

INTERVIEW WITH ELAZAR GRANOT

Barbara Taufar introduces Elazar Granot: He was once leader of the Mapam party and Israel's ambassador to South Africa and met chancellor Dr. Bruno Kreisky several times. He has already retired from politics.

BT: Elazar, my first question is: do you still remember when you heard for the first time the name Bruno Kreisky and in what context was it?

EG: The context of the Socialist International.

BT: When was that?

EG: Early eighties. I mean '81, when we started thinking of joining the International.

BT: You did not hear about this Austrian Jewish politician Kreisky in the sixties or in the seventies?

EG: No. We did not. I never heard or might have heard, but it didn't ...

BT: Not consciously?

EG: Not consciously. And once we decided to come, then I had to reconstruct ...

BT: Excuse me, when I met you as an Austrian diplomat in Israel, you knew that there was chancellor Bruno Kreisky in Vienna and that was in the middle of the seventies. So I would like to know - please try to go back and try to remember - did you hear about him for the first time in the newspapers or newspaper headlines, or was he discussed in any meeting in Mapam?

EG: No, I heard, I heard ... No. I heard about him for the first time, when we, when his name and the name of Willy Brandt and the name of Olof Palme were mentioned as the people who rebuilt the ...

BT: Socialist International?

EG: ... the Socialist International and that the man was - as a Jew - was very effective in his country, I mean in Austria and he was called „Kaiser“ because of this ... and that he does not put himself as a Jew, he puts himself as an Austrian of Jewish origin.

BT: Now, I suppose that you must have heard of this Austrian Jew Bruno Kreisky, when he started in the name of the Socialist International his fact-finding missions in the Middle East? Were these fact-finding missions in the Middle East in Mapam?

EG: First of all, you mention again that this Jew Kreisky ...

BT: Because you said before that he was not presenting himself as a Jew but as an Austrian, yes?

EG: Yes. We did not know, I did not know that he was a Jew.

BT: Ah, you did not know that he was a Jew?

EG: No. It came to my knowledge only afterwards. But I knew that there is a very prominent Austrian chancellor, and that he is interested in the Middle East and that he believes in bringing together Jews and Arabs, Jews and Palestinians, but not only Palestinians. I mean, he was active in the Middle East as a whole. To tell you the truth, these were times when our connections as Mapam, I mean, since '68, since the Russian invasion to Czechoslovakia, this was the turning point in the policy of my party. This was a divorce with the Russian Bloc. Not that we were communists, but we were ...

BT: Left-wing socialists.

EG: Yes and then there was a pause. And since then we had to reconstruct our relations towards the Socialists all over the world. There was a historic resentment in our party of social-democracy. We thought, I mean the leaders of Mapam, that they belonged to the ... two and a half internationals. But when I started to become ...

BT: ... general secretary of Mapam...

EG: Political secretary of Mapam, I came to the conclusion that we have to find a way towards the Socialist International. One of the reasons is or was that we found out that among the social democrats or socialist countries, (he corrects himself:) parties that there were some, who were more to the right and some, who were more to the left and some of those, who were more to the left were very close to us especially on the issue of peace in the Middle East.

BT: Were there any links before to Austria, to the unions or to the socialist party or to the communist party, I speak before the seventies?

EG: Yes, there were links, but the links were personal. I mean, we had two ambassadors, Mapam members, to Austria.

BT: In the seventies?

EG: In the seventies, yes. It was Yitzhak Patish and Natan Pelleth. Both of them members of Mapam and through them, especially [Patish] ...

BT: You heard of Kreisky, I suppose?

EG: ... we heard of Kreisky and we heard of the unions. Because Patish, as an old socialist, an open man and a person who spoke fluent German, became very close to the leadership of the Austrian Socialist party.

BT: Unions?

EG: And unions.

BT: Which were actually till the seventies, till Patish came to Austria totally occupied by the Mifleget Avoda (Labour-party)?

EG: Yes. As everything else.

BT: As everything else. The relationship between the unions in Israel and the Gewerkschaftsbund (trade union congress) in Vienna was especially in the sixties very, very close and it seems that the other part of the left wing world in Israel, the Mifleget Avoda, tried to divorce Mapam totally from any connections which it occupied. It did not want to share any power or any connections with Mapam, am I right?

EG: That is very right and, therefore, they were very much opposed to Mapam becoming a member of the Socialist International.

BT: Now do you remember, was it the Mapam ambassadors, which means the ambassadors of Israel who were Mapam-members, who got closer to Kreisky, who reported first to you and the Mapam party about Kreisky and his policies? Or did you hear about Kreisky's Middle Eastern visions in the Israeli newspapers and thought that this is a man you should get closer to and come in contact with?

EG: To tell you the truth, we had an interest, but we did have no connections with leaders of the Socialist International. And that includes Willy Brandt and Olof Palme.

BT: Till what moment?

EG: Till the moment that we decided to be part of the Socialist International. And we would never have become parts or members of the Socialist International, unless Bruno Kreisky and Olof Palme and Willy Brandt decided to support it - and they overcame a very strong labour party, Mapai party opposition.

BT: Yes. Now before we come to that, you realised, I suppose, in the Mapam that the European world which was in that time mainly dominated by socialist governments - at least the important countries in Europe and I consider Austria an important country, of course - that the tendency went towards a solution in the Middle East. Now how was the mood in Mapam to find support in the European socialist leadership for its own ideas in bridging this gap in the Middle East? When did this wish to get out of the political ghetto mentality, in which Mapam was, when did that happen?

EG: Concerning the peace process, we were never in a ghetto. I mean, concerning our relations with Arabs, with the Palestinians and others. We were in a ghetto within the Jewish community, because we were considered radicals at that time and people would not have believed it. But the fact is that we were very much isolated when we were talking about the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination.

BT: So, why did you actually then try so late to come in contact with the European socialists? Because in Europe especially after the Six-Day War, after the first years of total heroic ideas about this Israeli Blitzkrieg against the Arabs, the younger socialist generation, especially the '68 generation, started to become very critical about Israel and its occupation policy. How does it come that Mapam did not grasp that already much earlier and, therefore, contact its socialist sister parties, or the various, let us say, more radical socialist movements in Europe?

EG: The late years of the seventies and afterwards the first years of the eighties were dominated intellectually not by parties but by movements of students and so on. And you remember what happened in Europe in that time! So, it is, it is ...

BT: The question was why did Mapam need such a long time to find out ...?

EG: Because we had no connections with the social democratic parties at that time. We had no connections whatsoever! The personal connection between the two ambassadors of Mapam to Austria was not relevant to the party itself, to the policy of the party. When I suggested to join the Socialist International, the leader of Mapam at that time, his response was „Over my dead body.“ This was Yaari.

BT: Why?

EG: Because we were considering the social democratic movement as a right wing socialist organisation.

BT: Now, you heard, of course, about Kreisky already in the middle of the seventies, you read the newspapers here. I remember when we met in the middle of the seventies, before Camp David started, we discussed the Israeli press against him. So you knew about the man, ...

EG: I knew about the man and ...

BT: ... although you did not know him personally?

EG: ... and the fact that he was so harshly criticised by the press was a point for him. In my eyes!

BT: And also in Mapam's eyes?

EG: Well, Mapam did not have any ..., I say it again, we had no connections with the Socialist party of Austria.

BT: I remember, I invited in that time, before you met Kreisky personally, journalists of Hamishmar, the Mapam newspaper, to go to Austria and interview Kreisky. I suppose that after reading this interview with Kreisky about his Middle East visions, discussed in party circles?

EG: It was discussed and we found out that the man - I mean Kreisky as a person and as a leader - is very close to us ... I mean his concept, his ideas about solving the problem, were very close to us, because it was based on the socialist, and not only socialist principle of recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination, national self-determination.

BT: How - do you remember - how did it come to the first meeting you had with Kreisky?

EG: The first meeting was organised by the late Dov Zakim, who was political secretary of Mapam, international secretary of Mapam. And he went to Austria for the first time and met Kreisky and Kreisky was very interested.

BT: When was that?

EG: At 1979 something like that. And then he went for the first time and then he came back with the leader of the party, Meir Talmi, who was an old socialist. And it was a very special meeting between Talmi and Kreisky.

BT: Do you have more details about this meeting?

EG: I know about this meeting that it was a very ...

BT: Emotional meeting?

EG: Yes, in a way emotional. These two people, I mean, two old socialists met together. They knew, they read the same books.

BT: In their youth,

EG: In their youth and afterwards. It was a meeting of two old socialists. I am not talking about the age, I am talking about the ...

BT: Ideology?

EG: Yes. I believe that Kreisky was fascinated, although Talmi was not a fascinating person, but he was a very honest person and his honesty was coming forwards. And this was a very good basis for the next trip to Austria. Then Talmi resigned, Shemtov

became leader of Mapam, I was political secretary at this time. And we came together the three of us, Shemtov, Zakin and myself for the first meeting with Kreisky.

BT: When was that?

EG: It must have been 1980 or something like that.

BT: Do you remember how that was? For you, I suppose, it was the first time you were in Vienna?

EG: Yes, the first time in Vienna ...

BT: How was it?

EG: Well, it was ...

BT: Was it in winter or in summer?

EG: It wasn't winter. I think it was autumn. It was autumn or late summer. And it was a tour. We went first to Vienna and then to Bonn with Willy and then we went to England. Kreisky was very hospitable to us. He knew about Mapam then after meeting for the first time Talmi and Zakin. And we were talking business. It was, I mean the target, the aim of this visit was to persuade, to convince Kreisky that he should support us in joining the Socialist International.

BT: Against the will of the Labour party, of course?

EG: At that time we did not know how much, how strong the resistance will be, the opposition will be.

BT: What did Kreisky say? How was his reaction?

EG: „No problem.“ He said even more than that. It was the first time that he told us, „If I were living in Israel, I would be a Mapam member.“

BT: Which means, it was clear in that time that he was already not convinced any more by Peres's politics about the Middle East?

EG: No. He was critical of the Labour party.

BT: Because of its opposition towards the Palestinians?

EG: Well, you must remember that at that time the Labour party was not anymore in power. It was a Likud government. But the Labour party at that time was not convinced of its final goal. I mean that the only way to solve the problem, political problem between us and the Palestinians should be a dialogue, based on mutual recognition.

BT: This was before Camp David, this meeting?

EG: This meeting was before Camp David.

BT: Which means it was before the Lebanon invasion, of course?

EG: Oh yes, the Lebanon invasion was '82.

BT: From that moment on, were there any direct and regular contacts with Kreisky and Dov Zakin, or the Mapam leadership here in Israel?

EG: Even myself. I visited Vienna quite frequently.

BT: So which means you spoke with Kreisky then after '78, '79 a few times?

EG: A few times.

BT: Did you speak with him only politics or did you speak with him (about) also about Israel, about the Jewish history, etc.? I would like to know. Maybe you could tell me a little bit more about the - let us say - the non-official agenda of your talks?! Because Kreisky, when he liked someone, he went very openly into subjects, which were close to him.

EG: Well, I got a real story about it. It was after '82, I believe. It was when Kreisky made a statement one day. It was on the day, or a week before Sadat was killed, was murdered. And Kreisky made a statement where he said that there is no such thing as the Jewish people (jüdisches Volk). And people in my party were very angry about it and there were voices that said that we have to cut all relations with Kreisky. I opposed it, of course, and so did, Talmi. And we decided that I will go to Vienna to meet him. I went to Vienna. He was very ill at that time. He was at his home. The meeting was at his house. He was in bed. The meeting started at twelve o'clock and the doctor there said, „Twenty minutes only.“ When he showed his face after twenty minutes, Kreisky shouted at him, „Go away.“ I will never forget this dialogue with him. I said, „How come that you said this?“ And he said, „Well, I said the same thing about the Austrians. There is no such thing as an Austrian. We are a state, we are a country, but there is no Volk. I mean we have got so many cultures coming together and if I say it about Austria, why shouldn't I say it about the Jewish people.“ I said, „Allright. But we consider ourselves to be an historic people. And how come that you come out and say ..?“ „Well,“ he said, „there is no connection between Yemenite Jews and people who come from Europe. These are different cultures. The only thing that combines them is the same religion but not nationality.“ And we discussed it and argued about it, and then I told him, „But how come that you came to such a decisive conclusion?“ He said, „Well, I spent two years of my life studying this problem.“ I said, „Bruno, when did you have two years of your life to spend on this issue?“ He said, „In the year 1931 and 1932.“ I said, „But since then we had the Holocaust, we

had the establishment of the state of Israel. Hasn't it changed your mind? He said, „No, I stick to my theory.“

BT: Which was?

EG: That there is no Jewish people.

BT: So what are the Jews in his opinion?

EG: They are Israelis and the Jews that live in Israel are Israelis. But there is no national connection between Jews that live in Israel or that live in the Diaspora, in different places. And then I asked him, I said to him, „Alright, I understand that I am not going to change your mind. Could we come to an agreement that you will never make it public, I mean that you will never say it again, because people, friends of yours in Israel, are very vulnerable to it and very sensitive. And we would like to have at least, even if you think so and if we can't change your mind, you haven't got any reason to say it again, because you are not considering yourself Jew, not a liar, I mean, I am sure that you do not. You will never say that you are not of Jewish origin or something like that, but you don't consider yourself a Jew, you consider yourself as an Austrian. But so what reason do you have aggravate friends of yours in Israel and elsewhere. So he thought about it and he was in bed at that time and he said, „Alright, I will give you my word. I will not repeat it anymore.“ At that moment the phone rang. It was one o'clock - and he got the news of the assassination of Sadat. He did not show anything. He told me and kept on talking.

BT: About what?

EG: About problems of the Middle East, how to solve the problems, about the Labour party, about the Likud.

BT: You know, he made very strong remarks against Begin?

EG: Against Begin, yes. Very strong remarks.

BT: Did you discuss that also, that his remarks were considered here actually as the remarks of a Jewish traitor, as it was written in the press?

EG: Yes, he was considered as a traitor, because, first of all, he did not support our struggle against the Arabs. He thought that there are two sides to the story. He did not deny the right of the Jews, but he said that „you cannot claim these rights as long, as you are not ready to recognise the rights of the others. And you cannot expect our support. We had some experience in Europe.“

BT: Did you have the feeling that his own experience as a young socialist being imprisoned and threatened by the fascists in Austria and later on by the Hitler people, that this was for him a very elementary memory and ...?

EG: He never spoke about it, but what he conveyed to us was that for him nationalism of any kind, is a malice, is something that one should avoid. I mean fanaticism is nothing ...

BT: Therefore he must have been sympathetic towards Orthodox Jews, who were against the state of Israel and not nationalistic?

EG: Never, I never heard of him any support for Orthodox Jews. I believe that he was, I don't know it that much, but I believe that he was ignorant of them.

BT: But he said that he considers the Jews to be „eine religiöse Schicksalsgemeinschaft“, which is bound together by religious historical developments.

EG: Yes, I said it before. But it does not mean that he supported the religious people of this style.

BT: Was religion ever discussed? Judaism ever discussed? Jewish identity ever discussed between him and you?

EG: Only on that time on that occasion when he tried to make it clear to me that his concept of Jews as being related to a certain religion. I mean, I was not a very easy partner for this, because I told him, „Look here, I am a secular Jew. And I consider myself a Jew. There is something which is beyond religion. Religion is part of the Jewish heritage. Furthermore,“ when I spoke to him, I told him, „eighty percent of the Jewish people all over the world are not Orthodox Jews.“

BT: But the Bundists, for example, like the Marxists, had the idea that the whole Jewish problem - as it was called in that time - would not exist when there will be an assimilation and when there will be a total equality between all people, which means that the Jews actually would disappear as a „problem in the world“ through political developments, through ...

EG: It was ridiculous in the best, I mean, to speak after the Holocaust about Jews becoming equal was ridiculous. I mean, even by people who meant well, not cynical, this was something that we resented.

BT: Even in Mapam?

EG: Oh, yes. Mapam was a Zionist Socialist party, I mean, it was the only Zionist Arabic party. The Jewish members of Mapam were Zionists, the Arabs were not Zionists, they were ...

BT: ... Socialists.

EG: ... socialist Arabs, citizens of Israel, who decided to go together with Mapam because of its ideas, social ideas and attitude towards the problem, the Palestinian-Israeli problem .

BT: Was Kreisky interested in that?

EG: Very much and this appealed to him very much. Mapam appealed to him very much. I mean, it became a habit with him to tell us all the time, „Consider me as a member of your party.“ And he said it once and again. I mean, I met him, I don't remember how many times, but quite a number of times. Always whenever I came, he was very hospitable and forthcoming. The interesting thing about that day when we had this meeting and when Sadat was killed was that, after I left him, there was a very funny occasion: I had to go out with the foreign minister at that time - I do not remember his name, oh ... Lanc! And he had to pick me up from Kreisky. He came into the room and before leaving they started discussing some foreign ...

BT: ... policy events.

EG: ... politics of Austria. And they did not know that I understand German. So I got up and said, „I believe that I would rather wait in the living room.“ And he said to me - you know him well - „Sit down. It's alright.“ And then it became very embarrassing, because there were matters that were very intimate. And I got up again and I said, „I am sure now that I should leave.“ And he shouted at me. When we went out, Lanc said, „Why did you have to aggravate the old man?“ And I said, „Because I understand German.“ He said, „Oh, God!“ I then went to meet the Jewish community in Vienna to make peace between the Agudat Israel and the Mapai there, because both parties had confidence in me. And ...

BT: Agudat Israel! The Orthodox religious community!

EG: Agudat Israel and Mapai. I, the Mapamnik, was the judge. We came back to the house where I was staying, at seven o'clock. And the people of the house were very excited. „At last you come!“ They could not reach us. „Kreisky's office is waiting for you. They are calling over an hour now.“ I phoned Maria.

BT: What said Maria?

EG: Sartawi is waiting for you. I said, „But I have no appointment with him.“ She said, „Yes. But the chancellor made an appointment for you.“

BT: Had you ever met him before?

EG: No.

BT: But you knew about him?

EG: Of course, I knew about him. I did not know that he was in Vienna at that time. So I took a taxi and I drove to the Ballhausplatz. Maria was waiting for me there and Sartawi.

BT: Where?

EG: At the office of Kreisky. In the Bundeskanzleramt? And we sat together for hours and hours.

BT: You and Issam alone?

EG: Alone. And it was my first meeting with him and it was a very emotional ... And I will always remember it. And he told me that he is doomed. He knows that he will not live for long - because of his initiative. So it was a day when we started whether there is a Jewish nation, Jewish people and I ended, I ended by meeting Sartawi.

BT: And in the middle Sadat was killed.

EG: And in the middle Sadat was killed. By the way, Sartawi cried like a boy. He ..., I never ..., I mean, it was very moving. So this was - I believe - the last meeting. No, I came again once, came again once, but he was ... and our last ...

BT: Well ... just a moment. Then we had the famous Lebanon invasion. And I remember us, you and me, sitting in my apartment and me calling Kreisky and asking him to receive you and I think Shemtov.

EG: Shemtov and Zakin.

BT: Who was it?

EG: Shemtov and Zakin.

BT: And you?

EG: No.

BT: You did not go with them?

EG: I did not go with them. They met all the leaders of the Socialist International. They went to see Kreisky and Willy Brandt and ...

BT: And Mitterrand.

EG: ... and Mitterrand and they were in London as well.

BT: You did not go there?

EG: No.

BT: When did you ...?

EG: I arranged it, but I didn't go.

BT: When did you meet Kreisky again? Do you remember, was he still chancellor or was he already in retirement.

EG: No, no. I met him as chancellor.

BT: The last time?

EG: Yes.

BT: When was that?

EG: A very short time before he finished his office.

BT: So '83 probably.

EG: And then the last time that I was in Vienna was at his funeral.

BT: Could you tell me about the last meeting you had with him, what you remember?

EG: He was embittered. He was embittered.

BT: About what?

EG: About what goes on in the Middle East. He was very pessimistic.

BT: Can you go more into details what he said?

EG: Well, he did not put the blame only on Israel. He said that „it seems that you two people have decided to kill each other, to ruin each other. And what can I do? I did my best. Because of supporting Israel I am considered,“ by Arabs, as a friend of Israel. At your place I am considered - I mean in Israel - I am considered a traitor, because I am a Jew. And ...“

BT: „I am a Jew“ or because he was sympathetic to the Palestinian cause?

EG: Traitor, because being a Jew, because being a Jew. „So I give up. I can't help anymore.“ It was the only time that I saw him - you know - with no hope anymore. He gave up.

BT: That was also after Issam Sartawi was killed!

EG: Oh, yes. Sartawi was killed and ... I will never forget. It does not relate to meeting Kreisky, but I will never forget the last words of Willy Brandt at Kreisky's funeral.

BT: What did he say?

EG: I came there with Lowa Eliav. We were the two. And the last words of Willy Brandt were „Goodbye to you, lieber und schwieriger Freund“ (dear and difficult friend).

BT: To come back to the words 'schwieriger Freund': in all the discussions you had with him and I suppose you met him probably ten times ...

EG: Yes, at least.

BT: ... and these were longer meetings, because you both respected and liked each other and you had in a way a common political view ...

EG: He always had time to meet me.

BT: I would like to know were there ever any talks or any hints in his talks with you about his very difficult relationship, emotional relationship to Israel?

EG: Yes, of course. You know, it came out in many ways. There were minutes where he was really angry. And he showed it. You know him, he was very impulsive and he didn't hide his emotions. He was terribly hurt. He came back and back to it, about Golda Meir and the fact that she said that he did not give her a glass of water. And he said, „I offered her coffee.“

BT: Was it a trauma?

EG: For him yes. I mean, he was very much insulted. He said, „I could argue with her, but to insult me and tell me that I was impolite, that is too much for me.“

BT: Do you have the feeling that he wanted to be liked by the Israelis?

EG: Yes, very much. Very much. He wanted, first of all, he wanted to be appreciated. But I believe that deep in his heart he was convinced that he was serving the interest of the state of Israel and of the Israelis in supporting and pushing on with the peace issue. And he was both, insulted and sad.

BT: By the rejection?

EG: By the rejection. For him it was so clear that this is the solution and that it should be accepted by the Israelis. That he is in a way, serving his people.

BT: The Jewish people?

EG: Yes. In his efforts to bring about peace between Israel and its neighbours.

BT: Did he ever say that Israel has only a future if it accepts the fact that it has to live in peace with the Arab world?

EG: Well, of course. He said this and he thought so, like many people all over the world said. And he mentioned the fact, that we are a minority among, an Arab Moslem world, environment. But this was not the issue.

BT: Was he too early with his vision?

EG: No, he wasn't too early. We were much earlier than he was. Or were we too early? No, the others were too late. And I am not talking about the Israeli leadership alone. I believe that the Palestinian leadership did not miss any mistake that it could have done on the road. They are to blame no less...

BT: Why was it only Mapam, which agreed in that time with Kreisky's vision and with Kreisky's policy more or less and not the Labour party?

EG: Because the Labour party was not ready at that time. They were too late to understand, to grasp the reality and to grasp that nothing will be solved by force.

BT: Were there any subjects, political subjects concerning a peace process between you and Kreisky's politics?

EG: I believe that he, when he said that he would be a member of Mapam, he - as far as I remember - he fully accepted our approach, which said that we have, first of all, to negotiate, that we have to recognise the fact that there is another nation that claims the same rights as we claim and that we have to come to terms and the only way to do so is by a dialogue.

BT: Was he in that time for a Palestinian state?

EG: Yes.

BT: When you were accepted as a member of the Socialist International, how did that go? Was it immediately after the Lebanon invasion, when the Labour party accepted the invasion?

EG: Barbara, I will have to ask. I don't remember the dates.

BT: But you remember that Kreisky in that time was so furious about Shimon Peres that he actually wanted to throw the labour party out from the Socialist International?

EG: No. I don't remember that. I don't believe that he ever wanted to throw them out. But I do believe that the fact that he did not agree with them, had some part in

his support for us. I could not say this for Willy Brandt. Because without the help and the support of the three people, both him and Willy and Olof ...

BT: Olof Palme, yes.

EG: ... we would never have come to be accepted. They put all the pressure, all the personal prestige in order to push it.

BT: There was, of course, also the question of donations which Mapam needed and where Kreisky was helpful. And in this respect I would like to draw your attention now also to Karl Kahane, whom you met. Do you remember something about their relationship, because you met them also both together, I suppose?

EG: No, never.

BT: Never?! How and when did you meet Karl Kahane for the first time?

EG: On the third visit to Vienna. I met Karl Kahane.

BT: How?

EG: I went to his office.

BT: By your own, by your own desire or Kreisky wanted it?

EG: No, Kreisky ..., I did not ask Kreisky's help for this meeting. We had heard about Karl Kahane. He had some connections with our movement in Austria. I came to him and I can't say that ... I mean, he did help us, he did help us and not only help us, but he changed the course of his support. At that time we were still in the alignment with the Labour party.

BT: Between Mapam and the Labour party?

EG: Between Mapam and the Labour party. By the way, it was a terrible mistake by the leadership of my party at the late seventies to create this political alignment. Anyhow, the donation was to the alignment and then Karl Kahane changed it and directed it to Mapam. The reaction of the Labour party was very fierce. They were really angry with us. But you know, I must say that Karl Kahane gave up. I mean he did not have any, it was, he did not have the patience. I told him, „You have to have patience, there are ups and downs.“

BT: In the Middle East?

EG: In the Middle East. And he ... in a way, I believe that he had lost hope.

BT: Like Kreisky?

EG: And he detached himself. Yes, together. I mean, I believe that it came together, maybe because they were so close. He tried to detach himself. Not because of the money. I mean, whatever he supported he was very generous with. But I believe that he lost the belief that something can happen. And then the last time when we spoke, he told me that I should speak with his son, who is, I mean, there was some business and his son is responsible for that. I met once his son. What a lovely speech! He is a very nice person, his son. But nothing came out of it, maybe something, but something very small, and we needed at that time very much, every support. But I am not complaining. And I must say that both Kreisky and Willy and Olof Palme, they were very generous.

BT: In retrospective, would you have the feeling that Kreisky's close relations with the Middle East - which started actually very early, with Lowa in the late fifties, - would you have the feeling that Kreisky was not only out of political and humanitarian reasons involved with the Israeli-Arab problem, but also because he was a Jew?

EG: Well, I do not know enough about it, but I suspect him of having this element in his activity.

BT: Did he have a Jewish problem?

EG: Did *he* have? I believe that, he ... I don't know if he had a problem. I don't ..., I mean, his enemies said that he had a Jewish problem.

BT: Even in Mapam - you said - people were furious when he said that ...

EG: Because he said the Jews are not a people, they are ..., whatever they are, but not a people.

Barbara Taufar: ... I will start with the question concerning your memories of Bruno Kreisky, if and how he judged other Israeli leaders or personalities?

EG: He was very harsh. When I met him, most of the times he seemed to lose his patience. He was very, very much convinced that he was right. I believe that this was his way with other things as well. And when he thought that he was right, he was very ...

BT: Stubborn in his insistence?

EG: Not stubborn but insistent. He had no patience for people who disagreed with him. Not always, I am sure that he found out from time to time that he was wrong and others were right. But on this issue ... You see, for me to meet these three - and Kreisky among them - was to meet people who in a way held the globe in their hands. I mean, these were people who had an overall sight of the world affairs. They did not come from the Middle East. They were not so concerned with only one region. And we cannot say anything bad about all these three, because we were so much occupied with our problems that we had no time and no ..., you know. But these people living in the new Europe, being leaders of countries that came out of the war, progressing politically and economically, living in leisure, not having any threat ...

BT: Why, Vienna was in a time very much a target for terror-attacks because of Kreisky's connections!

EG: Yes, but no war. No war, no problem of your very existence.

BT: How did Kreisky, for example, explain to you his relationships with Qaddafi, which were also looked upon in a very, very harsh and I would say aggressive way by the Israeli leadership of all parties and also by the Israeli media? Did he ever speak to you about Qaddafi?

EG: No, I never asked him. I found out that it is a waste of time and of energy and of friendship to try and argue with people when it comes to convictions. Kreisky said that it was - I heard it from him - that it was at that time a real mistake by the West to boycott Qaddafi. He said you can never change the minds of people when you boycott them, you can never have any influence on them, you have to keep the dialogue. You may disagree, but once you cut a dialogue, you lose all hope of changing things.

BT: Did you agree with that?

EG: I do agree with it. I do agree with it. I totally agree with it.

BT: Did he never offer you or Mapam to meet with Qaddafi or to meet with any other ...?

EG: I believe that he knew that Qaddafi will never meet us. The problem was not only the readiness of us to meet others; it was for a long time and in many cases the readiness of others to meet us. Even when I met Sartawi, Sartawi made it clear to me that if I make it public, I endanger his life.

BT: You were already a Knesset member in that time?

EG: I am not sure. No, I believe ...

BT: Because Sartawi met many Israelis - also in that time.

EG: No, it was very shortly before his... See, I don't keep any dates. I am not sure. But I know one thing. Less than a few months afterwards he was killed in Portugal. I was not present there at the meeting of the Socialist International. It was Zakin there, a few metres from him, when he was ...

BT: ... killed.

EG: ... shot. Yes, Sartawi was shot. So I don't remember exactly, but I can tell you that Sartawi asked me more than ten times to be very careful, which I was, which I was. Therefore, when others boasted about it and wrote about it in the papers and so on, I was very confidential about it.

BT: Now did Israeli security people ever ask you, I wouldn't take now the word 'interrogate you', but ask you, to give details of your meetings?

EG: Ask me?!

BT: ... and of the impact with Kreisky?

EG: No, not even with the other Arabs. I was meeting for years Arab leaders, Palestinian leaders. In the eighties, since '85 to '88 I stayed for, for over a year, every six weeks, I went to Cairo to meet them. I had a way. I mean, it was forbidden to meet Palestinian leaders by law. I always came to the foreign minister of that time, some of them Likud ministers and my way was to tell them that I know that they know that I know that they don't know that I am going to meet that man. So one of them told me, „You mean that we approve of it, but we do not know about it?“ I said, „Not that much.“ Some of them asked me, when I came back, they wanted to hear something about it. I never ...

BT: About Kreisky they never asked you?

EG: No.

BT: had a very dark vision about the military aspects of the Middle East in the future, if there wouldn't peace. He foresaw a situation where terrorist groups might have atomic weapons and where this whole area might be plunged into a chaos, not so

much by governments but by terrorist groups running wild and not being controlled anymore by governments. Did you discuss that with him?

EG: Yes. And I was not as pessimistic as he was.

BT: Can you tell us more about it?

EG: Yes, I thought that ... You know, he became obsessed. When I met him the last time, it wasn't only the Middle East that made him frustrated. His bad mood had also to do with what happened in Austria as well, the fact that he was ...

BT: His decline of power?

EG: Yes. So he was ...

BT: But in the meetings before, I mean, you also had meetings with him before his decline of power?

EG: Yes, but he ..., I mean, his pessimism grew with age and with dying.

BT: Would you say that his pessimism grew after Sartawi was killed? Or after the Lebanon invasion?

EG: I must tell you every step back, every step back from the prospect of peace ... Of course, the Lebanon invasion was a terrible thing. Sartawi for him was a personal loss, because he liked the man, not only appreciated him, he liked him - and he was very likeable, I must say. I met him once, and we became friends, we sat for nearly four hours. Poor Maria, she had to wait until after eleven o'clock. For instance, when we heard about the death of Sadat, Kreisky didn't show anything. But I heard afterwards that, after I left him, in the afternoon when the news came and everything was very verified, he was very much depressed, he really was depressed. You can compare it to what happened to ..., when Yitzhak Rabin was killed!

BT: Did you discuss Rabin with him or other Israeli political leaders?

EG: No, Rabin was ..., what was Rabin when we met?

BT: He was in the political wilderness.

EG: Yes.

BT: But he had met Rabin and he was in that time already not on such good terms with Peres. So, I suppose he discussed with you the situation of the Labour party, no?

EG: No, no, no. We were very, very discrete. I want to tell you something. I never, I never encouraged anybody to tell me things that I don't have to know.

BT: Which means there was no political gossiping going on?

EG: No. Nothing between us. Only if he burst out expressing his disappointment.

BT: Was he very much hurt by the Israeli press, by the coverage of the Israeli press? Did he ever say something?

EG: Well, I can't say that I remember many compliments that he got.

BT: No, but ..., but did he react to you towards it? Did he give you his impressions about how the Israeli media were treating him and the words they wrote about him?

EG: Yes. In our first meetings he was brushing it off most of the time. But later he became more and more concerned and bitter about the fact that people not only disliked him, but were considering him to be an enemy, to be a traitor, etc. Maybe because he became old, maybe because he was ill, maybe because ..., you know that each of us, when we are nearing our ends, come back to where we came from. So I don't know. I am not a psychologist. And, of course, I didn't know Kreisky that well.

BT: Could you give me an explanation - and maybe not with headline words, but in depth - why the Israeli public - and by that I don't mean the masses of the people, but I mean the political establishment also in your party, which is not a religious party and not a national Zionist party like the Mafdal, etc. - why it was so difficult for them to swallow an Austrian chancellor of Jewish origins, who was not a Zionist and, nevertheless, was enormously anxious to secure and help the Israelis?

EG: First of all, Kreisky was very much appreciated. Let us remember the fact that he gave the Jews on their way to Israel the camps that were in Austria.

BT: Yes, but you remember then the crash he had with Golda Meir. And it was never actually mentioned that the day afterwards another camp was opened and a whole flow of Russian immigrants continued.

EG: Yes, but people knew about it. So he was appreciated.

BT: Kreisky helped. He was the only one who opened the gates of a European country for the Russian immigrants, he was the only one, the Israelis came to secure the return of the prisoners of war, if you remember, with Amry together, where he ..., and others worked for. So this man, even when he was already very sick, did a lot. Lowa Eliav went so far, to call him a tzaddiq (Hebrew for a „just man“). Now, why was there such a personal hatred in Israel against him?

EG: Because his attitude was not so much against Israel as for the Palestinians. You must go back, you must go back and remember those years. You see, this is something which I resented, I have been resenting all these years, it was the fact that we could be so unjust to Kreisky.

BT: But why?

EG: Why? Because he was a Jew.

BT: And you expected to be loved by another Jew automatically?

EG: I am not talking about myself, I am talking about ...

BT: No, no, about an Israeli Jew.

EG: Yes. If he is a goi, if he is a gentile, so you can't expect.

BT: Would it have been the same, if he would have been chancellor of Peru?

EG: Were he a Jew?

BT: Yes.

EG: Yes, yes. But it is especially Austria.

BT: Because of the Nazi past?

EG: Yes. An Austrian chancellor we expected ... I mean, the Germans understood it. You see, Willy Brandt, when he knelt ...

BT: But he was not Jewish. Why should the Jew Kreisky go to Auschwitz and kneel?

EG: Because if the goi does it, how come that a Jewish chancellor does not support Israel? You know: good, I mean, right or wrong, this is my country, this is my people. This is the attitude, this is the attitude. You see what happened now? Now ...

BT: It was the attitude of all the personalities?

EG: No, until Kreisky came out bluntly saying that there is no such a thing, as a „Jewish people“. I mean, he denied it ...

BT: Such thing as a Jewish people?

EG: Otherwise nobody in my party would say a word, nobody. But you see, Austria in the memory of us - and you must remember in my party there were many partisans, many people who came back from Europe; We had a movement of eighty thousand youngsters in Europe before the Nazi regime. Only a few hundred came out alive. So for us it was a real trauma, even as a party, even as a movement.

BT: Do you have the feeling that Kreisky could not understand that Israel per se is traumatised by the Holocaust?

EG: Oh yes, he did understand it. He did understand it, but he said to me once, „I understand it, but you cannot use it or make it as an excuse for everything. I understand it, when you demand your sovereignty, when you demand to have a state of your own, to be safe. But I cannot understand it when you occupy other people. That is not a good reason.“ And he thought that there was a flaw, I mean, that people didn't draw a line. Not that they used it, however sometimes it was used as well by the right-wingers and by others. We never used it. We never said that anything bad that we do is justified by the fact that others did it to us.

BT: Yes. In Mapam?

EG: In Mapam. Not only in Mapam. Many people in Israel. I mean, the right people, the good people are Mapam, and all the rest is bad. It's nonsense. But among the Jews that came, especially those who came from the Holocaust - and there were many - and their children who grew up by the stories of their parents; and you know that they have got a special problem, psychological problem: 'The world owes us, Europe owes us, Austria owes us, Germany owes us.' I am putting it between quotation marks. So therefore, even when we are not right, they shouldn't be so blunt about it, they shouldn't be so, so ...

BT: And this Kreisky did not accept?

EG: No, I don't accept it. Why should you accept it? Why should he accept it?

BT: I suppose that he was furious also about Begin who used, of course, the Holocaust and the drama of the Holocaust for his political purposes? Were there discussions between you and Kreisky about anti-Semitism?

EG: No.

BT: He never mentioned anti-Semitism?

EG: Well, when we talked, of course, when we were talking about the relations, his complex relations with the Jews of Israel, anti-Semitism came up. And you know that some people, some hooligans accused him of being a Jewish anti-Semite. But you must remember, he appreciated very much the fact that Begin made peace with Egypt.

BT: Yes. He even told me once, „Maybe it will need only people like Sharon to make peace with the Arabs. Maybe the Left cannot do it.“

EG: Well, the fact is that he was wrong. Of course, without the peace with Egypt nothing would have happened with the Palestinians. So for me, Begin made terrible mistakes afterwards and he realised that himself. The fact however that he did make peace with Egypt will stand for him in the history of the Jewish people, whatever we think about it, and that will never be forgotten. And he appreciated it very much. He knew how important it was. And Kreisky supported it with his whole heart, the peace and ... So he had a point, a soft point for Begin.

BT: Did he discuss with you also international politics? For example, the developments of ending the cold war or the North-South dialogue or the problems of unemployment, poverty?

EG: We talked about it once, when we talked about the supply of Austrian arms to others.

BT: To Arab countries?

EG: No.

BT: Basically?

EG: Basically.

BT: And?

EG: I believe that some arms were supplied to South America or something. I don't remember exactly. And there he said, „Okay, I am a socialist. But when it comes to a point where either Austria or any other country“ - and Austria didn't supply arms, but only vehicles and something with that - „I am talking, I am thinking about the Austrian worker and I don't see any reason why ...“

BT: ... they should be unemployed?

EG: „... unemployed.“ He never denied the responsibility of Austria to what happened in Europe.

BT: Did he ever mention anything about that Austria was not a victim of Hitler's aggression? Did he see Austria being a willing, a willing victim of Hitler's occupation of Austria?

EG: I never raised this issue. But if I think about it, I believe that he made a distinction. He was not proud of Austria during the war and before that, but he said to me once that the people and the historians underestimate the courage and the substance, the ideological substance of the socialists of Austria. And he told me once, „You know, there will come a time when people will understand what the Labour movement in Austria did before the war - the houses that were built and all these things - was a pioneering experiment. There will come a time when people will ...“

BT: ... appreciate it.

EG: „... appreciate it.“ He was proud of being a Socialist, an Austrian Socialist. We never spoke about the fact. You asked me, about the demonstrations, and so on. We never spoke about the point where socialists in Austria stopped fighting, stopped demonstrating, stopped. So we never spoke about it. But I do believe that he was

aware of the fact that there is a black chapter in the history of Austria as a people, as a state. But his idea was that his task is not to free Austria of the responsibility of the past ...

BT: But to bridge it?

EG: ... but to build a new Austria that such things will never happen again.

BT: Do you think that Kreisky considered himself - concerning his Middle East-vision as an Austrian Jew - to be a bridge between Israel and the Arab world?

EG: No, no, no. He was a person, not a Jew on this issue. He was an Austrian. He was a socialist and he was an Austrian chancellor.

BT: First and foremost?

EG: No. First of all, he was a human being who went through a terrible period in his life, where nationalism nearly ...

BT: Killed him?

EG: ... destroyed - not him - nearly destroyed the whole European culture, the whole European people. So he was an antinationalist by heart. Secondly, and there might have been ..., and maybe he said it to others, maybe Lowa could confirm it to you that he saw himself as a Jew in his action, in his activity towards peace in the Middle East, where he thought that his contribution is also a contribution of a Jew as such.

BT: But towards you he never mentioned that he is connected to any Jewish values or ethics or whatever?

EG: No, no. Well, we spoke about it on that day and I mentioned ...

BT: On what day?

EG: When we met, about whether there is a Jewish people. And I mentioned, first of all, the fact that certain elements of socialism, of morality derive, are derived from the Jewish moral, the traditional Jewish heritage. I mentioned the fact that within the radical movements, Jews were active in a much larger number. The number of Jews that were active in South Africa as well, was much higher than in percentage-wise among the white people who helped the ANC.

BT: He didn't go into that?

EG: No, no. He agreed with it. And we agreed that the fact that Jews suffered so much throughout the ages made them more sensitive to injustice.

BT: And this is maybe the reason why he was so extremely hurt by the fact that Israelis were not sensitive towards the injustice they inflicted on the Palestinians.

EG: He made it very clear. He made it very clear. He said, „People who suffered so much should be sensitive, to the trouble, to the misery of others!“

BT: Of course, there are arguments which say, that it is almost an anti-Semitic attitude to expect from Holocaust survivors to be better, than their butchers. This is formulated rather sharp. But the argument is, Jews are people like all other Jews in the world, even if they suffered so much.

EG: I mean, we have to pay something for the fact that we put ourselves - and the new Israel did the same - on a higher platform than others.

BT: And Kreisky agreed to that?

EG: No, we never talked about it. You asked me. We never talked about it. I mean I don't remember talking about it. But I'm telling you, I disagree with your attitude. We have to pay something for the fact that we put ourselves on a higher podium than others.

BT: You mean that you have to pay a price, for calling yourself the chosen people?

EG: Generally, yes. Not that I think that we are the chosen people.

BT: Did Kreisky think that ...? Did you speak with him about that problem?

EG: No, no. We were speaking generally about this issue.

BT: Which means, he was not very keen of going into philosophical talks. He was interested mainly in political tachless (Hebrew for „facts“)?

EG: I am not saying this.

BT: No, I am asking you.

EG: It came out that our meetings were dedicated mainly to two subjects, the peace in the Middle East, the inner struggle, the political struggle in Israel between us and others, and the Socialist International.

BT: Was he a well-informed man concerning the Middle East and the Israeli situation?

EG: He was very well-informed. And the same information can bring people to different and sometimes to contradicting conclusions. He was well-informed and he was not sensitive enough. This is the only thing that I would say. He had no patience. He was very impatient. He was so sure of himself. He was so sure that he was right, that he had no patience with those-who made such terrible mistakes, such big

mistakes not understanding that things should be changed, that the attitude of Israel should be changed. And I know that he was - he told me - that he wasn't always so very polite with the Palestinians as well. When he thought that they made a mistake, he told them so. You know, he was very outspoken. I don't have to tell you. He was very outspoken. And he made his mind very clear to anybody who spoke with him, with his best friends, both with Willy and with ...

BT: Palme.

EG: ... Palme. He was very outspoken and they had arguments.

BT: Would you say outspoken or would you say harsh and impolite?

EG: I don't know. I wasn't present when they had the discussions, but ...

BT: But you know from them?

EG: I don't know from them, because I said to you I don't ..., I am not interested in ...

BT: Political gossip.

EG: ... in political gossip. But I saw him twice in meetings of the Socialist International. In his last years he didn't come every time. He avoided it. Willy was there, Olof was more times than Bruno not always, but came from time to time. Kreisky came very seldom. And not that I know about it, but I saw it. If I would have to define the attitude of the leadership towards him - they all respected him very much, not all of them liked him. When I say that they didn't like him, some of them were afraid of him.

BT: Was it that Kreisky thought that he could not influence them enough, because he was not satisfied with the approach of the Socialist International concerning many projects, that he retired more and more from coming there, or ...?

EG: I wouldn't know.

BT: He never told you?

EG: We are talking about the leadership, we are speaking about people who were friends, who met together in ..., I believe, in Sweden?! Both Kreisky and ...

BT: Brandt.

EG: ... Willy Brandt, and then they met Olof Palme. Their friendship was, when I met him, a friendship of more than forty years!

BT: Kreisky's attitude was much sharper and unforgiving concerning the Labour party than Brandts. Brandt was willing to be much more softer in his judgement on Peres, for example, and the Israeli Labour party than ...

EG: Very right. Brandt even made a concession to Kreisky once, when he met Arafat in Austria. And he came there with Arafat and the red carpet ... And Brandt was totally disappointed, because the outcome of this meeting was for Brandt a total disappointment, because Arafat was not willing to give up even one centimetre. And he held it against Kreisky. He thought that Kreisky ...

BT: Had cheated him.

EG: ... pulled his leg, not cheated him, but pulled his leg. He never thought that Kreisky cheated him. But he believed that - and I heard it from Brandt - he believed that Kreisky was too naïve, or had too much trust in Arafat and he should not have brought him.

BT: Did you have the feeling, when you spoke for these many hours with Kreisky, that he was naïve, concerning the Middle East and Israel?

EG: He wasn't naïve, but he judged us by European terms and international European terms. He didn't go deep enough into the fear and the hatred. This is a conflict of more than one hundred years.

BT: Between you and the Arab world?

EG: Yes, yes. And the suspicion, the mistrust, the hatred ...

BT: He couldn't understand that, you think?

EG: No, I believe that he could not understand this. He was a rational person, very emotional, but at the end of the day he was rational. This combination made him such a leader, of being emotional and rational the same time.

BT: In Europe? Would he have been a leader also in the Middle East?

EG: Yes, of course, he could be. I mean, he was a leader. He had this ..., the charisma, he had the ability. Could he be a leader? He could be a leader everywhere, but not with us. He didn't know enough. He didn't - when I say know, I am not talking about what happened a month ago or a year ago - he didn't go deep enough into the souls ...

BT: Of the conflict?

EG: the soul and the psychology of the conflicts and the complexity of the conflicts.