
INTERVIEW: YOSSI SARID

Knesset member: 'We should talk to PLO'

Yosi Sarid, a member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament) from the opposition Labour Party, was the guest speaker at a meeting in Paris at the end of April organized by the Israeli-Palestinian Friendship Committee. Sarid, a founder of the pro-peace Ometz grouping in Israel, created an uproar in Israel and within the Labour Party some months ago when he announced his willingness to meet with Isam Sartawi, a close collaborator of Yasser Arafat. At the Paris meeting, Sarid restated his determination to meet with "Palestinians whenever I will have the occasion, if such a meeting contributes to the process of peace in the Middle East."

Calling for a global peace settlement, Sarid declared himself, at the meeting and in an interview with *EIR*, in favor of negotiations with any Palestinians, "so long as such negotiations are preceded by mutual and simultaneous recognition by both Israelis and Palestinians of the rights of each other's state to exist." Although personally favorable to the creation of a Jordanian-Palestinian federation, Sarid acknowledged that in the last analysis, it is up to the Palestinians to choose the kind of state they want to live in, and Israel will have to accept that decision.

Addressing the present political problems in the Israeli leadership during the question-and-answer period, Sarid declared himself categorically opposed to the idea of a national unity government composed of the ruling Likud Party and the Labour Party, which in his view would be "catastrophic." Sarid warned that Labour's agreement to join in a national unity government would lead to a split by the Mapam wing of the Labour alignment and his own faction in the Labour Party to create a new left party.

Sarid, who has been actively organizing the European Jewish community in recent months, severely condemned Menachem Begin's attempts to muzzle the Diaspora by equating any attack on his policies with "attacks against the Jewish state." "There is no reason whatsoever to be in total agreement with either Begin or Sharon," said Sarid, who called on Diaspora Jews to intervene forcefully in Israeli politics whenever it was necessary.

Sarid was interviewed by *EIR* in Paris.

EIR: Mr. Sarid, in your opinion are there any chances

left for peace in the Middle East? We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: On the one hand Israel just returned the Sinai to Egypt, but on the other hand the possibilities of war against Lebanon have never been greater.

Sarid: I don't think that a war will be launched in the very near future, but of course there is a danger of war. I believe that most Israelis do understand now that the bilateral peace treaty with Egypt cannot be isolated for a long period of time. A separate peace treaty would remain insecure. In order to maintain peace with Egypt, we have to solve the Palestinian problem; otherwise, there will be no long-lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Now, what are the principles upon which negotiations should rest? First of all, negotiations in the Middle East must be based on the principle of mutual and simultaneous recognition between both peoples—the people of Israel should recognize the right to self-determination of the Palestinians, and the Palestinians should recognize the right to self-determination of the Israeli people as well. The second principle is that Israel should declare its readiness for negotiation with any Palestinian who will accept this basis for negotiation, who will accept the very existence of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state in the region. And the third principle is that the decision over the fate and future of the Palestinians is up to them. They will decide their future, and if one day they will decide to establish an independent and sovereign state between Jordan and Israel, we—the Israelis—will have to accept their decision.

EIR: What are the chances that your ideas will be accepted in Israel? Maybe you can tell us about the activities and impact of the political group you founded, Ometz.

Sarid: Unfortunately I cannot pretend to represent the majority in Israel, but we do represent a very significant minority—and with regard to the Israeli Labour Party I would say that presently they cannot take a decision without taking into account our influence and our views. It is not a very easy battle. It is on the contrary very difficult, especially because the Palestinians are not making the fight in Israel much easier. Up to the present time, to be sincere, we don't have a very clear sign that the Palestinians have changed their mind about the existence of Israel. But we do believe that if Israel will declare its willingness to negotiate with any Palestinian who accepts the existence of Israel, Israel will have nothing to lose. Either the Palestinians answer and react positively to the challenge and they will come to the negotiating table—which will then be a very good day for Israel—or, God forbid, they will not answer the Israeli challenge and they will not be determined enough to come to the negotiating table. In that case the burden of responsibility will lay on the Palestinian shoulders.