

The Middle East visit by Brandenburg's Prime Minister took place at a very critical time. As a result, his meetings with his Israeli and Palestinian interlocutors were dominated by attempts to make statements relating to the currently escalating situation of violence and counter-violence, as well as possibilities of breaking out of this vicious circle and seeking a solution to the conflict which has dominated both sides' lives for more than sixty years.

Against this background, FES Jerusalem organized a meeting by PM Platzeck with a number of the Foundation's selected Palestinian partners.

The focus of the talks was the evaluation of the current situation and the question of how the peace process which, as a result of violence and counter-violence, has once again become bogged down, might be restarted so as to lead to concrete results. The problem, as the Palestinian interlocutors agreed, is the absence of tangible improvements for people in the Palestinian Territories and Israel.



*PM Matthias Platzeck with Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi (Director, PASSIA).*

Dr. Ghassan Al-Khatib, deputy president of Birzeit University and director of the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, spoke about the pointlessness of any negotiations as long as there are no changes in the "facts on the ground." The most important thing, he pointed out, is to once again build up confidence in the desire for and ability to achieve peace and compromises on both sides. Because, as Dr. Sabri Seidam, head of the Birzeit Innovation Group at Birzeit Universität warned, the Palestinians are increasingly losing their "appetite for peace," as they see fewer and fewer concrete steps by the Israelis to bring about an end to the occupation.

The younger generation of Palestinians also sees little hope for a speedy solution to the conflict. Thus Hiba Darwish, an outstanding participant in an FES seminar for young leaders, described the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as "ridiculous," as long as Israel is exercising complete control over all areas of Palestinian life and the Palestinians are experiencing the consequences of the occupation on a daily basis.

Those present agreed that the situation in the Middle East is steadily deteriorating. Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, director of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, even spoke of a historical low point in the situation in the Palestinian territories and Israel.

When news came in during the talks about an armed attack by a Palestinian on a yeshiva (religious school) in West Jerusalem, participants expressed their fears that this might indicate the outbreak of a third intifada. In order to prevent this, efforts must be made to immediately calm the situation. Here it was vital in particular to call upon the international community, and with it Germany and the EU, since on their own the parties to the conflict were incapable of breaking through the circle of violence.