

Say a big 'thank you' to Martin Schulz

Why are we debating the exact disparity in access to water between Israelis and Palestinians, if Netanyahu admitted his belief that Jews deserve more of it?



**European Parliament President Martin Schulz /
Photo by Reuters**

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A bit of disclosure: First, to me, Economy Minister Naftali Bennett (Habayit Hayehudi) is one of the

shallowest people I've ever encountered here in recent years. Give me Moshe Feiglin, give me Uri Elitzur, give me Shlomo Ben-Zvi, but spare me this hollow charisma.

Second, in my view, Habayit Hayehudi is a party of people who hate Arabs and non-Jews, of people who are eternally frightened, driven by the Holocaust and are, above all, horribly simplistic. If my father, one of the founders of the party that later became Habayit Hayehudi, were alive to see his political descendents in the Knesset on Wednesday (and not only on Wednesday), I have no doubt (to borrow the analogy so beloved by some of the Internet commenters so dear to my heart) that he would have died on the spot, if only to be able to turn over in his grave.

Third, I was the first Knesset speaker to allow a German president (the late Johannes Rau) to deliver a speech there in the German language. That speech was full of the love and humanity which are so rare in the Knesset plenum. It turns out that every language can be either beautiful or ugly, depending

on the speaker and his worldview. On Wednesday, for instance, we saw Hebrew in all its ugliness. So what? Because of them, we should forbid speaking Hebrew in the Knesset?

And fourth, Martin Schulz, the president of the European Parliament, is a close friend of mine. On most issues connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict we disagree. He is closer to the Israeli mainstream, and his positions resemble those of Labor Party chairman Isaac Herzog. He once told me, during a frank and stern conversation, **“For me, the new Germany exists only in order to ensure the existence of the State of Israel and the Jewish people.”** He’s a brilliant intellectual and a thoughtful politician, and we don’t need to worry – he won’t give up his existential friendship so easily. And certainly not because of Bennett or his colleague Orit Strock, the party whip.

But if he sometimes needs to think a bit before he accepts the messages delivered by Israeli cabinet ministers, I’ll understand him, for Martin Schulz doesn’t come from that branch of the Bnei Akiva

youth group I'll call "the occupiers." Nor was he a soldier in an elite unit. He's a European public figure who learned in his parents' home to stand up against all tyranny, evil and discrimination. He and his family were social democrats before Naftali Bennett knew anything about high-tech or how to shoot a gun, and even before Bennett's parents moved to Israel. For him, equality is something he imbibed at home. The same as how Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu imbibed discrimination and victimhood at home.

But beyond these personal disclosures, we ought to be grateful to President Schulz. Perhaps the disparity in access to natural resources isn't precisely what he was told in Ramallah. Perhaps it's even greater or perhaps it's smaller. But that is completely unimportant. What matters is that he did to Netanyahu what Netanyahu loves doing to others: He removed a few masks from the prime minister's arrogant, hysterical face.

"Those figures aren't accurate," the prime minister charged. "So what are the correct figures,"

opposition members shouted back. What difference does it make?! What matters is that the prime minister admitted there are disparities between Jews and Arabs, between Israelis and Palestinians. So we've agreed on the principle; now we're just arguing over the numbers?! Big deal.

I have no doubt that not many hours will pass before this newspaper's major talents, like Uri Misgav and others, make us much wiser about exactly how large this disparity is. But let's get back to the principle. The current Israeli government, headed by that man of "moral confusion," accepts the premise that the Jews deserve more. And this is the fundamental moral premise that is ticking like a bomb at the gateway to any present or future peace agreement. For only an agreement based on full equality has even the faintest chance of proving durable.

Now that the mask has been stripped from the face of the current Israeli government, a rare opportunity has arisen, if only for a moment, to think of an alternative to the built-in Israeli

discrimination. For several years now, we – a joint group of Israelis and Palestinians with similar views – have been trying to formulate principles utterly different from the premises of separation, discrimination, exploitation and arrogance. And this is what we have agreed on so far:

Twenty years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, 47 years after the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by the Israelis and 66 years after the establishment of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Nakba, we have reached a stalemate in which there is no freedom for the Palestinian people or security for Israelis. We have not even come close to a just and sustainable solution of two states for two peoples. For all practical purposes, we all live under a single regime of discriminatory Israeli rule. In addition, many of us have given up in despair and are no longer capable of imagining any such just solution in the foreseeable future.

In an effort to pave a new path toward historic reconciliation and true political commitment between both nations, we must give up the view of

the current solution that is based on many layers of separation, isolation and acts of built-in discrimination. We need to replace that solution with a completely different method and set of principles. Many of our members, Israelis and Palestinians, both here and in the diaspora, have reached this conclusion and, as a result, share a commitment and an understanding that it is both possible and vitally important. The purpose of these principles is not to propose practical, detailed solutions, but rather to lay out a completely different groundwork for a just and sustainable Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian partnership. Our starting point is founded in the belief that the fate of both nations is bound up in an unbreakable link; that the Jewish Israelis and Palestinians are part of the Middle East, and neither of them has a surplus of rights or exclusive sovereignty over any part of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Therefore:

* Every person who lives (or has the status of a

resident) between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea shall be assured equal personal, political, economic and social rights. These rights include: the right to protection and security; equal treatment without regard to sex, race, ethnic origin or religion; freedom of movement; ownership and possession of property; the right to bring a lawsuit to court; and the right to vote and hold elected office.

* The collective rights of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians - linguistic, cultural, religious and political - shall be ensured in every political setting. It is understood that neither side shall have exclusive sovereignty over any part of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (including exclusive ownership of land, exclusive access to natural resources, and so on).

* All remaining exclusive rights possessed solely by Jewish Israelis, including ownership of land and access to natural resources, shall be abolished. All resources - material and political - shall be redistributed on the basis of principles of

affirmative justice.

*** The right of return of the Palestinians is an integral part of UN Resolution 194. The implementation of this resolution shall take into account the existing reality. The moral and political injustice of dispossessing the Palestinians in the past shall not be remedied by creating new injustices.**

*** The new political institutions shall make democratic immigration and citizenship laws. However, Jews and Palestinians who live in the diaspora will be able to receive immunity in situations of danger (according to UN resolutions) and will have special status in the process of obtaining citizenship in comparison with any other ethnic or national group.**

Like many people, both among my colleagues and others, I believe with all my heart that mutual recognition based on these principles could advance a different political reality, in which memories of exile and being refugees would give way to a

comprehensive realization of rights, citizenship and belonging. They would turn bereavement into life, and despair into hope. And so, I want to say a big “thank you” to Martin Schulz, one of Israel’s last and best real friends in the world.