnik (Kadima party) — were taking away a great deal from these three days in the EP. They had had the chance to explore more deeply the history of Europe — centuries of wars and conflicts that had led to an overwhelming desire for peace, reunification and stability. They had enjoyed presentations and discussions on the Basque country (by Carlos Iturgaiz Angulo, EPP-ED), on Northern Ireland (by Bairbre de Brún, GUE-NGL) and on Belgium (by Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroek, ALDE).

The representative of the young Europeans, Jochem de Groot (ALDE, NL), was struck by the respect both delegations showed each other. He described the discussions as "fierce but honest".

Thinking outside the box

Most speakers agreed that the point of the meeting was to get to know each other up close, personally. It seems this worked quite well. Hussam Jubran said: *"what is important and new was the way we discussed issues, this gives us the ability to start thinking in a different, outside-the-box way"*.

The message

In their final joint message to Hans-Gert Pöttering, the young politicians expressed a heartfelt thank you note. They said: *"The involvement of young political leaders is crucial for the transformation of present conflicts into future peace. We believe that what we have experienced during these days under the auspices of the European Parliament has great importance for peace-building efforts. This platform has enabled young leaders from both sides to exchange views and real life experiences, building the foundation for trust between future generations. It has been particularly enriching to engage in a dialogue between young leaders from both the region and Europe"*.