

Moratinos, Kouchner, Frattini: averting another Gaza, June 13 2010

The whole world was shocked by the tragic consequences of the Israeli military operation conducted in international waters against the "Peace Flotilla" convoy of ships. The human cost is unacceptable. Nothing can justify the use of such violence, and our countries immediately condemned it.

Following these dramatic events, the time must come for analysis and reflection on the root reasons of the tragedy. The cause of the boarding of the Mavi Marmara can be summarized in a single word, one that is very familiar to us: Gaza.

It was Israel's unbending determination to force compliance with the blockade put in place in 2007 after the coup d'état by Hamas against the Palestinian Authority that is the origin of this event, just as Operation Cast Lead and its trail of intolerable pain were triggered by the constant firing of rockets into southern Israel. Last year, as it did on the night of May 30-31, Israel decided to use force to achieve its political and security objectives.

That logic must now be abandoned, because if it is not, more tragedies will occur that can only strengthen Hamas and Israel's other enemies in the region, destabilize moderates in both camps and deepen Israel's political isolation.

How? On June 1 the U.N. Security Council expressed its view, indicating three ways forward that we must follow.

First, the investigation: This is indispensable and it must be impartial, transparent and conform with international standards. It must, however, be sure to avoid the mistakes made after the submission of the Goldstone report, whose follow-up was exploited by the Human Rights Council, half of whose resolutions, unfortunately, have been devoted to condemning Israel.

Turkish and American citizens were the victims of this operation, and the investigation must therefore include an international component, as has already been proposed by the U.N. secretary general. He has our support.

Second, the lifting of the blockade: As early as the first hours after the tragedy, we stressed that the situation in Gaza was no longer sustainable.

In using this expression, also employed by the Security Council the following day, we mean that we must meet the humanitarian needs of Gaza's population and remove the *raison d'être* of the mafia-like tunnel economy, but at the same time provide guarantees that this will not go hand in hand with a resurgence in arms trafficking and an influx of terrorist groups into Gaza. This is in fact what Security Council Resolution 1860, adopted following the war in Gaza, stipulates, and the Security Council called a few days ago for it to be implemented in its entirety, not selectively. This includes the immediate release of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Concerning the humanitarian aspect, Tony Blair has suggested a shift from a logic of denial of supplies to Gaza to one based on general authorization, with the exception of banned products. Why not adopt this idea to demonstrate very quickly that the situation can improve?

The European Union already has a civilian mission on the spot ready to be deployed simultaneously at the Karni and Rafah frontier posts linking Gaza to Israel and Egypt.

To guarantee full security of supplies, we propose that inspections supported and funded by the E.U. should be put in place there in conditions acceptable to all in order to ensure that consignments bound for Gaza contain neither weapons nor explosives.

A similar regime could be considered for maritime consignments bound for Gaza, for example, by deploying E.U. monitoring teams in Cyprus. These arrangements would be implemented only against a backdrop of very substantial relaxation of the restrictions on imports and exports to and from Gaza.

A lasting solution also implies that the Palestinian Authority should be fully reinstated in Gaza and that a logic of peace should once again prevail in the Gaza territory. Efforts by Egypt in support of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas must still be supported concurrently with the démarche by the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas.

Finally, there is the essential issue: the revival of the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This tragedy must not create the conditions for a further escalation of violence either in the Middle East or in Europe, where deep emotion has been aroused. The scale of the international protests proves that Israel enjoys no immunity. How we wish that other tragedies would arouse the same condemnation!

The Palestinian president, who will be in Europe in a few days, has announced that despite everything, the talks will continue. Let us show the same political courage as that demonstrated by the Palestinian leadership. We want those talks to be able to address the final status rapidly.

The E.U., which on Dec. 8 adopted a strong, ambitious text concerning the broad lines of a future settlement, must itself move forward with the parties, in conjunction with U.S. mediation, with a view to the building and recognition of a Palestinian state living in peace and security side by side with Israel.

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