

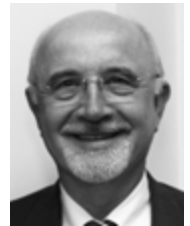
UNEASY NEIGHBOURS

THE EU AND ISRAEL – A PARADOXICAL RELATIONSHIP

Michael Mertes

INTRODUCTION

Uneasy Neighbors is the title of a standard work on the special relationship between Israel and the European Union.¹ By this phrase, the authors Sharon Pardo (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) and Joel Peters (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) succinctly describe the ambivalence of the Israeli-European relationship.² For decades, the two sides have been subjecting each other to alternating bouts of admiration and disappointment, attraction and repulsion. Although they are close to each other in geographic, economic and cultural terms, they also view each other with unease, increasingly even with incomprehension and antipathy. The paradoxical effect of this ambivalence is that relations between Israel and the EU are currently both intensive and tense to an unprecedented degree. In 2013, the Pew Research Institute found that only 41 per cent of Israelis have a positive image of the EU these days – compared to 56 per cent in



Michael Mertes was Head of the KAS office in Israel from June 2011 to July 2014.

- 1 | Sharon Pardo/Joel Peters: *Uneasy Neighbors. Israel and the European Union*, Lanham et al., 2010.
- 2 | The special relationships between Israel and individual EU Member States will not be addressed in this article. A historically rooted special relationship exists not only with Germany because of the Shoah, but also, for instance, with Poland (having the largest Jewish community in Europe before the Shoah numbering 3.3 million), with Spain and Portugal – countries where the Sephardic Jews originate, see “Portugal approves Sephardic Jew citizenship plan”, *The Times of Israel*, 29 Jan 2015, <http://timesofisrael.com/portugal-approves-sephardic-jew-citizenship-plan> (accessed 2 Mar 2015) – as well as with the UK (as the former mandate power in Palestine).

2009.³ Conversely, sympathy for Israel is clearly declining in the EU countries.⁴

Apart from the United States and Canada, there is no other country the EU is closer to than Israel. There, however, increasing numbers of people are contemplating a strategic reorientation of the country's economic and scientific cooperation. In their opinion, Europe belongs to the past, while the future lies with the Asian-Pacific region. Therefore, Israel should change from the strong EU focus of its trade relations (a third of all imports to Israel come from the EU, a quarter of Israeli exports go to the EU) and concentrate on other regions of the world. In East Asia, nobody is interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so the critics say. The Chinese, for instance, "[...] want to talk about three things: Israeli technology, Israeli technology, Israeli technology"⁵. While such statements can be interpreted as expressions of defiance against the EU's commitment to a Palestinian state⁶, they are also influenced by the euro crisis, which has been ongoing since 2009, and the declining reputation of the European Union as an actor in global politics.

The special relationship between Israel and the European Union dates back to the second half of the 1950s. Israel was the third country after Greece and the USA to establish a diplomatic mission

- 3 | See Pew Research Center: *The New Sick Man of Europe: the European Union*, 13 May 2013, <http://pewglobal.org/files/2013/05/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-European-Union-Report-FINAL-FOR-PRINT-May-13-2013.pdf> (accessed 2 Mar 2015), p. 57.
- 4 | The country where Israel is viewed negatively by the largest proportion of the population is the UK with 72 per cent. (Spain: 70 per cent, Germany: 67 per cent, France: 63 per cent, Poland: 44 per cent.) Cf. the *BBC World Service*, "Views of China and India Slide While UK's Ratings Climb: Global Poll", 22 May 2013, http://globescan.com/images/images/pressreleases/bbc2013_country_ratings/2013_country_rating_poll_bbc_globescan.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015), p. 49.
- 5 | See John Reed, "Israel: Trading partners", *Financial Times*, 3 Jan 2014, <http://ft.com/cms/s/0/045dca8a-6725-11e3-a5f9-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3B2gxNE00> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).
- 6 | Naftali Bennett, Israeli Minister of Economy in Netanyahu's 3rd cabinet and chairman of the national-religious party Bayit Yehudi, gave an upbeat statement the following year, "saying the Chinese do not foist political visions on their business ties with Israel, a welcome change given recent moves in Europe and America, including threats of sanctions by the European Union". Cf. Elad Benari, "Bennett: The Chinese Don't Care About the 'Occupation'", *Arutz Sheva*, 12 Jul 2013, <http://israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/169817> (accessed 2 Mar 2015); and: Hezki Ezra/Ari Yashar, "Bennett in China to Help Build 'City of Water'", *Arutz Sheva*, 24 Nov 2014, <http://israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/187810> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

to the European Communities. During a secret visit to Europe in 1957, Shimon Peres – then Director General at the Ministry of Defence – even had a meeting with Jean Monnet to discuss whether Israel’s accession to the EEC was conceivable.⁷ When Gideon Rafael was sent to Brussels as Israel’s first ambassador to the European Communities, David Ben-Gurion briefed him as follows: “Tell the Europeans that they have inherited their spiritual values from that little but enduring people which you are going to represent among them. We have not only horrible memories of the recent past in common, but also a bright future ahead of us.”⁸

Table 1

EU trade relations with Israel

Year	EU-Israel trade in goods		EU-Israel trade in services	
	EU imports in billion euros	EU exports in billion euros	EU imports in billion euros	EU exports in billion euros
2010	11.1	14.5	3.0	4.2
2011	12.8	16.9	3.3	4.7
2012	12.7	17.1	3.3	4.5
2013	12.5	17.0	—	—

Source: European Commission, “European Union, Trade in goods with Israel”, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113402.pdf (accessed 30 Mar 2015).

In many respects, Ben-Gurion’s wish has become reality. Relations between Israel and the EU are extraordinarily close in almost all areas of bilateral cooperation – the economy, science, technology and culture. Moreover, the cooperation in the multilateral context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) forms another layer, which began with the Barcelona Process in 1995, was complemented by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)⁹ in 2004 and continued as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2009.¹⁰

7 | According to a diary entry by David Ben-Gurion for 7 June 1957. See Sharon Pardo/Joel Peters, *Israel and the European Union. A Documentary History*, Lanham, 2010, p. 9; for other mentions see Pardo/Peters, n. 1, p. 2 f.

8 | Pardo/Peters, n. 1, p. 3 f.

9 | European Commission, “What is the European Neighbourhood Policy?”, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/about-us/index_en.htm (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

10 | See European External Action Service, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

The bilateral cooperation rests on solid legal footing: the Association Agreement of 1995, which entered into effect on 1 June 2000.

Since the first trade agreement between the European Economic Community and Israel concluded in 1964,¹¹ the bilateral cooperation has been upgraded to a partnership between equals. It now rests on solid legal footing: the Association Agreement of 1995, which entered into effect on 1 June 2000, replacing the 1975 agreement on free trade and cooperation.¹² In June 2008, the EU-Israeli Association Council decided in favour of plans to upgrade the relations between the EU and Israel¹³; however, this was not pursued further because of the first Gaza war (Operation Cast Lead) in late 2008/early 2009. At that time, the EU gave a novel slant to its proposals by making the upgrading conditional on greater EU involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – which had not been the case at the time of the Association Agreement.¹⁴

In November 2013, the two sides agreed that Israel – as the only non-European country – would take part in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020,¹⁵ which had been assigned a budget of close to 80 billion euros.¹⁶ It is the explicit aim of the EU to raise its special relationship with Israel to a level significantly above that of the current association. In December 2013, when the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations initiated by U.S. Foreign Secretary Kerry were still continuing, the EU Foreign Ministers stated their willingness to offer Israel a Special Privileged Partnership (SPP) in the event that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved by a two-state solution.¹⁷

11 | Pardo/Peters, n. 1, p. 34 ff.

12 | For an overview of the legal basis of the relations between Israel and the EU see: Delegation of the European Union to Israel, "Agreements", http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/israel/eu_israel/political_relations/agreements/index_en.htm (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

13 | Cf. EU-Israel Association Council, "Statement of the European Union", http://europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/association_counc/association_council.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

14 | Cf. Pardo/Peters, n. 1, p. 322 f.

15 | Cf. EU, "Joint Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Israeli Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni on Israel's participation in the Horizon 2020 Programme", Press Release, 26 Nov 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131126_05_en.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015); further: European Commission, "EU, Israel sign Horizon 2020 association agreement", Press Release, 8 June 2014, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-633_en.htm (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

16 | Cf. EU, "Breakdown of the Horizon 2020 Budget", http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020/pdf/press/horizon_2020_budget_constant_2011.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

17 | Cf. EU, "Council conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process", 16 Dec 2013, http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/140097.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

There is no precedent that could serve as a model for an SPP. At an event held by the KAS Israel office in the spring of 2014, Ambassador Lars Faaborg-Andersen, the EU Representative to Israel, stated that this partnership could go as far as a *quasi*-membership status for Israel.¹⁸ The SPP offer is to include “increased access to the European markets, closer cultural and scientific links, facilitation of trade and investments as well as promotion of business to business relations. Enhanced political dialogue and security cooperation [...]”. From the Israeli perspective, the prospects of the European offer, however, appear less attractive because of two aspects. Firstly, the condition of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, which ramps up the conditions laid down in the EU’s upgrade proposal of 2008. Secondly, the plans for a parallel offer to be extended to a future Palestinian state. EU representatives counter the second objection by stating that SPP agreements with a future Palestinian state would be quite different in nature from that with Israel just because they could not be based on anything like the same history.

The special partnership offer includes “increased access to the European markets, closer cultural and scientific links and an enhanced political security dialogue”.

The paradox of the relationship between Israel and the EU – increasing alienation despite increasing cooperation – cannot be attributed to a single cause. The factors, which will be examined in this article, include firstly the European and oriental roots of the Israeli-Jewish population, secondly the drifting apart of European and Israeli values, thirdly anti-Semitic tendencies in the EU, fourthly different threat perceptions on the two sides and fifthly the constant disagreements about a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

ISRAEL – MERELY AN OUTPOST OF EUROPE?

Towards the end of the 19th century, 90 per cent of the global Jewish population lived in Europe. Today, it is only nine per cent.¹⁹ The centers of gravity for Jewish life have shifted to Israel and the United States. In 2014, the global Jewish population numbered

18 | Michael Mertes, “Welche Zukunft hat jüdisches Leben in Europa?“, 30 May 2014, <http://kas.de/israel/de/publications/37919> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

19 | According to Dov Maimon from the Jewish People Policy Institute, Jerusalem in: Dov Maimon, “The Cultural Dimension of Jewish European Identity”, in: KAS Israel, “The Jewish Contribution to the European Integration Project”, 11 Dec 2013, pp. 26-33, here: p. 31, http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_36349-1522-1-30.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

some 14 million; close to 43 per cent were living in Israel and just over 40 per cent in the U.S.²⁰ Europe, on the other hand, is merely “the largest Jewish cemetery in the world”, a phrase frequently used in Israel.²¹

Many Europeans regard Israel as an offshoot of Europe – some also as a relic from the colonial era.²² This perception is underpinned above all by the fact that Zionism has its political and ideological roots in Europe. Another aspect of equal significance is the fact that the generation of Israel’s founders were overwhelmingly Ashkenazi, in other words from Central and Eastern European origin. These pioneers had a European outlook (at least in their support for an enlightened secular version of the principle of the nation state) and formed the institutions of the young state based on European models.

Table 2

Jewish Population in the European Union

Year	Total population in millions	Jewish population in millions
1990	340.69	1.02
1995	372.74	1.02
2000	375.54	1.03
2005*	457.50	1.12
2013	500.00	1.11

* Number relates to EU-25. Source: *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 90-105, “World Jewish Population”, <http://www.ajcarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=40> (accessed 4 Mar 2015).

Since 1948, however, the composition of the Jewish Israeli population (around three-quarters of the entire Israeli population) has undergone considerable change. The Ashkenazi-European proportion has decreased and the Mizrahi-oriental proportion

20 | See Jewish Virtual Library, “Jewish Population of the World”, <http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/jewpop.html> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

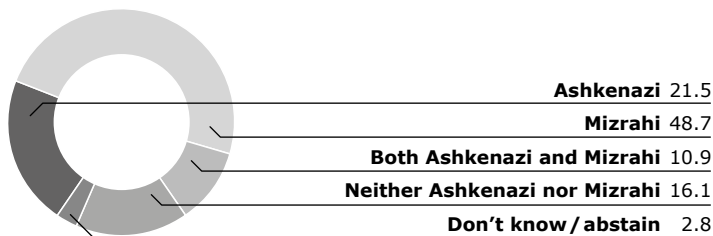
21 | See for example Centre for Israel & Jewish Affairs, “The Holocaust”, <http://cija.ca/resource/the-holocaust> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

22 | Voicing a critical opinion on the subject: Dore Gold, “The Myth of Israel as a Colonialist Entity: An Instrument of Political Warfare to Delegitimize the Jewish State”, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 9 May 2012, <http://jcpa.org/article/the-myth-of-israel-as-a-colonialist-entity-by-dore-gold> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

increased. (The term Mizrahi refers to Israeli Jews who originate from countries in the Middle East; in a wider sense, this term comprises Jews from North African and Caucasian origin.) Before the immigration of – very predominantly Ashkenazi – Jews from the former Soviet Union began in the 1990s, some 70 per cent of Israeli Jews were Mizrahi; currently, the proportion is around 50 per cent.²³

Fig. 1

Ethnic Self Identification of Jewish Israelis (in per cent)



Source: Israel Democracy Institute, n. 24.

The self-classification of Israeli Jews is, in fact, more telling for the Israeli-European relationship than these objective figures. The 2012 Israeli Democracy Index shows that some 49 per cent of Israeli Jews define themselves as Mizrahi and only 21.5 per cent as Ashkenazi. Around eleven per cent of respondents declared that they were both of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi origin. Some 16 per cent responded that they did not feel they belonged to either category; the Index publishers comment in this context that some of the respondents simply consider themselves Israeli and refuse to categorise themselves by their origin.²⁴

SHARED AND DIVERGENT VALUES

As a country with a democratic political system and a liberal economy, Israel forms part of the West. This association is manifested not least by the close alliance with the U.S. and the intensive partnership with the EU. At the same time, Israel's geographic location and the composition of its population place it firmly in the

23 | Cf. Jewish Virtual Library, "Jews of the Middle East", <http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/mejews.html> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

24 | Cf. Israel Democracy Institute, *The Israeli Democracy Index 2012*, p. 181, <http://en.idi.org.il/media/1365574/Index2012%20-%20Eng.pdf> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

Asian realm. Given these unique conditions, the country has the potential to act as a bridge between occident and orient.

There are several differences in their stances, some of which are significant and carry the seed of mutual alienation.

The community of values between Israel and the EU is founded on the joint commitment to the principles of liberty, democracy and the rule of law. But there are several differences in their stances, some of which are significant and carry the seed of mutual alienation. These are (a) the influence of religious convictions in society and politics, (b) the significance of national sovereignty and the capacity for self-defence, and (c) the vision of one's own future.

Importance of Religion

Israel defines itself as a "Jewish and democratic state",²⁵ Whether the "Jewish" component is to be defined mainly as a secular term (meaning nationality) or a religious one remains a central object of discussions within the country. In any case, there is no country within the EU where a comparable question of identity exists.

European societies are generally moving towards a "post-religious" era. The Eurobarometer established in 2005 that only 52 per cent of Europeans believe in the existence of God; ranking at the top of the scale in terms of religiosity are the Mediterranean states of Malta (95 per cent), Cyprus (90 per cent) and Greece (81 per cent), while those at the lower end are Sweden (23 per cent), the Czech Republic (19 per cent) and Estonia (16 per cent).²⁶ A study published by the Israel Democracy Institute and AVI CHAI-Israel Foundation shows that 80 per cent of Israeli Jews believe in God; an equal number are convinced that a higher power rewards

25 | In terms of legislation, this self-image is enshrined in Article 1 of Basic Law "Human Dignity and Liberty" among others: "The purpose of this Basic Law is to protect human dignity and liberty, in order to establish in a Basic Law the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state." Knesset, "Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty", http://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic3_eng.htm (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

26 | The values for the EU countries with the proportionately largest Jewish population are of particular interest: France 34 per cent, the UK 38 per cent, Germany 47 per cent. Cf. European Commission, "Special Eurobarometer: Social values, Science and Technology", 6/2005, p.9, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

people for good deeds and punishes them for evil ones. Both figures rose during the period from 1991 and 2009.²⁷

Remarkably, Israel is closer to the U.S. than to the EU where fundamental religious convictions are concerned. According to a survey conducted in 2013 by Harris Interactive, 74 per cent of U.S. Americans believe in God. The number of people providing this response is, however, on the decline²⁸;

whether developments in Israel and the U.S. will diverge in this respect remains to be seen. One thing is clear: there is no problem leading an openly religious life as an obser-

There is no problem leading an openly religious life as an observant Jew in the U.S., while this is becoming increasingly difficult in many EU countries.

vant Jew in the U.S.,²⁹ while this is becoming increasingly difficult in many EU countries. In the past, threats to the Jewish way of life came predominantly from right-wing extremists and Islamists; there are daily reports in the Israeli media about verbal or physical attacks on Jews in Europe who don a kippa (skullcap).³⁰ A new type of problem has emerged recently, originating in militant secularism, which defines religious freedom purely in negative terms ("freedom from") and questions the right to exercise specific religious practices ("freedom to"). The most important indicators of this development are the debate over the admissibility of the circumcision of new-born boys³¹ and the ban on shechita (kosher slaughter).³²

27 | Cf. Israel Democracy Institute, "A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2009", p. 50 f., http://en.idi.org.il/media/1351622/GuttmanAviChaiReport2012_EngFinal.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

28 | See Larry Shannon-Missal, "Americans' Belief in God, Miracles and Heaven Declines", Harris Interactive, 16 Dec 2013, <http://harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls/tabid/447/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/mid/1508/ArticleId/1353/Default.aspx> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

29 | Cf. Hannes Stein, "Juden Europas, kommt nach Amerika!", *Die Welt*, 15 Jan 2015, <http://welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article136405010> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

30 | One typical example of many: Ruchama Weiss/Levi Brackman, "Swedish reporter dons kippa and encounters anti-Semitic abuse", *Ynetnews*, 24 Jan 2015, <http://ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4618568,00.html> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

31 | Once again, the EU differs significantly from the U.S.. While the rate of male circumcisions in the EU is below 20 per cent (figures for 2007, see: World Health Organization, "Male circumcision: global trends and determinants of prevalence, safety and acceptability", 2007, p. 9 ff., http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2007/9789241596169_eng.pdf?ua=1 (accessed 2 Mar 2015)), over 58 per cent of new-born boys are circumcised in the U.S., although numbers are declining (figures for 2010, see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/07/circumcision-rate-drops_n_5107637.html).

32 | These and other indicators are listed by Dov Maimon, n. 19, p. 29.

Significance of National Sovereignty

While the majority of EU citizens identify more strongly with their own nation than with the EU,³³ the fact remains that an “ever closer Union of the peoples of Europe” is still a “post-national” project. It demands the transfer of parts of national sovereignty to supranational institutions; important legislative competences have accordingly been transferred from the EU Member States to “Brussels”.



In contrast to many European countries, a religiously observant Jewish life is easily possible in the U.S. Around 40 per cent of the Jewish population worldwide are currently living there. | Source: Alex Schwab, flickr ©©©.

The primary objective of Zionism is diametrically opposed to this. It defines the re-establishment of unrestricted “Jewish sovereignty” as its core mission. After almost two thousand years in exile, the Jewish people is to become master of its own fate once again³⁴ and should not depend on the unreliable goodwill of non-Jewish governments. Politicians speaking on the Israeli Holocaust remembrance day (*Yom ha-Shoah*) regularly emphasise

33 | According to the *Standard Eurobarometer*, eight per cent of respondent considered themselves “European and (nationality)” or “European only”. Cf. European Commission, “European Citizenship”, *Standard Barometer* 81, Spring 2014, p. 10 ff., http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb81/eb81_citizen_en.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

34 | Cf. the following passage from the Israeli Declaration of Independence of 14 May 1948: “This right [to establish their own state] is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.”

that the capability of the Jewish people to defend itself constitutes the core of Israel's national interest.³⁵ Deviating from this secular-Zionist majority position, a religious-Zionist minority contends that Jewish sovereignty is a decisive step on the road to salvation.³⁶

Although Israel should have no problem at all in overcoming the economic hurdles for EU membership (to name just one example, Israel was ahead of France and the EU average in terms of per capita GDP in 2013³⁷), it would not be capable of fully satisfying the political part of the Copenhagen criteria. According to Sharon Pardo, the fundamental obstacle lies in Israel's self-image and national interest: "Proponents of Israeli membership of the EU ignore fundamental incongruities between Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state and the state of the Jewish people, on the one hand, and the guiding principle of the EU of an open and unified space. Israel is a liberal state, but Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state and the state of the Jewish people makes it exceptional and radically different from other states."³⁸

Ideas of the Future

In contrast to the aging societies of Europe, the "start-up nation"³⁹ Israel comes across as a young, child-loving, dynamic country with a growing population and enormous innovative power. Like the new frontier myth has become part of the civil religion of the United States (besides the self-image as "one nation under God"), the

35 | "Seventy years ago the Jewish people did not have the national capacity to summon the nations, nor the military might to defend itself. But today things are different. Today we have an army. We have the ability, the duty and the determination to defend ourselves." Cf. Prime Minister Netanyahu in his Yom ha-Shoah address on 18/19 Apr 2012: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Yom Hashoah-Address by PM Netanyahu", 18 Apr 2012, http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/History/Holocaust/Pages/Yom_Hashoah_PM_Netanyahu_18-Apr-2012.aspx (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

36 | See for instance Dalit Halevy / Ari Yashar, "Feiglin Outlines Five-Step 'Jewish Sovereignty' Plan", *Arutz Sheva*, 13 May 2014, <http://israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/180590> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

37 | See *CIA World Factbook*, "Country Comparison; GDP Per Capita", <https://cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

38 | Statement made by Pardo in the interview with KAS Israel held on 18 Jul 2011: Michael Mertes, "Five Questions – Five Answers: Israeli Perceptions of Europe", KAS Israel, 18 Jul 2011, <http://kas.de/israel/en/publications/23431> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

39 | Well-known phrase from the title of the bestseller by Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*, New York, 2009.

pioneering spirit is one of the core elements of the secular-Zionist ethos. The national-religious settler movement derives part of its legitimacy from the conviction that it has remained true to that ethos, a view in which it was explicitly encouraged by Reuven Rivlin, Israel's current president, during his time as Speaker of the Knesset.⁴⁰

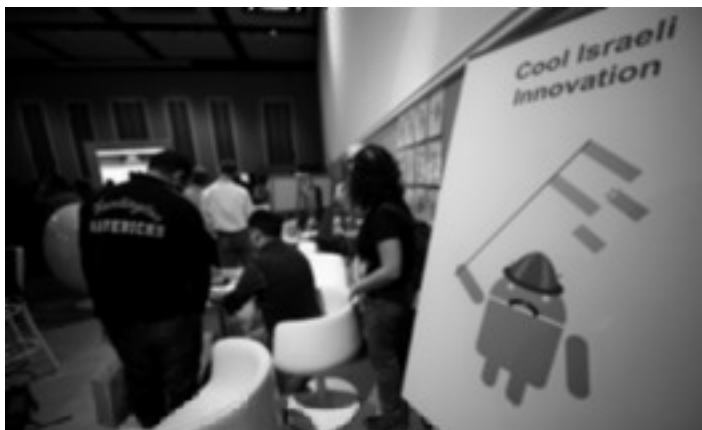


Young and dynamic: In comparison to the ageing European societies, Israel presents itself as a young, child-friendly, dynamic country with a growing population. | Source: Yoav Lerman, flickr ©@#@.

While many European societies are responding defensively to the global economic upheavals – from the ascendance of new, self-confident competitors in East Asia to the banking and financial crisis of 2007 to 2008 and the subsequent national debt crisis – and trying to maintain the status quo, Israel has been holding its own in the global markets as a successful “Silicon Wadi” with innovative products and services thanks to a strong incubator and venture capital sector. According to the most recent Bloomberg Global Innovation Index, Israel is ranked the 5th most innovation-friendly country in the world – behind Germany (3) but ahead of the U.S. (6), France (9) and the UK (10).⁴¹

40 | “You, my brothers, are pioneers ...”. Chaim Levinson, “Rabbi at terror victims’ funeral: Jews want peace, evildoers seek to destroy us”, *Haaretz*, 1 Sep 2010, <http://haaretz.com/1.311471> (accessed 2 Mar 2015). Further: Mazal Mualem, “Rivlin dedicates Independence torch to settlers amid criticism”, *Haaretz*, 26 Apr 2004, <http://haaretz.com/1.120669> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

41 | See Bloomberg, *Bloomberg Innovation Index*, <http://bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-innovative-countries> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).



Proud pioneering spirit: Israel is known for its ability to innovate. The labels “Start-up Nation” and “Silicon Wadi” are quite accurate in that regard. | Source: Or Hiltch, flickr @@@.

Altogether, these facets provide an image of a country which sees its future less and less tied to Europe. In her brilliant study of Israeli mentality, Diana Pinto describes present-day Israel as a country that “thinks of itself living in its own cyberspace at the very heart of a globalized world with increasingly Asian connotations”.

She defines this cyberspace by the fictitious internet addresses “www.israel.org for its highly dynamic and innovative civil society; www.israel.com for its prosperous business world; www.israel.inc for its spectacular technology; www.israel.gov, surely the least impressive of its activities; without forgetting www.israel.god, the most imponderable but also the most outspoken and vividly present”. Pinto states that the country is “happily surfing on the line that separates the declining powers (Europe, but also America, it must be said) from the emerging powers (such as China, India and Brazil, and even, from an Israeli perspective, Russia)”⁴².

ANTI-SEMITISM IN EUROPE

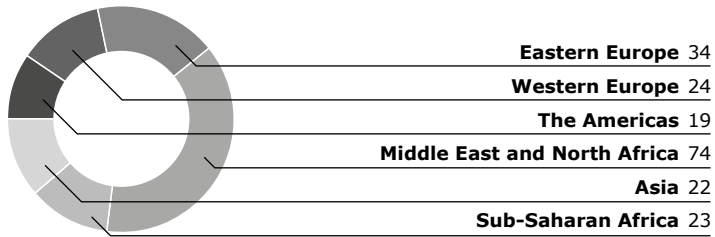
The resurgence and new social acceptability of anti-Semitic views in Europe are drawing attention in Israel, and not only on the right wing of the political spectrum – although that is where they are monitored most closely. The concern is complemented by a sense of validation: any anti-Semitic criminal act in present-day Europe is an argument for the continued validity of Israel’s promise to

42 | Diana Pinto, *Israel Has Moved*, Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 7, 9 f. and 14.

be a safe haven for persecuted Jews from all around the world.⁴³ Israel is seen as the only place where they are greeted with unwavering solidarity. Typically, the big "Republican March" on 11 January 2015 in Paris was said to have been predominantly in support of *Charlie Hebdo* and not the Jewish victims of the terrorist attack on a kosher supermarket on 9 January.⁴⁴

Fig. 2

Scale of anti-Semitic attitudes worldwide (in per cent)



Source: ADL, n. 46.

Such worries are not only fuelled by a multitude of horrific news, but also reflected by surveys. On 8 November 2014, the eve of the remembrance day for the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a report about the experiences of citizens of EU Member States with anti-Semitism, hate crimes and discrimination, which attracted a great deal of attention in Israel.⁴⁵ In the spring of 2014, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) published a study which examined the extent of anti-Semitic views worldwide for

43 | Cf. as one example of many the following statement by a French Jewish woman, who is planning to emigrate to Israel: "In Israel there is an army that will protect us. Here, I can no longer see a future for my children", in: Dan Bilefski, "Number of French Jews Emigrating to Israel Rises", *The New York Times*, 20 June 2014, <http://nytimes.com/2014/06/21/world/europe/number-of-french-jews-emigrating-to-israel-rises-sharply.html> (accessed 2 Mar 2015); see also: Emily Greenhouse, "After Charlie Hebdo, Jews in France Confront An Old Question", *BloombergPolitics*, 13 Jan 2015, <http://bloomberg.com/politics/features/2015-01-13/after-charlie-hebdo-jews-in-france-confront-an-old-question> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

44 | Cnaan Liphshiz, "France marched for Charlie, not for the Jews", *The Times of Israel*, 16 Jan 2015, <http://timesofisrael.com/france-marched-for-charlie-not-for-the-jews> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

45 | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Discrimination and hate crime against Jews in EU Member States: experiences and perceptions of antisemitism", http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews-eu-member-states-0_en.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

the first time.⁴⁶ According to this study, a quarter (24 per cent) of Western Europeans and a third (34 per cent) of Eastern Europeans – some 150,000 million people in total – hold anti-Semitic views. It is only nine per cent in the U.S. by the same criteria; according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, Jews, together with Catholics and Evangelical Christians, have the highest popularity ratings out of all the religious communities and denominations there.⁴⁷



In numerous European cities it is necessary to protect Jewish institutions. Anti-Semitic acts have increased in recent years. On the 14 February 2015, a terror attack on a synagogue in Copenhagen was conducted. | Source: Peter Kirkeskov Rasmussen, flickr @@@@.

From an Israeli perspective, the danger to European Jews comes above all from an unholy alliance of right-wing extremists, radical Islamists and parts of the pro-Palestinian Left. This alliance is spreading an atmosphere of hate and violence on an unprecedented scale at anti-Israel demonstrations in Europe. In many places, synagogues, Jewish schools and other Jewish institutions have been placed under guard as if high-security installations. One thing that is causing particular concern in Israel is the impression that the influence of Muslim voter groups on European

46 | See ADL, "Index of Antisemitism", <http://global100.adl.org> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

47 | Cf. Pew Research Center, "How Americans Feel About Religious Groups", <http://pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

politics is showing an inexorable increase. Prime Minister Netanyahu even spoke of an "Islamisation" of Western Europe in early 2015.⁴⁸ (Taking all this into account, it is no surprise that some right-wing European populists – Geert Wilders from the Netherlands to name but one – are seeking allies amongst Israeli politicians from the far Right in the fight against Islam.⁴⁹)

Besides European societies, their political representatives are also suspected of anti-Semitism. The same applies to numerous European NGOs, including the German political foundations, whose main task is supposedly to provide one-sided support to the Palestinian cause. When there are voices in Europe maintaining that Israel is violating human rights in the Palestinian Territories and to be blamed for the death of innocent children there, then this is believed to subliminally reactivate the anti-Semitic blood libel. When the EU refuses to recognise the Israeli settlements on the West Bank as part of Israel, then that is supposedly merely a European contribution to the international boycott movement against Israel and to efforts de-legitimise the Jewish state. Seen from the Israeli perspective, European criticism of the Israeli settlement policy is motivated by anti-Semitism in any case as it judges the Jewish state by other benchmarks than non-Jewish countries, which are allowed to conduct comparably policies with impunity, such as Turkey in Northern Cyprus or Morocco in the Western Sahara.⁵⁰

48 | Cf. Reuters, "Netanyahu says Europe's 'Islamization' pushing Israel to expand Asia trade", *Haaretz* online, 19 Jan 2015, <http://haaretz.com/business/1.637751> (accessed 2 Mar 2015); further: Herb Keinson, "Netanyahu: Israel must open Asian markets due to anti-Semitism in Europe", *The Jerusalem Post online*, 18 Jan 2015, <http://jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Netanyahu-Israel-must-open-Asian-markets-due-to-Islamization-anti-Semitism-in-Europe-388164> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

49 | See for example Eldad Beck, "Geert Wilders: Israel fighting our war", *Ynetnews*, 30 Nov 2010, <http://ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3991733,00.html> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

50 | All these arguments were voiced at a joint conference by KAS Israel and the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs on 24 Mar 2014. Cf. Michael Mertes, "Is the EU an Enemy of Israel? A Conference Discloses Misconceptions", KAS Israel, <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.37204> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

DISCREPANCIES IN THREAT ANALYSIS

The criticism that the EU is underestimating the “Islamic Threat” within its borders is complemented by the accusation that it is showing a spirit of appeasement in its foreign affairs dealings.⁵¹ In its indulgent pacifism, it neglects to build up the hard power required for exercising a role in world politics. Although it presents itself as a moral superpower lecturing others, it would not be not willing or ready to provide reliable and robust security guarantees to Israel in the event of the establishment of a Palestinian state, which it supports. In this context, Israeli commentators have lately been only too keen to call attention to the EU’s helplessness in the face of Russia’s conduct in Ukraine.⁵²

Although the EU presents itself as moral superpower lecturing others, it is not willing to provide robust security guarantees to Israel in the event of the establishment of a Palestinian state, which it supports.

In the dispute over the correct response to the Iranian nuclear program, Israeli politicians and security experts tend to be sharper in their criticism of the willingness of the Obama administration to enter into discussions and make compromises than of the moderate stance of the Europeans. However, the EU’s reluctance to categorise the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah and the Palestinian Sunni Hamas as terrorist organisations meets with broad incomprehension. When the EU declared the military wing of Hezbollah a terrorist organisation in July 2013 after long discussions, Israeli government representatives protested, saying that differentiating between a political and a military wing flew in the face of reality.⁵³ The decision by the European Court of Justice of 17 December 2014 to remove Hamas from the list of terrorist organisations on the basis of procedural errors was initially seen in Israel as a further example of the EU’s naïveté.⁵⁴

51 | An accusation voiced first and foremost by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Cf. Herb Keinon, “Israel severely rebuked, as PM warns ‘spirit of appeasement’ blowing through Europe”, *The Jerusalem Post online*, 17 Dec 2014, <http://jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Israel-severely-rebuked-internationally-as-PM-warns-spirit-of-appeasement-blowing-through-Europe-385001> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

52 | Cf. Manfred Gerstenfeld, “Why Israel should monitor the Ukraine conflict closely”, *The Jerusalem Post online*, 17 May 2014, <http://jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Why-Israel-should-monitor-the-Ukraine-conflict-closely-352559> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

53 | See “Netanyahu: EU should blacklist all Hezbollah wings, not just its military”, *Haaretz online*, 23 Jul 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.537257> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

54 | See “Israel cries foul after EU strikes Hamas from terror list”, *The Times of Israel*, 17 Dec 2014, <http://timesofisrael.com/court-orders-eu-remove-hamas-from-terror-blacklist> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

By contrast with the EU and the U.S., Israeli foreign affairs politicians have been noticeably reluctant to voice criticism of Russia's aggressive conduct in the so-called "near abroad" (particularly Georgia and Ukraine). Russia is not perceived as a threat but as a (potential) partner.⁵⁵ There have not even been any negative official comments against the support Russia has been providing to the Assad regime since 2011 in its fight against attempts to overthrow it. From an Israeli perspective, a predictable dictator is always the lesser evil compared to unpredictable hordes of jihadists – even if he is allied to Hezbollah.

UNWANTED INTERVENTION: THE EU AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The policy of the EU (and of numerous individual EU Member States) in support of the two-state solution – in other words, the establishment and recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state – was, is and will remain one of the main sources of European-Israeli tension. There was a brief period of détente after the Oslo Accords of 1993, when this goal seemed to be coming into reach and the time had come to let Israel rise up into the ranks of the associate partners of the EU. Subsequently, the tone became increasingly more irritable on both sides, particularly after the formation of Netanyahu's third cabinet (in March 2013), the most settler-friendly Israeli government so far.

In the "Venice Declaration" of 13 June 1980,⁵⁶ the (then nine) EC Foreign Ministers raised for the first time the European Community's claim to be involved in finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EC recognised the right of the Palestinians to self-determination; this right was to be exercised "within the framework of the comprehensive peace settlement", meaning the two-state solution. The PLO would have to be involved in the negotiations (speaking on behalf of the Palestinian people prior to the existence of a state). What appeared to be a stumbling block from Israel's point of view at the time has become a matter of course since the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. By participating in the Middle East Quartet (United Nations, European

55 | On the background see: Lincoln Mitchell, "Borscht Belt: Will Israel Spurn America for Russia?", *Observer*, 22 Jan 2015, <http://observer.com/2015/01/borscht-belt-will-israel-spurn-america-for-russia> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

56 | Cf. European External Action Service, "Venice Declaration", 13 Jun 1980, http://eeas.europa.eu/mepp/docs/venice_declaration_1980_en.pdf (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

Union, United States, Russia), which presented a “roadmap” to peace in the middle of the Second Intifada, the EU underscored its ambitions to remain involved in Middle East politics; the appointment of elder statesman Tony Blair as the quartet’s special envoy in 2007 put a European face on this group, which has yet to produce results.



Between cooperation and dissent: Despite the close partnership between the EU and Israel, here the Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, disputes occur, for instance over the settlement policy. | Source: Gali Tibbon, European External Action Service, flickr ©①②③.

The central points of dispute between the EU and Israel include the persistent European protest against the Israeli settlement policy. In legal terms, the EU justifies its criticism with the fact that no sections of the West Bank form part of Israeli territory. This view is based on a ruling by the European Court of Justice⁵⁷, which had to determine whether products from the settlements were “Made in Israel”, i.e. whether they fell under the preferential tariff arrangement between Israel and the EU; the court ruled that they did not. Politically, the EU’s main objection is that the settlement policy destroys trust in the willingness of the Israeli government

57 | Cf. Court of Justice of the European Union, “Products originating in the West Bank do not qualify for preferential customs treatment under the EC-Israel Agreement”, Press Release No. 14/10, 25 Feb 2010, <http://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2010-02/cp100014en.pdf> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

to come to an agreement and renders a two-state solution, which the EU supports, less and less feasible.⁵⁸

It is under discussion to have goods from Israeli settlements in the West Bank labelled as such throughout the EU. This is considered a "boycott against Israel" on the right wing of the political spectrum in Israel.

In recent years, the EU's political toolbox has included above all incentives ("carrots") in the form of upgrade proposals up to and including an offer of a Special Privileged Partnership. One potential sanction (describing it as a "stick" would be taking the metaphor too far) currently under discussion is to have goods from Israeli settlements in the West Bank labelled as such throughout the EU. Several EU Member States have already introduced corresponding national regulations. The labelling obligation in itself is considered a "boycott against Israel" on the right wing of the political spectrum in Israel, although the goods are not subject to any import bans. Similar accusations are being voiced when the EU insists that the funds it provides must not go to settlement projects (as is the case in the "Horizon 2020" Framework Programme).⁵⁹

Today, Israel is facing even greater problems as EU Member States are abandoning the wait in increasing numbers and recognising the "State of Palestine" unilaterally (without, however, following through and opening an embassy there). This was presaged by many European countries giving their approval to a resolution voted on at the UN General Assembly on 29 November 2012 to confer "non-Member Observer State" status on Palestine. The surprising decision by the German government to abstain caused real consternation among Netanyahu's government at the time.⁶⁰

Disregarding polemic accusations of anti-Semitism,⁶¹ the most significant political objection to the European criticism that Israel is blocking the two-state solutions has been that the past setbacks

58 | For a summary of the EU arguments against the settlement policy by Ambassador Lars Faaborg-Andersen see n. 18.

59 | Cf. *ibid.*

60 | Cf. Jonathan Schanzer/Benjamin Weinthal, "How Israel Lost Europe", *Foreign Policy*, 30 Nov 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/11/30/how_israel_lost_europe (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

61 | See Keinon, n. 48; further the statement made by Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman on 4 Jan 2015, namely that some "lies and fabrications" that could be heard in the European Parliament amounted to "another chapter in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion". Quoted according to: Herb Keinon, "Liberman says western Europe, not Iran or Palestinians, Israel main challenge", *The Jerusalem Post online*, 4 Jan 2015, <http://jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Liberman-implies-some-EU-parliaments-motivated-by-anti-Semitism-on-Palestinian-issue-386599> (accessed 2 Mar 2015).

in the peace process were, in fact, due (in part) to Palestinian intransigence. The Israeli side draws attention to the fact that Hamas is holding on to its major objective of wiping the "Zionist entity" from the map and maintains that many Europeans taking the side against Israel are encouraging the Palestinians to remain intransigent, and even to use violence.

How seriously the new European trend towards recognition of Palestinian statehood is being taken in Israel is reflected in a statement made by Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman in the presence of the Israeli ambassadors to European states in January 2015. In this statement he maintained that it was not the Palestinians, Iran or Hezbollah that would pose the greatest challenge in the New Year, but Western Europe.⁶²

CONCLUSION

The description of the relationship between Israel and the European Union as an "uneasy partnership" will be appropriate for the foreseeable future. On the one hand, the causes of alienation are likely to intensify, at least as long as a two-state solution remains out of reach. On the other hand, there are an increasing number of valid reasons for expanding the existing cooperation.

The two sides have much to offer each other in economic, scientific and technical as well as cultural cooperation. The "start-up nation" Israel can serve as a model to stagnating European countries, demonstrating how a lack of natural resources can be more than compensated for through ingenuity and innovative power. The European Union, for its part, can show Israel through its uncompromising efforts to fight anti-Semitic tendencies that it is still considerably closer to Israel in terms of its values than the East Asian economies, where Israel is seeking new partners today.

In view of the violent upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa, Israel and the European Union share fundamental security interests. Both are under threat from the proliferation of jihadist terror, albeit in different ways. Both would be affected if Iran were to succeed in establishing itself as a nuclear great power in the region. All this militates in favour of deepening security cooperation, from the exchange of intelligence to the drafting of joint strategies.

In short: Israel and the European Union may be disappointed with each other in some respects, but they will continue to need one another.