

“EUROPE’S ROLE IN JERUSALEM”

Speech to the European Parliament on the Middle East

Strasbourg, 22 October 1998

Mr President, I would like to thank the President-in-Office for her statement. It is always a delight to listen to her. I hope she will take particular inspiration from what Mr Caudron said.

I think our commitment in this situation should not be to one side or to the other but to success. We should be offering solidarity to both sides in the face of the inevitable terrorist extremist outrages. We should be putting pressure on both sides to observe commitments which they have undertaken and, above all, we should be offering encouragement to both sides to think, if not the unthinkable, at least to think those things which are politically difficult.

Yes, we must play our role in those matters such as water, trade and infrastructure, where our experience and money are important and are urgently needed. But I suggest that there is a much more difficult area where we might also make a uniquely European contribution and that is Jerusalem.

For 50 years we in Europe have struggled with the nature of co-existence in a crowded land. We have learned to be creative with the heritage of sovereignty and symbols. This European fascination with Jerusalem is not a new or a passing fad. Next year marks the anniversary of the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 by Christian armies, in moments of medieval glory mired in murder. This city of Jerusalem has been central and sacred and important to all the peoples of the Book and we should honour that interest by a legal and a constitutional creativity, the kind which we have shown here in Europe in our own domestic arrangements in the Union.

I would say to all who choose to be involved in these negotiations positively that we will need two great virtues. The first is an eye for the devil in the detail. I learnt on a trip to Ramallah that our diplomats are going to have to eat and sleep and negotiate with a street map of greater Jerusalem in their pockets. They are going to need to watch each and every word. For instance a capital in Jerusalem is different from Jerusalem as a capital or the capital. Secondly, and most importantly, they are going to need the absolute determination to secure success, of the kind which President Clinton showed in Wye Plantation.

I think the European Union owes the Holy Land not just an economic investment but an intellectual investment in the final status of issues. This is not something which we should leave just to our overworked presidency. It is a challenge to the creativity of the Commission and indeed of this Parliament and of all of us as individuals. I hope it is not too much to believe that by May 4 next year we could perhaps echo the prayer of the ages, ‘next year in Jerusalem’, and mean by that a peace for the millennium in the navel of the world.

