Middle-East peace process

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MEPs' grave concern at the deadlock in the peace process is reflected in a report by Luigi COLAJANNI (PSE, E) adopted by the Foreign Affairs Committee (Chairman: Fernandez Albor, EPP, E). The report condemns the Netanyahu government for its new policy of refusing to recognize or apply the commitments entered into by the previous government. The Israeli army's failure to withdraw from Hebron, new settlements in Palestinian territories, the opening of the tunnel under the mosques, the uncertain fate of Orient House and the closure of the territories borders are all seriously compromising Israeli-Palestinian relations and could well lead to a general decline in the situation. The Israeli Government is urged to abandon this policy and to implement the Oslo Accords since dialogue with the Palestinian Authority is the only way of achieving peace. As regards the situation in the Palestinian territories, the committee is extremely worried by the recent deterioration in the human rights situation and lack of progress towards democracy. The EU's primary role of providing economic assistance must be backed up by a political initiative designed to strengthen Palestinian civil society. The Committee supports the appointment of a special envoy to the region. It is also in favour of opening negotiations on a trade agreement between the EU and the Palestinian Authority, which would be replaced with an association agreement when the legal status of the Palestine Authority permits. The peace must be global, that is it must include all Israel's neighbours. Negotiations with Syria must be resumed, Syria must reach agreement with Lebanon and there must be a withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon. Iran, for its part, is urged to bring pressure to bear on fundamentalist groups to ensure they do not impede the peace process.