



On Monday, May 2, 2022, **ELNET** and the **French Campus of the Academic College of Netanya** organized a symposium at the French Senate entitled "*The Abraham Accords: a promise of peace to the world*", under the high patronage of President **Gérard Larcher**, and the sponsorship of Vice President **Roger Karoutchi**, President of the France-Israel Friendship Group, and Senator **Olivier Cadic**, President of the France-Gulf countries friendship group.

25 high-level speakers from France, Israel, and the Middle East discussed the prospects created by these agreements and evaluated their impact.

Among the speakers were **Tzachi Hanegbi**, former Minister of Regional Cooperation of Israel, **Dr. Emmanuel Navon**, Professor of International Relations, **H.E. Xavier Chatel**, Ambassador of France to the United Arab Emirates, **Robert Greenway**, President and Executive Director of the Abraham Accords Peace Institute, **H.E. Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa**, Ambassador of Bahrain to France...

OPENING REMARKS

Vice-President **Roger Karoutchi** opened the symposium by stating that the Abraham Accords were the result of a long process of rapprochement during an exceptional political situation.

The gradual withdrawal of the United States from the region has prompted the states concerned to build the foundations of a pragmatic partnership together, in the face of common security challenges, such as Iran's nuclear program.

These accords are also paving the way for dialogue and respect for international law that France has always supported.

This dynamic of normalization is in keeping with France's diplomatic tradition in the region, which aims to be a mediator in the resolution of regional conflicts.



Roger Karoutchi also recalled that the European experience of the last 70 years has proved that economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation made overcome historical disputes and promote peaceful and lasting solutions possible.

Two years after their signature, many achievements have been made: the spectacular increase in trade between Israel and the United Arab Emirates which reached \$600 million in the first 2021 semester of 2021 or the development of industrial and technological cooperation, such as the agreement on cybersecurity between Morocco and Israel. The economic component has been enriched with a military one.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Arié Bensemhoun, Executive Director of **ELNET France**, defined the Abraham Accords as a "Copernican revolution" which Europe has not yet assessed. According to him, there is an incredible opportunity to relaunch all peace processes, and in that prospect, he vowed that the French parliaments create a caucus dedicated to the agreements, ensuring their promotion.

Claude Grundman, President of the **French Campus of the Academic College of Netanya**, stressed the importance of the moment at a time when Israel was commemorating the Shoah. The Abraham Accords are "a crazy dream" for those who want to make it happen.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: TZACHI HANEGBI

Tzachi Hanegbi, former Minister of Regional Cooperation and Parliamentarian, recognized that the Abraham Accords do not belong to Israel and the United States alone: France must partake in it. He recalled the history of the tragedy of the Middle East by evoking his memories of childhood and youth, marked by the various wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors. During the Six Day War, the bombings in Tel Aviv did not foreshadow the future peace agreement with Egypt ten years later in 1978. The same was true with the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Saddate's speech in the Knesset in 1978 convinced him that the future could only be peace and security for the region. In 1982, his first war experience as a paratrooper in Lebanon, deeply marked him. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan were given a new impetus with the Abraham Accords, as the benefits accrue to all actors in the region.



A beginning of cooperation even before the signing of these Agreements was beginning to take place during his term as Minister of Regional Cooperation of Israel between 2016 and 2020. According to him, there is no limit to this cooperation: it depends on the personal commitment of everyone to make it grow.

1st PANEL: CHRONICLE OF A HISTORICAL RAPPROCHEMENT

H.E. Dr. Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the UAE National Council recalled in a video the stakes of the Abraham Accords. In the EAU, they are perceived as a major change in the Middle East and an "outside the box" solution to hatred and terrorism. The UAE took the decision of normalization because they understood that peace would serve the interests of everyone in the region. **H.E. Dr. Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi** called on the Europeans to get more involved and to encourage other Arab countries to join the Abraham Accords. The stability, security and prosperity of the Middle East depend on it. Anything which is a threat for the region has an impact on Europe.



INTRODUCTION

Senator Olivier Cadic introduced the first roundtable by recalling that the Abraham Accords are the visible result of older relations. For example, the United Arab Emirates had tacit relations with Israel in military, diplomatic, scientific and health areas. At a time when the United States is withdrawing from the Middle East, there is no doubt that the European Union and France, which holds the presidency for another two months, have a role to play in this new regional environment.

Claude Grundman moderated the roundtable which brought together **Robert Greenway**, President and Executive Director of the Abraham Accords Peace Institute, **Pr. Youssef Chiheb**, and **Dr. Emmanuel Navon**, Professor of International Relations at Tel Aviv University.

Robert Greenway spoke about the impact of these agreements, hoping that they will be further deployed in the region. He said that a new approach was needed and the American administration was heavily involved, supported by businessmen who had a different vision of international relations. All countries had a decisive role, a vision and leadership. He also explained that two approaches could be observed in the region: a "destructive approach" (dealing with the threat embodied by ISIS and Iran) to which should be opposed a "constructive approach".



The Abraham Accords have established a sustainable security architecture in the Middle East by making the normalization between Israel and its neighbors possible. In the years to come, there will be many challenges in the region: expanding and strengthening relations between all the partners involved is imperative

Pr. Youssef Chiheb spoke about the three dimensions of the Accords: past, present and future. According to him, the normalization with Morocco is not like any other. Egypt and Jordan had territorial conflicts with Israel, and Bahrain and the UAE have geographical proximity unlike Morocco. The history of Judaism there is an exception in the Arab world. Negotiations began secretly in Morocco under the aegis of the late King Hassan II. The following kings also took their part. This process of rapprochement has become vital regarding the common enemies of Israel and Morocco: Iran, the Hamas, the Hezbollah, Al Qassam... In this perspective, the agreements provide a security response. In his view, it is now necessary to strengthen cooperation by opening an embassy of Israel in Rabah and an embassy of Morocco in Israel. Moreover, Morocco must bring Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiations table without talking about artificial controversies: **Pr. Chiheb** also believes that Jerusalem must remain under Israeli sovereignty for security reasons. Accelerating strategic cooperation by deploying Israeli expertise on water, renewable energy and gas in Morocco is a necessity, as well as in intelligence, the military and technology transfer. In conclusion, he suggested the creation of a common market between the signatory countries.

Dr. Emmanuel Navon brought a strategic and geopolitical analysis of the Accords. According to him, Israel has changed its strategy. In the 1960s, Ben Gurion had successfully developed a peripheric alliance with the non-Arab countries. At that time Israel, Iran and Turkey had common security interests, including Nasserism and the Soviet threat. This alliance has become null and void and relations with these countries have deteriorated. Today, Israel has reversed its periphery by allying itself with the Arab world against Iran, whose hegemonic ambition worries the Gulf states. In this game of alliances, energy also plays a key role. "We are in a post-oil era," said **Dr. Navon**, "which requires rentier countries to diversify their economies and introduce technology". This is why the interest in Israel is important. On the other hand, there is a reversed alliance with Greece which needs the Cyprus-Israel partnership, which also explains Erdogan's attitude of rapprochement with the Hebrew state. The Abraham Accords are a "Copernican revolution" since peace has been established within civil society.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RUTH WASSERMAN LANDE

According to **Ruth Wasserman Lande**, the Egyptians and Jordanians efforts to ease tensions on the Temple Mount alongside Israel's new Arab allies have proved the reversal of the existing regional order. While the agreements have opened new windows of opportunity, they have also created a platform to fight regional threats. Egypt is no longer the only Arab Muslim country to cooperate openly with Israel and to actively combat antisemitism and antizionism, which it was reluctant to do until now, despite the 1978 peace agreement. The current government's interests of an active relation with Israel are a response to the Muslim Brotherhood and domestic extremism. The other Muslim states have implicitly recognized the freedom of worship allowed by Israel by not condemning the Hebrew state in relation to the tensions on the Temple Mount. 100 000 worshippers pray on the site which proves that the rhetoric of Iran, Hamas and the Muslim brothers no longer have any hold on them.

Unlike the international media, the leaders of the Abrahamic circle clearly understand that this new alliance is more relevant and a safeguard against instability and terrorism. She finally recommended that Europe should create a steering committee to oversee the implications of the Accords; create a pro-Accords parliamentary group in the European Parliament; media rhetoric must stop being populist, just as Jordanians must understand that they are the official guardians of the holy sites in Jerusalem, not Hamas. The international media should have free access to the Temple Mount mosque to see the disorder during the Ramadan period. Finally, the international community should rally the Israeli side against Hamas, Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, while the Biden administration must take a firmer stance against the latter.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER (VIDEO): YAACOV HAGOEL

Yaacov Hagoel, Chairman of the World Zionist Organization, evoked the Abraham Accords in the context of the 74th anniversary of the independence of the State of Israel. Over the past decades, a narrative has emerged, asserting that regional peace and the recognition of the State of Israel by the Arab countries could only happen through peace with the Palestinians.

The Abraham Accords have proved the contrary. They target the common interests of peoples and nations. Cooperation on the economic, technological, biotechnological, touristic and security levels benefit to all parties. It strengthens peace and builds a true alliance, which one could only dream of a few years ago. At a time of war on the European soil, finding a common ground and interdependence between the parties is a necessity.



2nd PANEL: CONTENT AND PROVISIONS OF THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

Dr. Arié Bensemhoun, Executive Director of ELNET France, introduced the second panel.



Jonathan Medved, founder and CEO of OurCrowd, emphasized the historical importance of these agreements. There were 300-400,000 Israeli tourists in the Gulf countries right after the signing. On the economic level, these agreements mark the end of the "sand curtain" in the Middle East with no turning back possible. This new contagious dynamic can only be extended to new partners, as showed by signs in Lebanon. A multilateral role on the part of the EU is needed: it is time for a Marshall Plan to support these agreements with significant investments, similar to those made to support the post-pandemic economy. Billion dollars can cement this reconciliation by extending it beyond the regional sphere. Cybersecurity, food security and so many other areas are at the heart of these agreements and are of concern to the international community as a whole. OurCrowd is a pioneer in having invested heavily in the Arab signatory countries.

Dr. Tajeddine Seif, Ambassador of the Pontifical Foundation Gravissimum Educationis in the United Arab Emirates, emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue and education to bring people together: the foundation institutions bring together more than a million students of all faiths. The United Arab Emirates have been the first to support tolerance as a driving force for education. The prevention of conflicts at the international level requires international cooperation in this field.

Dr. Nirit Ofir, fellow at the University of Haifa, presented the concrete implications of these agreements through the education field. In 2014, the creation of the "Shams" project had already brought together Israeli and Arab students in seminars to familiarize them with the institutions (Tsahal for example) and cybersecurity, technology and computer science issues. Centers of excellence have been created to link research and education, the public sector and the private sector. Education supports innovation by involving the driving forces of the signatory countries, through the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Efi Stenzler, former President of the KKL, focused on the ecological question and the water issue, a major one for Israel and the countries of the Abraham Accords, since the latter are mostly desert territories. Israel has been a pioneer in terms of water recycling and desalinization and became a model for the Middle East and the world. By choosing technologies and reforestation, the country has been transformed in a hundred years. Water is a vector of peace, hence the need to pool the knowledge and techniques necessary to make it happen.

3rd PANEL : TOWARDS PEACE AND PROSPERITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The third panel was introduced by **Henrique Cymerman**, President of the Israel-Gulf Chamber of Commerce and Industry, journalist and lecturer.

According to him, the Abraham Accords are a "geopolitical revolution": mentalities have gradually evolved in the Middle East, even within public opinion. 70% of the population in the Emirates are under 30 years old and want change. The agreements are undeniably stabilizing the region by transforming alliances in the Middle East.



H.E. Xavier Chatel, Ambassador of France to the United Arab Emirates, recalled the position of France which welcomed the Accords and hopes that they will have an impact on the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to him, it is less a "Copernican revolution" than a "Darwinian evolution". The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan seemed more unlikely at the time. Nevertheless, these agreements are bold, strategic and disruptive. From the Emirati point of view, Israel does not give security guarantees, but it is an intelligence and cyber superpower, and a way to anchor itself more firmly in the West.

The Emiratis are resentful of the American withdrawal and are looking for new circles of solidarity. They are changing their regional policy and are in the process of appeasement with their withdrawal from Yemen, in Libya, etc. The economies are complementary between Emirati capital and Israeli technological capabilities. The Emiratis see themselves as "a mix of Singapore and Israel": they have also concluded a CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) with Israel.

However, this progress is fragile, there is still reluctance among the population: 43% of Emiratis have a negative image of Israel. 63% think that the agreements will not necessarily help to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are also risks that may come from the Iranian side.

H.E. Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Bahrain's Ambassador to France, said that peace and prosperity were at the heart of the vision of the King of Bahrain and while the Agreements were controversial, the will to bring peace has prevailed. Prosperity is a crucial point. Israel and Bahrain have common interests. Those who want to spread division will lose all credibility once public opinion is won over to peace.

Ruth Wasserman Lande spoke about her role in the caucus that promotes the Abraham Accords in the Knesset. This caucus is co-chaired by a member of the coalition and a member of the opposition because everyone is involved in these agreements. These are peace agreements between the people, they are not just intergovernmental. The caucus aims to bring together and shed the light on experts, economists and artists.



CONCLUSION

For **H.E. Yael German**, Israel's Ambassador to France, the Abraham Accords are changing the course of history. In Israel the new coalition has amplified this change: for the first time, an Arab party has joined the government. "Our desire is to strengthen this peace pact by extending it to other countries," she said. These agreements have strengthened existing ties with other Arab countries and are a milestone in regional and international politics.



Senator Olivier Cadic took the floor to conclude the conference and to emphasize that progress is already very concrete in multiple fields such as technology, media, financial services, tourism, research, energy, cybersecurity and air transport. France and Europe are deeply concerned about the threat posed by Iran, and it will be important in the future to ensure that allied countries stand together. In this respect, the Abraham Accords change the game.

This symposium on the Abraham Accords, the first of its kind in the Senate, was a real success and an important first step for French parliamentary diplomacy.

ELNET's ambition in the coming months is to push French parliaments to create a caucus dedicated to the Abraham Accords to promote peace in the Middle East.