

## Debate in Norwegian Parliament about PMW's findings

**Norwegian Parliament, Spontaneous Questions Session, February 13, 2013, (Excerpt):**

**Hans Olav Syversen (Christian Democratic Party):**

“My question is for the Foreign Minister. Yesterday was probably in fact a historic day. The name Palestine was used for the first time, probably, by a foreign minister in this room, and it buttresses the support Norway has given to precisely that within the UN context. One would think that this certainly also gives [Norway] some responsibilities, in terms of what it means to be treated as a state. I am sure that the Foreign Minister is well aware of the report that on Sunday was [broadcast] on NRK (Norwegian state-owned TV), where state-funded PA TV served clear Antisemitism.

We know that Norway supports the PA with several hundred million annually. We also know that this is support for a budget that may very well be used to fund this type of activities. Among others, we had such an example from children's TV, where children express that their ‘enemy Zion’ - meaning Israel – ‘is Satan with a tail’, whereupon the [PA TV] program hosts [respond]: ‘Bravo.’

I need not go into [details with] all of these examples. I think the Foreign Minister is well aware. However, I'm still surprised that the State Secretary [Torgeir Larsen] who commented [on PMW's book *Deception*], reduces it to a small example problem and says that it is part of a political battle arena, almost as if this is something we should expect. I offer the Foreign Minister the opportunity to give a clear message about Norway's position on this significant problem.”

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

We strongly denounce any expression of Antisemitism, and for many years we have worked systematically with all parties to the Middle East conflict to reduce the breeding ground for mutual hatred and animosity. We are also very upset about the same [NRK TV] report, and our representative to Palestine discussed this yesterday with [PA] President Abbas' office and referred to this specific [PA TV] program as an example, stating that this is a kind of statements and attitudes we cannot live with. We got the answer that the President's office completely agrees. They wish to pursue this matter and see how this could have happened. They confirmed again, as we have heard in previous conversations that they do not want to be part of this (i.e., hate incitement).

I would like to emphasize that we have been directly involved in projects to develop both curricula and textbooks for Palestinian children. There has been a study, led by Professor Wexler of Yale University, on how the schoolbooks look on the Palestinian and the Israeli side respectively. His main findings are that there is no systematic incitement to hatred, but that it is correct from both sides that they present the opponent in a worse light than one might wish. He concludes that Israeli textbooks in this respect are better than the Palestinian [books], but that it is not a systematic project of hatred.

As MP Syversen points out, Norway contributes to the budget support [of the PA] - we contribute with approx. seven percent of the [total] budget support. EU, European donors, contribute with 50 percent, the US with 20 percent, and others, including Arab donors, contribute

the rest. We cooperate on this with the other donors in our dialogue, and I have a particular responsibility here as head of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) (*i.e.*, an international donor group to the PA. AHLC's website states: "The AHLC is a 15-member committee that serves as the principal policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Palestinian people. The AHLC is chaired by Norway and co-sponsored by the EU and US. In addition, the United Nations participates together with the World Bank (Secretariat) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The AHLC seeks to promote dialogue between donors, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Government of Israel (Gol).")

**Hans Olav Syversen (Christian Democratic Party):**

I am happy that there is a much stronger message from Norway now that this is unacceptable. The impression – with reservations for [how the program was] edited - which certainly was given in the NRK TV Evening News on Sunday, was, in my opinion and the Christian Democratic Party's opinion, not satisfying at all. School books are one thing - that we can discuss - but now we are talking about state-funded and state-controlled TV broadcasts from the Palestinian territories. It is, with due respect, not the first time this problem (*i.e.*, Antisemitic messages on PA TV) has been discussed. I have here a long list of questions that the Christian Democratic Party among others has asked about the same [issue], since 2000. My question is: What are you doing now with the PA so that this may come to an end, contrary to what has been done in the past, when you (*i.e.*, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry) also said that you would bring it up with the Palestinian side?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

As I said in my previous answer, we brought this up immediately at a high level with the PA, who responded that they would pursue this, and that they did not wish to broadcast this kind of expression through a Palestinian TV channel. I don't think it is being edited by the [PA] President's office, but it is clear that since we are an important partner and an important donor along with a number of other Western and Arab countries, we have an interest in what is happening in this field.

As I [explained] pretty thoroughly in my statement yesterday, we have a special and heightened focus on "hate speech," on xenophobia, on hateful expressions, no matter where they come from, including the Antisemitic category. We are keen to pursue this. I want to strongly emphasize that also my State Secretary, Torgeir Larsen, who actually manages this project, is very concerned about this, so if a different impression has been created, that is neither his nor my intention.

**Dagfinn Høybråten (Christian Democratic Party):**

According to what the Foreign Minister has now said, I assume that it is the government's view that Norwegian taxpayers should not fund hate propaganda through state-funded and state-controlled television in the Palestinian territories. This has been brought up by the Christian Democratic Party time after time, as our parliamentary head just said, and we have received the same assurances from former Foreign Minister Gahr Støre and now from [present] Foreign Minister Barth Eide of Norway's clear stance and Norway's resolve to bring this up. History repeats itself. The question is what the [Norwegian] government will do beyond sending messages that we do not like this. Is it true that Norway will take steps to ensure that Norway certainly is not helping to fund this hate project that Palestinian children's TV apparently still is?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

Firstly, I can answer clearly yes that it is not the government's intention to finance hate propaganda from the Palestinian side - if there is any doubt about it. Nor does any support from Norway go to the mentioned TV channel. I have checked this. But of course it is true that we provide a general support to the PA that is in line with what the US does, with what Europe, the European Union does, and with what a number of other donors are doing.

We coordinate this, because both the Israelis and the Palestinians understand that it is important that the PA is able to establish the elements of a state, so that they can continue towards a two-state solution. I have in just about all my conversations with Israeli officials received assurances that Israel is happy that we are doing it, because alternatively the prospects of peace and a two-state solution would disappear. So I think it's very important that we not waste that which has been accomplished after all. But we are very concerned about this. We have brought it up, and we will continue to bring it up.

**Morten Høglund (Progress Party):**

It's good that you bring this up, and that you are concerned. But as previous members have mentioned, the results have so far been absent. Does the Foreign Minister find that he has any other means with which to pressure [the PA], as we understand that cutting the financial aid is out of the question? Are you planning, for example, to bring this up as an issue in AHLC and set this as a condition in connection with what the Foreign Minister also refers to, namely, the ongoing international project to support the PA?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

I will confirm that this is a subject for the donor group and the interaction between the various donors. I want to emphasize that even though we now again saw one such example that was documented here - and which the Israeli organization Palestinian Media Watch made NRK TV aware of, and it is correct and well documented that this [PA TV incitement] happened - it's not as if nothing [positive] has happened. Through many years of work - which is why I mention textbooks among other things - we saw that there were significant challenges a number of years ago.

Here I dare now say that for example curriculum and textbooks, including in Gaza, are among the best in the Arab world in terms of how they relate to Jews and the other party. But it is important to understand that this is a region characterized by deep tensions and deep conflicts, where also the religious overtones of it is clearly present - and not only on the Palestinian and Arab side. Therefore it is important that we all along also work for reconciliation when it comes to attitudes.

**Peter Skovholt Gitmark (Conservative Party):**

Let me begin by denouncing all hate propaganda. Hate propaganda in the Middle East builds up barriers to peace and it weakens a possible two-state solution. With budget support as an instrument we are indirectly supporting everything that is government-funded. I think a good project is a Norwegian-funded project in which Palestinians and Israelis go through each other's textbooks together. That helps create greater credibility and, not the least, a more truthful account of history. A Palestine, which is dependent on budget support, also has the possibility of heeding more clearly to international demands. The Foreign Minister himself mentioned the importance of Norway's leading the donor group (AHLC), and the fact that Norway alone [contributes] seven percent of the budget support [to the PA]. Together with the EU and the US

that is nearly 80 percent of the budget support. How will the Foreign Minister do this? Can we expect a clear demand [from Norway to the PA] now?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

Firstly, I am pleased that Rep. Skovholt Gitmark emphasizes that it is important to denounce all hate propaganda. It [comes from] all parties in the Middle East, and it is important that the parties and we cooperate in reducing it where it may occur. Obviously there are very special overtones attached to everything that tastes of Antisemitism, which we must pay special attention to, something I was very clear about in yesterday's statement (i.e., the Foreign Minister's Foreign Policy Statement of Feb. 12, 2013), [and] which we get the opportunity to debate tomorrow. We believe that a number of projects we have been involved in have reduced this phenomenon.

I would say that compared to the situation in a number of other Arab countries, there has been more awareness on the Palestinian side than in a number of other Arab countries about the importance of caution when dealing with, distinguishing, the deep political disagreements that obviously exist with Israel when it comes to the way forward, and the relationship to the Jews. But then there are some problems that remain. Therefore, we will continue to work with it bilaterally and as head of the AHLC.

**Morten Høglund (Progress Party):**

I will continue to ask the Foreign Minister. I want to dig a bit deeper into the same [subject] but expand it a bit. In his statement yesterday, the Foreign Minister talked well about important values and [the issue of] combatting hate speech. He even brought up examples of Norwegian support through among others the EEA funds to combat racism, Antisemitism and homophobia in Central European countries. Meanwhile, Norway has, through the foreign policy and through the development policy agenda, an economic relationship with many countries in the world, that obligates Norway

We have now specified this in relation to a challenge related to the Palestinian territories. But we see in other countries – such as Uganda - also examples of hateful language and hateful behavior. Another global evil is corruption. There, the State Department has a zero tolerance. Will the Foreign Minister participate and think aloud and create a vision for a zero tolerance [policy] for Norwegian support to governments and countries that allow - or not actively fight – for example racist, Antisemitic or homophobic remarks in the media or through other channels on which these countries obviously have an influence, so we can have a clear and strong position throughout to make demands when Norwegian money is involved?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

... I refer to [the fact] that my colleague, Development Minister Holmås, has just announced that there is going to be a thorough review also of the recipients of Norwegian development aid, with an even greater focus on democracy and human rights, including rewarding those who meet our expectations and sanctions against those who do not. So this is definitely a task the government is specifically working on.

**Morten Høglund (Progress Party):**

Those are good signs. Does the Foreign Minister agree with me that the new signals are an acknowledgment of [the fact that] Norway in several areas has been too yielding and too reluctant to use the power we have, [and] that it is a goal for Norway to be more clear in terms of

what countries we support and which values those countries should live by, and that Norway if necessary will cut funding and stop [its] support when these values are broken deliberately?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

...It is important that we have these values heavily present in all our work abroad. In that sense, the answer is yes. [However,] if Rep. Høglund with 'zero tolerance' intends that the day a hateful expression appears in a country, we should cut funding [to that country] immediately, I would say that that is not necessarily the best way to make things better. It might be good for our own conscience, but not necessarily for the circumstances in that country.

**Peter N. Myhre (Progress Party):**

We hear what the Foreign Minister says, but we must surely affirm that it is obvious that the government's measures against the PA have not had the desired impact. I want to focus on a statement by the Foreign Minister's predecessor, former Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, who said in an interview with TV 2 on 6 July 2008, that, and I quote: 'it is unthinkable that Norwegian aid goes to TV productions that transmit hatred of Jews.' Whether it was correct at the time, I'll leave aside, but I would like to ask the Foreign Minister if the Foreign Minister believes that it is unthinkable that Norwegian aid goes to TV productions that convey hatred of Jews today?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

I will repeat that there is no direct support from Norway for this [PA] TV channel that is discussed here. I can say that with certainty - when it comes to transferring from Norway to this TV channel. But it is obvious that when you provide general budget support, it will in principle have many recipients, because you enter a big budget with many different expressions. That is why we believe that we are clearly entitled to have an opinion and say something about how we react to this [PA TV hatred].

Now I really need to emphasize that the response from [PA] President Abbas' office yesterday, in conversation with our envoy, was that they also denounce this, and that they wish to pursue this. I take that as a positive sign. We are going to follow up [and see] that they actually do it. I will now demonstrate the many things that have happened, for example improving the training materials, which I think is very important. It is very often here that we in many countries see that the long-hostile attitudes are created. Here, I think it is significantly better than before we committed ourselves to it.

**Peter Skovholt Gitmark (Conservative Party):**

I am pleased that the Foreign Minister adopts important parts of Conservative [Party's] policy. Stricter requirements of all recipients of Norwegian aid are important. Those [are requirements of] respect for human rights, democracy, rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of press, anti-corruption, etc. It is a central part of the development policy and must be. Far more important than the protest, which may be important in itself, is how we follow up on the protest and how we follow up with action.

For Norway the single example with Palestinian Media Watch and PA TV and what is exposed there is especially important for us as head of the donor group (AHLC). While I agree with the Foreign Minister that it is positive that the [PA] President's office in the Palestinian territories reacts, I expect that the Foreign Minister is going to do something more than just following up on it, that he also follows up with concrete action by the donor group (AHLC) and say that this is unacceptable behavior.



**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

The answer to the last question is yes. I think I've mentioned it a few times by now. We regard this as totally unacceptable. We show that it is unacceptable - we did it as late as yesterday. We've done it many times before and we have also engaged in a number of projects to help reduce this problem in the Middle East in general and in the Israel-Palestinian conflict in particular.

It's a very important point that [we have] helped put together representatives from both sides to look at how they describe each other.

Antisemitism should be condemned as Antisemitism wherever it comes from. In addition to that, we need to recognize that this is part of a context with significant challenges in terms of attitudes to the other party - on both sides of the conflict. We must not in any way fail to mention that, because I think it is present on both sides, although I don't say that it is evenly distributed. It is my experience that that is what we can do. We can say it, we can repeat it, we can emphasize it, we can follow up. It is not so that the President of Palestine has a direct editorial responsibility for every TV station, but they must take responsibility for these attitudes in general.

**Dagfinn Høybråten (Christian Democratic Party):**

It is not difficult to disagree with the Foreign Minister that we obviously cannot direct our development policy by whether the countries we cooperate with fully live up to Norwegian standards. Then many billions would have been freed up. Some here in the audience would probably want that, but the Christian Democrats do not want it. We wish to follow up on the human rights in the countries with whom we cooperate. We believe that such cooperation provides a platform to do so. That's why we bring up a case like this, because we think it is so serious that it year after year, time after time, has not improved, but on the contrary, repeats itself in broadcasts aimed at children on government-funded and government-controlled TV. The Palestinian representative to Norway said in an e-mail to NRK in connection with this broadcast that this was not normal and not part of Palestinian culture. Would it not be an idea for the Foreign Minister to invite this representative to the Foreign Ministry and express [to him] what he (the Foreign Minister) now said in the parliament hall?

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

I would first like to say that we have also contacted the [PA] President's office directly. Then, we have expressed it at a high level to the PA. Nothing prevents [us] from also communicating this to the [PA] representative in Oslo, but he should be well aware of our view since this has been communicated to the [PA] President's office in Ramallah yesterday from the head of our representative office, Hans Jacob Frydenlund, so I think the message has been expressed clearly. And it will continue to be.

So I want to say again that there is an underlying assumption in all the [MPs'] questions that it (PA's incitement) has not improved. I'm not sure if we can say that with certainty. I will not say the opposite, but my impression is that [the PA] has worked a lot with attitudes and that they rather have changed for the better than for the worse. But as we all have just seen, the problem is not gone. I do not think either, that we should believe that with this (i.e., after Norwegian criticism) we are never going to see this kind of expression again. Therefore it is important that we engage heavily in resolving the conflict, for that is where the real answer is, [that is where] you reach a successful two-state solution for Palestinians and Israelis.

**Norwegian Parliament, February 14, 2013, (Excerpt):**

**Svein Roald Hansen (A) [10:11:49]:**

The conflict between Israel and Palestine continues, [and is] frighteningly deadlocked. The parties' ought to realize the limitations of use of power, that peace and reconciliation cannot be achieved through missiles, that security is not created through new walls, more settlements and continued occupation.

It was correct and important to support Palestine's application for status as an observer state at the UN. It was in recognition of the results the PA has achieved in building the institutions necessary for a two-state solution.

The Palestinian economy is, however, in a deep crisis. There is fatigue in the international donor community. We have a special responsibility as head of the donor group. We must not fail this responsibility.

This is not least in Israel's interest. If the Palestinian economy collapses, Israel as an occupying power remains alone with the responsibility. Therefore it is so incomprehensible that Israel sometimes worsens the situation by withholding Palestinian tax revenues.

In the Spontaneous Question Session yesterday the examples of Antisemitism exposed by the Israeli organization Palestinian Media Watch on Palestinian children's television, were rightly criticized sharply. The government reacted by bringing up the matter with President Abbas' office, where there were also strong reactions.

Antisemitism is unacceptable, wherever and however it is expressed. Therefore, the government, as Minister of Foreign Affairs explained yesterday, has had a strong commitment to Israel and Palestine to ensure that this type of hateful enemy images and expressions can be cleared away, among others, in textbooks. We must stand up against Antisemitism and extremism, wherever it manifests itself.

I should, however, hope that we could also stand together with an equally strong commitment against Israel's plans to launch new settlements, including in Jerusalem, which - if [the plans] are implemented - in effect undermine the possibility of a two-state solution. I do not think that is a burdensome demand to present to the new Israeli government that it stops the settler movement when it continues to settle on Palestinian territory. The expansion of settlements on Palestinian territory must stop. That is an expectation [with which we] meet the new Israeli government in the international community.

**Dagfinn Høybråten (KrF) [10:50:49]:**

... To achieve popular support for reconciliation and peace, the prejudices and stereotypes must be torn down. Last Sunday, NRK TV News had a report on Antisemitism in the Middle East, focusing on the relationship between Palestinians and Jews. The program was factual and [well-] documented. As we from the Christian Democratic Party's side have pointed out for years, Palestinian media are sending – and also from the PA government's TV station - regular programs with racist content, where the Jews as a people are stigmatized in a totally unacceptable way. The worst is that well-prepared broadcasts are being made, also on children's TV. Children are used to perform messages learned by heart like 'Our enemy, Zion, is Satan with a tail.'

Jews are on PA TV – [which is] funded by the [Palestinian] National Authority - portrayed as devils with tails, as greedy, power-hungry creatures who run a conspiracy for world domination. It takes one to know one! This cannot be done away with just by calling it a result of adults' political agitation battle. This is not about political struggle and debate, [or] about the occupation or security, terrorism or border check points. These are serious matters. What we are talking

about is pure racism and demonization of a people - Antisemitism, which attributes negative traits to the Jews as humans. It is pure bluff when the Palestinian programming director [Emad Al-Asfar] says it only happens occasionally in live broadcasts, which they cannot control, and that they correct it afterwards. It is against their better judgment when the Palestinian embassy here in Oslo claims that Palestinian culture and history is free of Antisemitism, and that the problem is the [Israeli] occupation. Although I am pleased that Foreign Minister Eide and the department now resolutely are bringing up the issue with the PA, I am not pleased that Antisemitism is largely seen as a feature in the political struggle that we almost just have to accept. This is Antisemitic racism, it is unacceptable and it undermines what Norway tries to achieve in the Middle East [in terms of] reconciliation, peace and development. Let me also say that we stand together in criticizing both Israeli and Palestinian acts that make the efforts to achieve a peaceful solution difficult. That applies to the Palestinian attitude to terrorism and acceptance of the State of Israel and it applies to the Israeli settlement policy in sensitive areas. But the question of regular Antisemitism in Palestinian TV is in a class of its own. It's about racism and deliberate indoctrination of innocent children on a TV channel funded by the PA. We must demand an immediate end to this. ...

**Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:**

... We had a long session in question time yesterday on hate speech against Jews in the Palestinian media. I just want to reiterate that this is not something we can accept, this is something we strongly denounce, something we have denounced (in the past), and something we will continue to denounce (in the future). It cannot be reduced to only an expression of the conflict. Of course I still think that the conflict makes things worse, and that a solution to the basic conflict will make it easier to combat this. That being said, I feel the need - perhaps even more clearly than yesterday - to emphasize that it is not our impression that things are getting worse. On the contrary, I've looked closely at many of the projects we have been directly involved in, and talked to our people in the region who believe that it is likely that the teaching about the Holocaust in precisely the Palestinian schools may be the best in the Arab world. It is precisely because of our and other international donors' strong commitment to how teaching must be done. Human rights education - a number of specific projects - has actually affected this so that both the West Bank and Gaza now have curricula and practice that put more emphasis on individual rights, more emphasis on the universality of human rights, and more emphasis on historical facts such as the Holocaust than what is common in other Arab countries.

It shows that the answer to this is not only to protest but also to do something. I think that is an important issue. Without spending much time on it, I would say that in this region, hate speech and hostility towards other groups are not isolated [phenomena] on one side of the debate - to put it gently.