

## **Urgent debate on The Israeli-Palestinian peace process: the role of the Council of Europe**

Ms KAVVADIA (*Greece, Spokesperson for the Group of the Unified European Left*) – The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is one of the emblematic initiatives taken up by the Council of Europe, as it represents a paradigm of human rights issues, which has been current for 50 years now, despite the perpetual efforts of both the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly to address it. Because of the turbulent events of the last few years in the area – where, unfortunately, we have seen the law of the strongest – it seems unlikely that a positive solution can be found in the near future. The peace process has stagnated while, in the last few years, events in the area have escalated negatively. In 2014, the Council of Europe protested against the execution of Palestinians, both by Hamas and by the Israeli Government. Reports have substantiated claims of the gradual and persistent settlement by the Israeli State of territories in the Gaza Strip. In 2017, an Assembly report informed us beyond doubt about the terminal environmental deficit of the Gaza Strip.

The assumption of the United States presidency by Donald Trump has empowered the conservative point of view in Israel. After the Israeli High Court overruled the so-called regulation bill, there was an attempt by the United States to acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the moving its embassy there. That initiative has not yet been seen through, but it has enflamed passions all the same.

Against that background, we now see Palestinian protesters convicted and imprisoned with long sentences, even if they are under-age. A recent example, which has been exposed through the media, is that of Ahed Tamimi, aged 16. She was arrested in December and is still in prison, facing a military court, for slapping an Israeli soldier during a protest. In the operational framework of the Council of Europe and the Assembly, initiatives and fact-finding visits are once again to be taken to help us to support people in need, to see that authorities operate according to international law and to ensure that human rights are not violated. In that context, the honest exchange of information can begin and eventually the peace process can be re-established in the area.

No one has the right to remain silent. We all recognise that the solution for peace in the Middle East must be based on a two-state solution, with safety and security for all Israeli and Palestinian citizens and an absolute respect for freedom and human rights. Far-right populism and nationalism have been an obstacle to peace for too long.