**Negotiations – Reconciliation - Elections**

The current political situation revolves around three issues, namely (1) the ongoing *negotiations*, (2) the chances for a possible *reconciliation* between the different Palestinian factions, and (3) the prospects for *elections* to be held in the Palestinian territories.

With regards to **negotiations**, it is well known that President Abbas is personally committed to, interested in and focused on negotiations as the only viable venue for a solution and the only option or strategy to be employed. He can also rely on the Arab League foreign ministers for providing these negotiations with an umbrella of legitimacy which is crucial to Abbas as own legitimacy is very thin after his term as President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has expired (he was elected in 2005 for a term of four years which ended in 2009).

*Jordan* is also deeply engaged in the negotiations, even sharing in them as a full partner with access to all contacts and information from Washington, Tel Aviv and Ramallah (Amman does not need to sit directly at the table to be well aware of every option put on the table).

*Hamas* has been in the past and will continue to be the major opponent of Fatah and the Abbas Presidency in the future. Despite the fact that the movement is now politically completely naked and losing all its strategic allies, i.e. Syria, Hezbollah, Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, in yesterday’s (6 October) public statement by Khaled Meshaal as well as during his visit to Erdogan in Ankara, the Hamas leader addressed Abbas in his call for reconciliation while hinting at the progress made in reconciliatory efforts between Hamas’ ally Iran and the United States as well as Europe (namely the new spirit in Tehran after the election of President Rouhani).

At the same time US Secretary of State John Kerry proposed an *economic piece agenda* over $4 billion for Israel, Jordan and Palestine in an attempt to include and integrate Israeli into the region (normalizing Israel’s relations with its neighbors and ending its obsession of being a “military ghetto” in the region).

Keeping all of the above in mind, one can witness, after 9 sessions of meetings between Tzipi Livni and Erekat in Jerusalem with and without Martik Indyk, an episode in Geneva bringing together another team of negotiators under Dennis Ross with Yasser Abed Rabbo for the Palestinian side and Uri Savir for the Israeli Team – with the goal of Geneva II. Yet the official statement from Ramallah with regards to *Geneva* claimed that talks are a dead end and of no substance and that only discussion for a framework with Livni are important, hinting at extending the previous 9 months framework indefinitely. However, the Palestinian society, i.e. NGOs and leftist groups, are condemning these episodes and demand to close this venue of negotiations which only provide Netanyahu with the opportunity to use them as a cover for expanding settlements and further judaizing Jerusalem.

When it comes to the ongoing division between Hamas and Fatah recent developments have not been conducive to **reconciliation**. President Rouhani is interested in reestablishing Iran’s connections with Hamas and in using them as a political card in the Iranian talks with the US and the EU. Also, Erdogan will not miss such an opportunity to re-empower Hamas again which in turn he intends to use to bolster his recently damaged standing in the region. These two developments were reflected in deposed Prime Minister Haniyeh’s suggestion to Fatah and other factions to share political power – which was declined by them. Haniyeh agreed to an Egyptian proposal for opening Rafah crossing which had already been put forward and implemented in 2005, i.e. policing by the PA and an EU presence at the crossing. But Jibril Rajoub, member of Fatah Central Committee stated, “We don’t trust Hamas with the security and safety of our men and we will not send PA officials to Rafah”. Thus, the shortly opened window of opportunity has closed again, while no official statement neither from the PA nor the President’s office was released endorsing or rejecting the offer. This means a de facto end for reconciliation efforts for the time being.

What concerns possible **elections** in the near future, recent developments at last month’s Revolutionary Council meeting need to be taken into account. Members of the council suggested that Abbas would appoint a deputy in the near future as had been promised for a long time. The suggested name was again Marwan Barghouti’s with the excuse that his appointment would serve as a ticket for his release from prison and, moreover, fill the gap in absence of any current possible candidate from the Central Committee of Fatah. Abbas himself was experiencing mixed feelings as most speeches came from the Dahlan Camp to which he is opposed and he refused. However, he continued to hint that the plan for elections would go on as planned in the West bank – without any to be held in Gaza – depending on the state of current negotiation results and EU as well as US continued support.

Under the surface, there is a fourth point of importance which concerns the **anger and the frustration in the street** over the economic, financial and political impasse which is posing a challenge to the PA. While the PA is continuing full cooperation and coordination in joint Palestinian-Israeli security efforts, Palestinian special security forces crushed protests in Jenin refugee camp as well as in Balata in Nablus and continue to contain any demonstration with excessive force. Attention is also on the Israeli incursions on the Haram al-Sharif and their attempts to share the holy site of by force as well as the increased number of arrests among the youth – all representing their energized efforts to control more and more land and to continue building new housing units for settlers within Palestinian neighborhoods.