Parallel reality of the Palestinian resolutions in the UN

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Why is it that the Israeli-Palestinian issue has been filling the UN’s agenda practically since its very inception? One brief and simple answer to that query could be that it is all due to the fact that more than 70 years ago, the Arab states rejected the UN General Assembly’s Partition Plan. If adopted, it would have laid down conditions for creating two states – a Jewish and an Arab one – in the territory of the former British Mandate.

Simple answers, however, are completely out of this discourse. Rather the opposite: the ever-changing global reality and the power play within the UN, as well as hundreds of various resolutions, have gradually formed something, which we might call a “parallel reality” – such as has very little to do with the reality on the ground.

For many years, we have been watching the same crazy show staged at the UN General Assembly every fall – the debate on the so-called package of the Palestinian resolutions. Their drafts are prepared chiefly by the Palestinians themselves, and the EU is the main partner to negotiate their final wording.

Some of those final texts are nevertheless rather controversial. The most problematic ones presented in recent years are those that are concerned with Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, the point of contention being the name of the place itself. It is arguably the most important spot in Jerusalem and it bears historical, cultural and religious importance for all three great monotheistic religions: Judaism Christianity and Islam.

The Czech Republic has acknowledged that both sides in the Israel-Palestinian conflict have a legitimate attachment to the place. This position is politically based in the acts of the Czech Parliament and the government’s concept of the Czech Republic’s foreign policy, as well as in the common position of the EU Council. In January 2016, the EU ministers of foreign affairs approved the designation “Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.” Within the UN they, however, fail to push this well-based bilingual name through.

Of course, the EU is an aggregate of 27 member states and, as such, it is not always easy to find a common ground. In practice, it means that not all of our EU partners agree with our views, just as we do not always see things their way. The development has led to the situation where the EU holds a declared common position – designation of the place as Temple mount/Haram al-Sharif – but at the same time is unable or even unwilling to stand up for it. This in turn leads to the fact that every new round of UN negotiations on the Palestinian declarations brings more discord to the EU common stand declared in 2016, and the gap between the Czech position and that of the EU is getting wider. True, to many – particularly in Central Europe – that may seem as mere wordplay, but for the Israelis and Palestinians that is virtually a basic question of their history and national identity.

I do not believe that we can reach peace and stability in the region without Israel and the Palestinians returning to the negotiation table. I also believe that UN Palestinian resolutions do not bring us any closer to this goal. According to them, Israel is the sole perpetrator of all Palestinian problems. That in result goes against long-standing Czech Republic’s foreign policy, which seeks balanced position throughout the whole region. We are sure that at the end of the day only such approach can prove truly effective and bring us concrete results.

The same can be applied to the EU. Only if it stands tall for its own values and its own balanced position – as is among others expressed in its internal designation of the “most controversial” place in Jerusalem – it will really exert the influence it fully deserves given its strength. We do believe that the EU does not want forever to be – as the saying goes – only a payer and not a player.

At the same time, we recognize the need of compromise in formulating the resolutions in question. Yet if it is to be really effective, it should not be reached at any cost and for too many concessions. This is the position from which we approach the ongoing EU deliberations on the UN General Assembly Palestinian resolutions. We want to be active and open minded. In the end, however, our vote will fully depend on the quality of the final text.