

The PLO and the Euro-Arab Dialogue

AHMAD SIDQI AL-DAJANI*

The Emergence of the Dialogue

The idea of a Euro-Arab dialogue made its appearance on the international political scene in the wake of the October 1973 war. This was when the nine countries of the European Community issued a statement, known as the November 6, 1973 Communiqué, on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In return the Arab countries at the Algiers summit on November 29, 1973 issued a communiqué directed to Western Europe, in which they remarked on the improvement indicated by the November 6 Communiqué in the attitude of the nine European countries to the Palestine question.¹

The Arab communiqué noted that “the Arab world was observing with the greatest attention and interest the indications of an understanding of their position that have started to appear in the countries of Western Europe,” and declared a genuine Arab readiness to participate in the efforts being made within the framework of the UN to establish a just peace in the area. Having reminded Western Europe of the common interests that linked it to the Arab homeland, the communiqué called on it to adopt an

* Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani is a Member of the PLO Executive Committee and represents the PLO in the Euro-Arab Dialogue. He is Professor of Modern History at the Lebanese University and the Institute of Arab Research and Studies. This article is taken from the author's book *Munazamat al-Tabrir al-Filastiniya wal-Hiwar al-'Arabi al-Urubbi* (The PLO and the Euro-Arab Dialogue), (Beirut: PLO Research Centre, 1979).

¹ For the specific factors leading to the idea of the dialogue see Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani, *Al-Hiwar al-'Arabi al-Urubbi, Wijhat Nazar 'Arabiya wa Wathaiq* (The Euro-Arab Dialogue, an Arab View and Documents), (Institute for Arab Research and Studies, 1976), pp. 33-61.

unambiguous and even-handed attitude to the Arab cause.

A series of contacts between the nine countries of the Community and the Arab countries followed. Noteworthy among these contacts was the visit paid by a delegation of Arab ministers to Copenhagen in mid-December 1973, on the occasion of the meeting of the European summit conference there, where they discussed with the countries of the Community the broad outlines of Arab-European cooperation. Mention must also be made of the meeting between the secretary-general of the Arab League and a German representative of the countries of the Community in the last week of May 1974, following the meeting of the Community countries in Germany. But the meeting of the French foreign minister, who was then the chairman of the Community's Commission, with the Kuwaiti foreign minister and the secretary-general of the Arab League on July 31, 1974, was to be the first official meeting at which the idea of the dialogue was discussed, and an idea of how it should be initiated and how the General Committee should work was put forward. Then, on October 20, 1974, the two sides met in Cairo to discuss arrangements for the first meeting of the General Dialogue Committee. The European side submitted a working paper covering the organizational and procedural aspects, and the two sides agreed that the first meeting should be held before the convening of the European summit conference, which was scheduled to meet in December 1974.²

The European Side and Palestinian Representation

This meeting was not held on the agreed date, but was postponed *sine die*, because of a fundamental obstacle raised by the European side: the question of Palestinian representation on the General Committee. This problem had been put to the Arab countries for the first time during the meeting of the representatives of the Arab side on the Euro-Arab Dialogue Committee when it met in Cairo on November 12, 1974. The Arab League Council had defined the goals of this meeting in its resolution of September 4, 1974, which stipulated that a unified Arab attitude should be reached on the subjects that were to be covered by the Euro-Arab Dialogue at the first meeting of the General Committee.

The point was raised when, on the second day of the meeting, the chairman of the Committee informed the members that the Arab side had received a letter from the European side objecting to the seating arrangements for the members of the delegations at the conference table. The letter

² The most important contacts and events related to the dialogue are described in *ibid.*, pp. 25-32. See also Alan R. Taylor, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue: Quest for an Interregional Partnership," *Middle East Journal* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1978), pp. 429-43.

referred to all the Arab delegations without mentioning the PLO delegation. Before this the European side had proposed that membership of the General Committee should be open to the nine countries in addition to the representatives of the European Commission. Representation of the Arab side was left to a resolution to be adopted by the Arab League. This resolution, when adopted, stipulated that membership of the General Committee should be open to all the Arab countries and the Secretariat General of the League, with collaboration by the Arab organizations and agencies connected with the dialogue. The chairman of the Committee also informed the members that he had contacted the French ambassador, the representative of the Community, and firmly told him that a Palestinian delegation must be represented alongside the other Arab delegations, and that the ambassador had promised to pass on the Arab point of view and bring the reply to it.

The Arab member countries discussed this European attitude and agreed to insist on Palestine being represented on the Arab side. To quote some of the views expressed at the meeting, this was “because Palestine is a member of the Arab League,” “it is impermissible for the European side to interfere in the question of the representation of the Arab delegations”; “because, in fact, the Palestine question is the very basis of the dialogue,” and because “this European move is a political, not a procedural one.” The member countries also agreed that final agreement to attend the meeting of the General Committee should be conditional on the Palestinian delegation attending it, and left it up to the secretary-general to continue contacts with the European side.³

The European side did not reply to the Arab viewpoint before the date fixed for the meeting of the General Committee. The meeting was thus postponed, although both sides had made extensive preparations for it. The immediate reason for the postponement was the European side’s rejection of PLO representation in the dialogue. In taking this decision it was aware that the question of Palestinian representation on the Arab side was a matter for the Arabs to decide, that it was required by the regulations of the Arab League and was of special importance to the Arab countries. It was also aware that this decision would endanger the very idea of the dialogue before an official start was made on it.

The questions are: In what circumstances was this attitude adopted? And what were the real reasons for it?

³ The quotations are from the speeches of some Arab delegates at the meeting. See *Mabadir Ijtima'at al-Hiwar al-'Arabi al-Urubbi* (Minutes of the Meetings of the Euro-Arab Dialogue), Volume I, published by the Arab League Directorate General for Economic Affairs.

The period prior to the adoption of this attitude witnessed two extremely important events at the level of the Palestine problem. The first was the adoption of the resolution by the seventh Arab summit conference meeting in Rabat in October 1974, regarding the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The other was the invitation to the PLO to take part in the debates of the UN and the speech made by Chairman Arafat at the General Assembly, amid scenes of great enthusiasm, on November 13, 1974. The adoption of the Rabat resolution had strong repercussions in the US and Europe, some of whose leaders saw it as upsetting the equilibrium they had been trying to maintain with a view to reaching a settlement.

The invitation to the PLO to take part in the General Assembly debates also had strong repercussions on international public opinion, and Palestinian attendance at this session contributed greatly to the PLO being accepted as the representative of the Palestinian people.

Two inter-connected reasons may be adduced for the adoption of this European attitude. The first was the US attitude to the Euro-Arab Dialogue, and the second was the disagreement between the European countries as a result of this attitude, among other factors.

The US Attitude to the Dialogue

The US adopted a hostile attitude to a Euro-Arab dialogue when the idea of it was mooted during the October War. On January 11, 1974 the US declared that it could not accept a European initiative and proposed the convening of an energy conference in Washington in which the consumer countries would confront the producer countries. The aim was to divert the countries of the European Community from their idea of conducting a dialogue with the Arab countries on energy. This had been the decisive factor in the promotion of the idea of a dialogue, when the countries of Western Europe had been so gravely affected by the Arab oil embargo in the wake of the October War. The nine European countries accepted America's invitation, while stipulating that there should be no question of the grouping of the consumer countries being institutionalized. This stipulation was based on a request by France, but when the conference met in Washington on February 11, 1974 it disregarded the European suggestion by establishing a coordination committee, which was a sort of permanent institution. The result was that France refused to participate in its activities. As a result of the outbreak of this crisis in the ranks of the Common Market countries, the meeting of the Community's Council of Ministers, which was to have been held on February 14, 1974, was postponed.

The US was at pains to step up its activity in the nine countries, to

prevent their conducting a dialogue with the Arab countries. A senior official of the Community has informed the present writer that American Secretary of State Kissinger made great efforts in this connection, repeatedly telling the foreign ministers of the nine countries: "You are wrong to agree to sit down with twenty Arab countries and wrong to agree to sit down with the PLO." When he received the European reply to the effect that it was their business and they would make their own decision on it, he urged them that the dialogue should not include "any talk of energy or discussion of political matters." The effects of this American pressure became apparent during the meetings of the foreign ministers of the Community when Britain expressed reservations regarding the resolution adopted by the ministers of the Community on March 4, 1974, approving the principle of a Euro-Arab dialogue. At its meeting on April 1 and 2, 1974, the Council of Ministers of the nine member countries met with opposition from the new British government, which defended the American viewpoint to the effect that the principle must be observed of "prior consultations" between the parties of the Western bloc on everything related to matters of "major importance." The British argument was received with sympathy by a number of the countries of the Community, which believed that their political future depended on the establishment of close relations with the US. These countries had no strong objection to Kissinger's desire to restrict the political role of the European powers in the Arab world and his determination to retain the initiative in reaching a political settlement in the area.⁴

Contacts between the Arab and European sides were not discontinued after the postponement of the first meeting of the General Committee. At a meeting with the secretary-general of the Arab League and the chairman of the Arab side on January 18, 1975, a European delegation stressed the European Community's interest in maintaining the dialogue. Following this, the Irish ambassador, who then held the rotating chairmanship of the Community, submitted a memorandum containing ideas on the broad outlines of the fields that should be covered by the dialogue and asking for information on the Arab viewpoint thereon.

Meanwhile the European Community was trying to think of a way round the obstacle of Palestinian representation. At its meeting in Dublin on February 11, 1975, it came out with a specific proposal to the effect that the dialogue should take place at the technical level and discuss questions and subjects related to cooperation between the two sides. The participants should be a delegation of experts representing the Arab League and one representing the European Community, it being understood that the Arab

⁴ See Alan Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

delegation would include Palestinian members. The first part of the proposal meant that the dialogue would be restricted to economic problems and avoid any discussion of politics. The second part was an attempt to get round the problem of PLO representation by conceding that its representatives should be included in a single Arab delegation in which regional identities were not apparent.

The PLO's Attitude

At the sixth Arab summit conference in Algiers the PLO had supported the idea of a dialogue and shared in drafting the Arab communiqué addressed to Western Europe issued by the conference. The PLO reaffirmed its attitude to the dialogue at the seventh Arab summit conference held in Rabat in October 1974, at the closed sessions of which the question of its attendance was raised. The general opinion was that it should attend as a member, because Palestine "has been a member of the Arab League since it was founded."⁵

At the meeting of the Euro-Arab Dialogue Committee held to prepare for the meeting of the General Committee, the PLO representative supported the idea of the dialogue, stressed the importance of its political aspect and insisted that the PLO should attend its sessions.⁶ The Board of Directors of the Palestine National Fund assumed the task of representing the PLO at the meeting of experts, and delegated representatives to attend it. The PLO's delegation at the meeting gave its view of the stage through which Arab-European relations had passed since the October War, and stressed the need for the dialogue, especially in its political aspect. It also stressed that the various economic, cultural and political aspects of the dialogue were all interconnected so that Arab political views could be made known by raising any of these aspects.⁷ The first meeting of experts was held in Cairo on June 10-12, 1975 and issued a joint memorandum. The second meeting of experts was held in Rome, at the end of July 1975 and the third in Abu Dhabi at the end of November 1975. Both these meetings issued working papers.

The PLO's Role

The Arab side entrusted the head of the PLO delegation with the task of

⁵ See the speech of the assistant secretary-general in *Minutes of the Meetings of the Arab-European Dialogue*, session of November 14, 1974.

⁶ The PLO was represented at this meeting by Mr. Abdul-Latif Abu-Hajla, director general of the PLO Political Bureau.

⁷The PLO delegation was headed by the present writer in his capacity as a member of the Palestine National Fund and the Palestinian Central Council, the other member being Dr. Muhammad Rabi', member of the Fund Council.

drafting its speech at the Rome meeting, and chose the PLO representative as the Arab chairman of the Culture, Labour and Social Affairs Committee. The PLO's attitude to the dialogue, according to its representative, was "that it should be comprehensive, transcending transient and petty interests. [The PLO] therefore believes that the dialogue is essential.... This view and the way the Palestinian people have done their duty in the field of developing their revolution, have inspired in the PLO a feeling of confidence in its ability and that of the Arab nation to get through to the European Community and, by attaining a unified Arab attitude, to create facts that will oblige the Community to give concrete form to the undertakings it made in the communiqué of November 6 and to adopt an attitude that constitutes an advance on the illogical European talk of the policy of equilibrium between the Arab countries and Israel."⁸

The PLO took part in the Abu Dhabi meeting with a strong delegation which played a role in shaping a unified Arab attitude during the meeting of the Arab side. This meeting discussed the European side's idea of how the dialogue should continue and of the meeting of the General Committee which the Arab side had persistently requested should be held. The European side's letter made it clear that it agreed that the meeting of the General Committee should be held on the basis of a single European delegation meeting a single Arab one, as had been the case at the meeting of experts. It specified that representation should be at ambassadorial level, that the task of the General Committee should be to coordinate the activities of the various committees, and that it could discuss other subjects agreed on should the Arab side so request.

A New Stage: The Initiation of Political Dialogue

The Euro-Arab Dialogue was to enter on a new stage with the first meeting of the General Committee in Luxemburg from May 18 to 21, 1976. The two sides agreed that the General Committee should be convened when the meetings of the experts at the technical level had achieved their objectives, thus constituting a successful preliminary stage. The Luxemburg meeting was held at ambassadorial level to discuss the political problems of the dialogue.

The joint meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Arab side with the aim of reaching a unified Arab attitude. The PLO delegation at the Arab meeting defined the tasks to be performed at the level of the General Committee as being "to initiate the political aspect of the dialogue which we have been waiting to discuss for eight months." Shortly before the session

⁸ From an interview with the present writer in the Beirut daily *al-Mubarrir*, August 7, 1975.

adjourned, it proposed that the Arab side should assess the prerequisites for the continuation of the dialogue. The Arab side entrusted the head of the PLO delegation with the task of writing its speech and chairing the drafting committee which was to agree with the European side on the joint communiqué.⁹

The First Meeting of the General Committee in Luxemburg

There was comprehensive political discussion at the first meeting of the Committee. It was framed in the form of Arab and European communiqués delivered by the chairmen of the two sides, and then in the form of two complementary communiqués in which each side commented on the contents of the other's communiqué. At the request of the Arab side the head of the PLO delegation delivered the Arab complementary communiqué. This was followed by a joint meeting of the drafting committee, which performed the task of a political committee, discussing and approving the main lines of the joint communiqué. The Arab communiqué stressed the special importance of the meeting, and urged complete frankness. It went on to present a picture of the situation in the area thirty months after the issue of the November 6 Communiqué and to concentrate on Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories, its establishment of settlements and its repressive policies against the Arab people of Palestine. As regards Western Europe's relations with Israel, the speech requested the European countries to oppose Israeli occupation, to pursue an economic policy that would check Israel's expansionism, to express their disapproval of Israel's continuing defiance of world opinion on the Middle East, and to stop supplying Israel with arms. The speech opposed the European view that the policy of the countries of the Community was justified, inasmuch as this view embodied a policy of balance between Israel and the Arabs. It urged full recognition of the PLO and the right of the people of Palestine to return to their homes. The speech concluded with an exposition of the Arab viewpoint on the most important issues related to world peace and security.

The European communiqué made it clear that the European side was aware of the political significance of the dialogue, and stressed the concern of the countries of the Community that the Mediterranean should be kept secure from the tragedy of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It outlined this attitude as it was set out in the November 6 Communiqué. In touching on the Palestine question, the communiqué mentioned the aid provided to UNRWA by the European countries and acknowledged that the solution of the Palestine question was a pressing problem. Its conclusion was that "the nine

⁹ See also Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani's article on the Luxemburg meeting in *al-Abram*, June 15, 1976.

countries believe that the problem at present is of the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to express their national identity.”

At the Luxemburg meeting the Arab side achieved two of the objectives it had set itself. The first was to initiate discussion of the political dimension of the dialogue, which had been postponed at the request of the European side, and to present the Palestine question as one of its most important aspects. The second achievement was that the PLO was made the spokesman for the Arab countries so that the Europeans were confronted with it face to face, prior to their recognizing it. This meeting issued a final communiqué, paragraphs 4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10 of which unambiguously covered the political question. Paragraph 7 read: “Each side explained its point of view on the Palestine question and the Middle East crisis. The two sides took careful note of the communiqués issued by each of them, and resolved that the solution of the Palestine question on the basis of the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people is a decisive factor in reaching a permanent and just peace.”

The Second Meeting of the General Committee in Tunis

The second meeting of the General Committee, held in Tunis from February 10 to 20, 1977, provided an occasion for the PLO to continue with its role in the Euro-Arab Dialogue. The Arab side approved the draft communiqué written by the head of the Palestinian delegation, who was also entrusted with the tasks of speaking on behalf of the Arab side in Committee A, which was to discuss political matters, and of delivering the final complementary communiqué.

The Arab communiqué at this meeting dealt comprehensively with political matters. It gave a detailed exposé of past Zionist policy on the establishment of new settlements and the maltreatment of the Arabs of Israel and the occupied territories. Reviewing European policy vis-à-vis the area, the communiqué complained that the European side had conspicuously failed to translate principles into practice.

The European communiqué, on the other hand, emphasized the advance that had taken place in the European attitude. It included an additional paragraph replying to the Arab communiqué, pointing out that the European Community could not permit others to decide what its relations with Israel should be. The Arab complementary communiqué maintained that it was absolutely necessary to deal with all subjects related to Arab-European relations, first and foremost of which were the relations of the Community with Israel, and to put into practice principles agreed upon. The European complementary communiqué promised in reply to make diplomatic efforts affirming its unswerving position. The discussion in Committee A was

characterized by frankness, and eventually a joint communiqué was drafted to the effect that the two sides affirmed “their extreme concern for security in the Middle East and the possible consequences for European and world security, their full appreciation of the dangers involved in the continued stagnation of the current situation, and their common interest in the establishment of a permanent and just peace.” The communiqué also affirmed that “the solution of the Palestine question on the basis of the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people is a decisive factor in the achievement of a just and permanent peace.” The European side reaffirmed its view that “the conflict in the Middle East can only be resolved if the right of the Palestinian people to the effective expression of their national identity is made a fact.” It affirmed its position on the question of Jerusalem and the Israeli policy of settlements in the occupied territories.¹⁰

At the Tunis meeting the Arab side thus succeeded in taking a step forward in the political dialogue with the European side and, by confronting it with the Palestinian delegation, in inserting the existence of the PLO as a major element in the Euro-Arab Dialogue.

The PLO’s dialogue team made the part played by the Organization in the dialogue known to the Palestine National Council at its thirteenth session in Cairo in March 1977. The National Council in response adopted a resolution in which it stated that “having studied the course of the Euro-Arab Dialogue and the effective role played by the PLO as part of the Arab side, [the Council] affirms the importance of this dialogue and expresses its approval of its continuation, and of the advance manifested by certain European countries of the European Community in their attitudes to the Palestine question and the Israeli occupation of Arab territories.” The Council called on the countries of the Community “to develop their attitude as set out in the Tunis communiqué and to ensure that this attitude should embody a practical policy of opposition to Israeli occupation that would help to enable the people of Palestine to exercise their inalienable national rights to their homeland.” The PLO official responsible for the Euro-Arab Dialogue was elected a member of the new leadership and continuing the dialogue was made one of the tasks of the Executive Committee of the PLO.

The PLO submitted to the Arab countries, through the Secretariat General of the Arab League, a memorandum in which it assessed the course of the dialogue in its second year, as it had done in the first year. The

¹⁰ See the Tunis meeting file in Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani, *Munazamat al-Tabrir al-Filastiniya wal-Hiwar al-Arabi al-Urubbi* (The PLO and the Euro-Arab Dialogue), (Beirut: PLO Research Centre, 1979), pp. 129-64.

memorandum also touched on the new stage the Euro-Arab Dialogue had entered after the Tunis meeting — “a stage in which an advance has been made from the discussion of principles and generalities to the discussion of application and details.” It saw a recently published statement of the European side as constituting an advance on the November 6 Communiqué, inasmuch as the statement maintained that the resolution of the conflict in the area “will not be possible until the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to give true expression to their national identity is made a reality that takes into account the necessity to establish a homeland for that people.” The statement further affirmed that it is “impossible to safeguard the security of the countries of the area through the forcible occupation of territories,” and indirectly referred to Israel’s expansionist policy when it called on the parties “to refrain from any statement or policy that could constitute an obstacle to peace efforts.” In the same memorandum, the PLO reaffirmed its support for all aspects of the dialogue, and made various suggestions as to how the continuation of the dialogue should be organized and financed.

The PLO also submitted another memorandum calling for the Secretariat General and the chairman of the Arab side to contact the European side in connection with various problems arising from the Israeli occupation. The aim would be the implementation of the joint communiqués.

The two memoranda were submitted for discussion to the meeting of Arab foreign ministers within the framework of the League Council during its September 1977 session. The Council approved them and adopted a resolution on the financing and continued organization of the dialogue.

The Third Meeting of the General Committee in Brussels

The Brussels meeting was held eight months after the Tunis meeting in quite a favourable atmosphere. The European Community countries had helped to create this atmosphere at the end of October 1977 by issuing the London Communiqué on “The Conflict in the Middle East” and by adopting an attitude which the Arab side regarded as somewhat more advanced than that expressed in the November 6, 1973 Communiqué.

Having achieved a unified attitude, the Arab side came to the meeting hopeful of achieving advances in both the political and technical aspects of the dialogue. As usual, the Arab Dialogue Committee entrusted the representative of Palestine on it to write the draft of the Arab political communiqué.

The Arab side’s two principal political demands were that the nine European countries should recognize the PLO and that they should take practical measures to embody the principles they had declared in condemning Israeli policy in the occupied Arab territories. The PLO had drawn up a

plan of action to be taken at the meeting to assist the promotion of these demands.

The meeting of the General Committee started on October 24, 1977, with the reading of the political and economic communiqués of each side. The Arab side's political communiqué, delivered by the representative of Saudi Arabia, was an assessment of the course of the dialogue. It explained that "the nature of the present critical stage demands progress in the political dimension of the dialogue." It drew attention to the grave events that were taking place in the occupied Arab territories. The representative also pointed out that exports and imports between the nine countries of the Community and the Arab countries were continually increasing, and that the value of the commercial exchanges between them had increased four times in the last four years, with the nine countries becoming the Arab world's most important partner. It emphasized that "the atmosphere created by the dialogue had affected this growth at the level of bilateral relations."

The Arab political communiqué recalled the terms to which the two sides had previously committed themselves as regards the Palestine question and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, and stated that "the issuing of statements about any question is an expression of good intentions; it is a prelude which must be followed by something.... It must be followed by another, more effective stage, a stage of serious efforts to implement principles and intentions through practical measures." The Arab communiqué asked what "practical and decisive steps – after the issue of the communiqué – the European countries could take to implement these principles."

The European Communiqué

The European political communiqué, which was delivered by the representative of Belgium, discussed the "problem of peace in the Middle East." This, it said, "still gives cause for alarm and remains the focus of our attention." It set forth in detail the contents of the London Communiqué, making it clear that the bases of a settlement were Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, explaining the principles on which these resolutions were based and stressing the right of the Palestinian people to the effective expression of their national identity, including their right to have a homeland. The communiqué expressed the nine countries' readiness to participate in "any just and studied initiative that could contribute to gradual development towards a real peace," and their concern "at the illegal measures recently taken by the Israeli government in the occupied territories." The latter were described as being in conflict with the principles defended by the European Community and as impeding the process of negotiation. The Community reviewed the events in South Lebanon and

expressed its regret at them and its concern for the safety of Lebanon. It also mentioned that the political dialogue or, to use its own words "the exchange of viewpoints on political questions, had certainly helped to remove much misunderstanding." The nine countries expressed their hope that "exchange of viewpoints in all fields would in the future flourish and grow in a manner leading to further results."

Development of the PLO's Activity in the Western European Countries

To provide a full assessment of the results of the dialogue up to the limited progress made by the Brussels meeting, mention must be made of the activity of the PLO in the nine European countries. There are indications that this activity increased as a result of the dialogue and sometimes achieved definite results.

After it was recognized as an observer member of the United Nations, the PLO proceeded to open offices in many countries. As the Western European countries had not recognized it, some of them permitted the PLO to open information offices supervised by staff operating within the framework of Arab League offices. In this way the PLO obtained an information presence in Italy, France, Belgium, Britain and Germany. The authorities of these countries did not all accord the PLO officials the same degree of welcome: France's and Italy's treatment of them was outstanding while Germany was extremely reserved. The PLO had no presence in Holland, Denmark and Luxemburg, and Holland's attitude was in general extremely reserved.¹¹

The presence of the PLO in these countries developed during the two years that witnessed the start of the Euro-Arab Dialogue. The results of this, as the PLO's reports show, have been most conspicuous in Belgium, where the headquarters of the European Community are situated. They have also appeared in the increasing interest shown in Holland, one manifestation of which was the invitation of two members of the PLO to conduct a dialogue with a number of members of parliament in the Dutch Parliament. Its presence has followed a normal course in France and Britain; in West Germany stirrings of interest activated relations with the PLO, but were soon blocked by the special situation that governs Germany's relations with Israel, which are still to a considerable extent determined by its guilt complex.

While considering the changes that have taken place thanks to the dialogue it will be instructive to conduct a brief review of relations between the PLO and West Germany within this framework. When the dialogue

¹¹ During this period the PLO's Political Bureau was active in Western Europe, and its head, Farouq Qaddoumi, made several successful visits to countries of the Community, in particular France, Italy and Belgium.

started Germany showed interest in it because of her great interest in dealings with the Arab countries. But at the same time she had the reservations about the Palestine question just noted. As the dialogue progressed the representatives of the PLO and those of West Germany got to know each other.

In his capacity as chairman of the Culture, Labour and Social Affairs Committee of the Euro-Arab Dialogue, the PLO representative paid two visits to West Germany, in the summers of 1976 and 1977. During the first visit he had cultural talks with the relevant quarters in Bonn and Munich, and political discussions with those responsible for the dialogue and for the Middle East in the Foreign Ministry. Although this visit coincided with a plane hijacking operation, it achieved considerable success. This success encouraged the German officials in the Foreign Ministry to maintain contact with the PLO's dialogue team and with the PLO's representative in the Arab League office in Bonn. West Germany offered to host a seminar on the relations between Arab and European civilizations which the Arab side in the dialogue had proposed should be held.

The second visit, in June 1977, covered more ground. It started with visits to a number of educational establishments in Munich, in particular the Institute for Political Studies, during which there were important talks and discussions. There were political discussions with a number of the leaders of the Christian Democrat Party (which rules Bavaria) on Arab-European relations and the Palestine question. The coming to power of Menahem Begin and the Likud alliance in Israel had given rise to many questions in German circles. During his talks, the PLO official responsible for the dialogue concentrated on relations between the peoples of Palestine and Germany, and on the situation of the Arabs of Palestine. After Munich came a visit to Bonn to meet a senior member of the ruling Socialist Party, and then a meeting with the minister of state for the prime minister's office. The latter lasted for an hour and a half, during which there was a discussion of Arab-European relations, the situation in the Arab world after the coming to power of the Likud bloc and the official German attitude to the PLO. The meeting was extremely successful in furthering mutual understanding, and full agreement was reached on the need to maintain contact.

However, contact was not maintained after that summer because a new situation arose after President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977. This obliged all the countries of both parties to the dialogue to reappraise their attitudes. A further factor in the interruption of contacts was the retirement of the German ambassador, Dr. Schirmer, who, at the level of the Euro-Arab Dialogue as a whole, had been outstanding in his perspicacity and his belief in the need for Arab-German rapprochement.

A New Climate

Following the situation that arose after President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, disputes of extreme vehemence broke out within the Arab side and had an unfavourable effect on the unity of their position. On the other hand, the European side differed from most of the countries of the Arab side in its reaction and attitude to the visit. The nine countries supported the visit as an effort towards the achievement of peace, while at the same time having reservations as regards its chances of success in fully achieving a comprehensive settlement.

It had previously been decided that the fourth meeting of the General Committee should be held in Khartoum shortly before the end of the first half of 1978, while Sudan was chairman of the League Council. However, this meeting was not held at the appointed time and place, because the attempts to repair the split in Arab ranks had proved ineffective. It proved possible to hold the meeting in Damascus at the end of the year, however, while Syria was chairman of the League Council.

The PLO Memorandum Assessing the Progress of the Dialogue

As usual, before this meeting the PLO submitted to the Secretariat General of the Arab League a memorandum assessing the development of the Euro-Arab Dialogue, requesting that it be submitted to the League Council. The memorandum dealt with the most important events that had taken place in the third year of the dialogue, including the Brussels meeting and the meeting of the ministerial committee appointed by the Arab Economic and Social Council. It explained that "since the third meeting of the General Committee, an atmosphere of stagnation has surrounded the dialogue, the principal reason for which has been the outbreak of Arab differences... which means that it is up to the Arab governments to reach agreement that Arab disputes should not be permitted to affect the continuation of the activities of the institutions of unified Arab action in their efforts to maintain the necessary minimum required to ensure Arab interests at the national and international levels." The memorandum also contained proposals for financing and organizing the activities of the dialogue.

The Secretariat General distributed the PLO memorandum along with a commentary on it. The two were discussed at the meeting of the League Council held in Cairo on September 13, 1978, with several Arab countries not attending. The Council decided that the proposals contained in them should be forwarded to the Arab side of the dialogue, and the Secretariat General called on the Arab Dialogue Committee to meet shortly before the meeting of the General Committee in Damascus. This Committee discussed the PLO memorandum and decided to include its proposals in the political

and economic communiqués. As usual, the representative of Palestine was entrusted with the task of drafting the Arab side's political communiqué.

The Fourth Meeting of the General Committee in Damascus

The fourth meeting of the General Committee was held on December 9-11, 1978, about a month after the meeting of the Arab summit in Baghdad which met following the Camp David agreements between the US, Egypt and Israel in September 1978. The Arab Dialogue Committee succeeded in preparing for the meeting in spite of the bad prospects that seemed to face unified Arab action.

After this meeting the two sides proceeded to draft a final communiqué. For the first time the Arab side submitted a draft to be discussed by the European side, pointing out that it was acting as host to the meeting. The European side accepted this reluctantly, and submitted an amended draft. Although the Arab side had been at pains to ensure that the draft should give a true picture of the dialogue that had taken place and of the results achieved, on more than one point the European side tried to put forward formulas that evaded the subjects at issue.

As regards the demand for the recognition of the PLO, the Arab draft read: "The European side has expressed its full understanding of the Arab demand, and promised that the governments of the nine countries will study the demand with the closest attention and the necessary speed in the light of the justifications adduced by the Arab side in the General Committee." The European side rejected this phrasing, having agreed to it in principle in Committee A, and it was eventually agreed that the wording should be that of paragraph 9 of the final communiqué: "The European side has taken into consideration the factors submitted by the Arab side at the General Committee, and undertakes that its governments shall bear them in mind."

As regards the demand for the condemnation of Israel and the embodiment of principles in concrete action, the Arab draft proposed the following: "The two sides affirm their condemnation of Israel's policy of establishing new settlements to change the legal status and the demographic structure of these territories, including Jerusalem, and they strongly condemn the operations of repression directed by Israel against the Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories which are in flagrant violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." The European side accepted this formula in principle in Committee A, but later declared that it could not accept it and submitted an alternative draft. The discussion concluded with the two sides recalling the resolution they had approved at the UN and confirmed at the third meeting, as has already been mentioned.

Thus the final communiqué was agreed on. The Arab side clearly

expressed to the European side its dissatisfaction at the level of political progress made so far in the dialogue, and its conviction of the need for a meeting of the two sides at foreign minister level as soon as possible. In the communiqué the two sides also stressed the need for peace to be restored in Lebanon. The Arab side expressed its rejection of the settlement of the Palestinians in Lebanon as an idea rejected by the Lebanese, the Palestinians and all Arabs. The European side stressed that this idea had never been proposed by the nine countries. The Arab side, on a Lebanese-Palestinian initiative, asked that this point be included with the intention of rebutting current reports to that effect.

What Next?

What progress had the Euro-Arab Dialogue made by the end of the fourth meeting of the General Committee? And what will be the overall Arab attitude and that of the PLO to the dialogue?

The PLO carefully studied the results of the Damascus meeting, and discussed them with those concerned with the dialogue in the Arab League and certain Arab countries. All this resulted in the drafting of a memorandum assessing the fourth meeting and presenting proposals and ideas in the field of preparation for the fifth meeting.

A brief assessment of the fourth meeting indicates that the most important thing to emerge from it was the Arab side's ability to frame a unified Arab attitude in spite of the situation created by the Camp David agreements. At the joint Arab-European level it became clear that the European side stood by what it had declared in the London Communiqué, that it did not respond to the demands of the Arab side put forward at the Brussels meeting and that, in general, it was following a policy that fell short of Arab demands for their rights. Thus the European attitude has brought the dialogue to a point where it is necessary to reconsider if it is worth continuing the political dialogue without its making any progress.

The proposals and ideas put forward by the PLO to deal with the present situation are based on a unified Arab attitude that "welcomes the holding of the fifth meeting of the General Committee at the appointed time, on condition that proper preparations are made for it, so that it may achieve the required success and the desired objectives." This means that the meeting will not be held unless the Arab demands are met, and that the Arab side should call on France, which has assumed the chairmanship of the European side, to lose no time in adopting a positive attitude to the Arab demands for official recognition of the PLO and a declaration of the right of the people of Palestine to establish their independent state. It also means that the Arab countries should make bilateral contacts with the European countries to

explain the Arab position and to urge them to rescue the dialogue from the predicament in which the European attitude has placed it.

We do not wish to anticipate events and forecast what will be the response of the countries of the European Community to the Arab demands. But it does seem likely that by framing a unified Arab attitude, the PLO and the Arab countries will be capable of convincing the nine European countries that the present is the best time to accede to the Arab demands, and that delay in doing so will have a negative effect on the dialogue in general and the technical aspect of it in particular.¹²

While continuing its efforts to frame an effective unified Arab attitude, and taking a firm stand along with the Arab countries on the political dimension of the dialogue, the PLO is well aware that the Euro-Arab Dialogue is, by its very nature, a long-term operation. The future generally favours the recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people by the European countries. Participating in the Euro-Arab Dialogue is one of the activities of the PLO that indicate its determination to continue with its political struggle.

¹² Recent developments in the European Community countries' position suggest that they may be adopting this viewpoint.