



## Report

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# Jerusalem Project

## Working Stay in Jerusalem

### 11 to 25 March 2011

#### 1. Brief visit to Switzerland

Before leaving Switzerland for Jerusalem, the Lassalle Institute (LI) team met up with Rami Nasrallah from the International Peace and Cooperation Center (IPCC) and Shlomo Hasson from the Futura Institute (FI). With the support of Dr. Heidi Albisser and Prof. Alfred Bodenheimer of the University of Basel, Swiss parliamentarian Josef Lang and Mario Carera, Senior Advisor at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the LI had organised some high-level meetings in Basel and Berne.

##### Cross-border cooperation

On 8 March, together with our cooperation partners, we looked into existing forms of cross-border cooperation in the region around Basel, where Germany, France and Switzerland converge. In Village-Neuf, Dr. Frédéric Duvinage, Director of Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (TEB), gave us a brief introduction. He then guided us around the border region, showing us ways in which the three adjoining countries cooperate in various projects, for example at Mulhouse airport and in the planned merging of the different public service ports. Shlomo Hasson was enthusiastic about what he saw. Particularly impressive for him was the fact that around 50% of the Alsatian working population commuted to Basel for work. Highly relevant to Jerusalem, this would imply that, once political borders have been defined, they become less and less relevant for a region's everyday life in social and economic terms. In the opinion of the partners from Jerusalem, large cities are already today more important than nations. Economic power is concentrated in megacities.

In order to learn about cross-border cooperation, Hasson and Nasrallah would like to visit up to a dozen cross-border regions in Europe over the coming two years. Of course they realise that the socio-economic context in Jerusalem is different from that in Europe. Nevertheless, there are important insights to be gained, which can be applied to create new concepts of cooperation. These would then be ready to be put into practice once Jerusalem has become the capital of two states.

##### Cooperation with the University of Basel's "Europainstitute"

In the afternoon, we met Prof. Georg Kreis, Prof. Anne Peters and Prof. Laurent Goetschel from the University of Basel at the "Europainstitute". Shlomo Hasson outlined the latest news with regard to urban planning in Eastern Jerusalem. Shortly after a zoning plan for two districts had been approved by Mayor Nir Barkat, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior reversed the decision. Nasrallah and Hasson conclude from this that, with the Israeli government becoming increasingly isolated, the international community should raise its pressure. The fact that European politicians are becoming more willing to speak out resolutely for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and to support corresponding projects such as that of Nasrallah and Hasson, was confirmed by Peter Maurer, the state secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, at a meeting with the three cooperation partners in Berne the following day.



### Lobbying in Berne

Whereas the stay in Basel was dedicated primarily to the partners' research interests, the trip to Berne was undertaken to canvass political support. Talks with several parliamentarians in the corridors of parliament in the morning were followed by further discussions over lunch. For the first time, Nasrallah and Hasson had the opportunity of meeting Mr Geri Müller, chairman of the foreign policy committee, who declared himself sympathetic to the project and promised to follow it with abiding interest. Various Swiss politicians signalled their support for Nasrallah's and Hasson's plans.

Later in the afternoon, Peter Maurer, the state secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), welcomed the LI and the guests from Jerusalem. He explicitly praised the cooperation partners' long-term approach and underlined his willingness to lend moral and financial support to Hasson's and Nasrallah's project within the scope of the FDFA's possibilities. To raise awareness of Hasson's and Nasrallah's undertaking, the LI and FDFA will try to arrange for a meeting with the Council of Europe and EU representatives in the course of this year. Moreover, determined efforts are now being made to find a suitable Swiss bank for the Affordable Housing project.

## **2. New and old encounters**

Niklaus Brantschen and Pia Gyger travel to Jerusalem twice a year. The working stay from 11 to 25 March 2011 proved particularly intensive. Besides meeting up with old acquaintances, the LI laid the groundwork for two workshops with Israeli partners. There were also spontaneous encounters which opened up new doors and opportunities.

### Strong women in the desert

Partnership between men and women is a matter of special concern to Pia Gyger and Niklaus Brantschen. On the first day of their stay, they drove to a rural place near Be'er Sheva with the Head of LI, Dr. Anna Gamma, where they visited Bedouin women who earned part of their keep with embroidery. These women revealed a high level of self-confidence, and were not shy of questioning traditional role patterns and generally taking their lives into their own hands.

### Great commitment by political foundations

The meeting with Michael Bröning, the Head of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in East Jerusalem proved illuminating. The FES is a political foundation associated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany. The two most important Palestinian partners of the FES are the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) and the IPCC. Mr Bröning praised the IPCC as a particularly knowledgeable and competent organisation. For Mr Bröning, too, one of the great challenges is to prevent East Jerusalem from increasingly becoming the "slum of the West Bank". A project is currently being launched that is to assess the possibilities of cooperation between Bonn, Germany's former "interim" capital, and Ramallah, which one day may become an interim capital for the Palestinians.

We also obtained first-hand information on the other major foundation, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in East Jerusalem, which in turn is associated with Germany's Christian Democratic Party. The Head of the foundation, Felix Dane, considers the current tendency towards a bi-national state as dangerous. In such a political space, Israel would be unable to maintain its claim of being Jewish and democratic. According to Felix Dane, a special concern of the KAS is to promote religious dialogue. One of the organisations that the KAS supports in this context is the Wasatia Foundation.



### Wasatia or the quest for a moderate form of Islam

The Palestinian Wasatia Foundation was founded in 2006 by Mohamed Dajani, Professor at the Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem. Although Professor Dajani receives regular death threats, he has been leading this groundbreaking foundation for five years. The LI seized the opportunity to attend Wasatia's annual general meeting in Ramallah. Besides Islamic judges and Sheikhs, participants also included young women from Nablus. The fact that there are forces within Palestinian society that are committed to an open and moderate form of Islam is highly encouraging from LI's point of view. It is quite possible that the Wasatia Foundation will, in the medium term, develop into or set up a democratic political party. In any case, we from the LI are keen to stay in touch with Professor Dajani.

### Get-together

One of the highlights of the stay was the meeting with four Palestinians and four Israelis who had taken part in the first Jerusalem Conference in Switzerland back in 2006. Although they are all still actively involved in peace work, it once again became clear how difficult effective networking is under the circumstances of an asymmetric conflict. The LI witnessed a conflict culture that left little scope for genuine dialogue. Nevertheless, the meeting was important in view of the exchange of ideas and viewpoints it generated, and very instructive for the LI.

## **3. Planned workshops**

The stay in March not only brought about numerous encounters, but was also used intensively for the preparation of two workshops that the LI will, for the first time, conduct locally with some very well connected partners, beginning in September this year. This means that the LI can increasingly bring its core competence in inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue to bear in Jerusalem itself. The workshops will not be one-off events, but are to be institutionalised so that eventually they can be held locally, independent of the LI.

### Man-woman partnership

Together with the married couple Avner and Sarah Haramati, Niklaus Brantschen and Pia Gyger are planning a workshop in Jerusalem on the theme of man-woman partnership. Avner Haramati is the chairman of the Jerusalem Inter-Cultural Center, Sarah Haramati works as a psychotherapist. The two-day workshop is aimed at Israelis, Palestinians and Europeans. Both couples and singles can take part. In the view of the initiators, partnership between men and women is one of the keys to overcoming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has been virulent for so many decades.

### What is my aspiration as a Jerusalemite for this century?

The second workshop is to be held together with the couple Baruch and Shelagh Stolov – both pupils of Thich Nhat Hanh. In its first edition, it is aimed at Israelis from Jerusalem who are searching for new answers to the pressing issues in and around Jerusalem. The workshop title, "What is my aspiration as a Jerusalemite for this century?", takes up a concern affecting human beings everywhere. Designed for leaders in various fields, the workshop, will be working mostly with the methods of the «Lassalle-Institut-Modell»®. Regular meditations prepare the ground on which genuine dialogue can thrive.



#### 4. Also-rans – marathon in Jerusalem

At first glance, Jerusalem looks like any other Western city. In the secular Israeli quarters especially, Jerusalem seems in many ways similar to big cities in Southern Europe. Once you start talking to locals, though, the cracks appear. Ask someone "How are you," and he or she might easily reply, "In one word, good." If you then dig deeper and ask, "And in two words?" the answer will be, "Not good".

Different worlds clash within the Israeli community. The Purim festival is a good example – a sort of carnival for Jewish Israelis. Whereas the nationalist religious and the ultra-orthodox Jews will – each in their own manner – celebrate the religious aspect of the festival with readings from the Book of Ruth, secular-minded Jews take the festival primarily as an opportunity to meet up and celebrate with friends.

With such a strong focus on religion, it comes as a surprise that Jerusalem recently staged its first city marathon. And this happened to take place on the very day the LI team was leaving the city, making it almost a mission impossible for the taxi drivers involved. Nowhere else in the world does a marathon seem more out of place. It was probably meant to convey an impression of normality, but this didn't really work. Most people saw through the ploy. And most people are too full of their own worries to care. Luckily, though, there are still Palestinians and Israelis dedicated to turning Jerusalem into a peaceful and open city. It is time for the international community, in particular Europe, to leave its comfort zone and engage with greater effort in the Middle East trouble hotspot.

Bad Schönbrunn, April 2011

Pia Gyger and Niklaus Brantschen – Heads of the Lassalle Institute's Jerusalem Project

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